

How To: *Remain physically and mentally healthy as an RA?*

✧ As an RA, you have many obligations and responsibilities to meet, in addition to attending classes, completing school work, being involved in sports/clubs, and maintaining a social life. Being an RA can not only be a rewarding experience, but also a stressful one. There are many different ways to handle this stress, good and bad. This handout reviews some ways you can stay mentally and physically healthy, while handling the pressures of being an RA and a college student.

1. **Physical Health:**

- Stay hydrated – Drink at least 8 cups of water per day, every day, throughout the day.
- Diet:
 - Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and dairy daily.
 - Stay within the recommended daily 2000 calorie limit.
 - A healthy diet helps reduce anxiety and stress, improves mood, helps your brain function to its highest potential, helps fight illnesses, amongst many other benefits.
 - The Wellness Center staff can provide you with more information on diet.
 - Avoid drinking too much caffeine (coffee, sodas, energy drinks, teas). It is recommended to drink *no more* than 2 caffeinated drinks per day. Caffeine creates anxiety-like symptoms when processed in the body.
- Exercise:
 - Physical activity (walking, bicycling, running/jogging, swimming, sports) can help you feel better about yourself, relieve stress/anxiety/depression, sleep well, stay within your recommended body weight, amongst many other benefits.
 - It is recommended to exercise 3-4 times per week for at least 30 minutes each time.
- Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to deal with stress/anxiety. It is recommended to only drink alcohol 1-2 days per week. Refer for the Counseling Services website for more information on recommended alcohol intake.
- Take a multi-vitamin daily, with a vitamin C supplement (check with your primary care provider, before starting any supplements).
- Sleep is extremely important to enhance daily functioning. It is recommended you get 6-8 hours of sleep per night.
- Make sure you stay up-to-date on all vaccines needed.

2. Mental Health:

- Social:
 - Surround yourself with people who enrich and support you. Maintain strong relationships.
 - Take time for the activities, hobbies, and projects you enjoy.
 - Delegate responsibilities, when appropriate, or ask for help.
 - Maintain contact with the students that live on your hall.
- Cognitive:
 - Become aware of what triggers stress you and how you react:
 - Triggers – low grade, roommate conflict, taking on too much...etc.
 - Reactions – headaches, irritability, mood changes, isolation..etc.
 - (For more information on this, contact the Wellness Center)
 - Live in the present (here and now), not in the future or the past.
 - What types of statements are you making to yourself? Are they mostly positive or negative? Make a conscious effort to make 5 positive statements to every 1 negative statement.
 - Avoid **catastrophic** thinking (making problems bigger than they are).
 - Avoid **generalizing** (i.e., using words like “always” and “never”)
 - Avoid **comparing** yourself to others. Everyone is individually different and unique.
- Emotion:
 - Stay in touch with your basic feelings (sad, mad, happy, scared) and learn how you can express them (i.e., talking to someone, journaling, doing something physical).
 - Here are some brief anxiety relieving exercise:
 - Deep breathing – Breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, filling the lungs with air, do this for at least 2 minutes.
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Beginning with the feet, tense the muscles and hold for 5 seconds, then release tension and repeat, continue the same practice with your other body parts (calf muscles, quads, gluteus, abs, etc.) working up from your feet all the way to your face, until you are flexing the whole body at once.

For more information on how to remain healthy, please contact the Wellness Center at (434) 223-6411.

Any of our staff would love the opportunity to meet with you.