



Don't stress:

A smooth transition to Uni Life

The transition to university is a challenging time, which can be very stressful for some students. School leavers lose the comfort zone provided by their local high school and the friends they grew up with, while other students may be returning to education after a significant period in the workforce.

“Feeling overwhelmed, increased fatigue, mood swings, changing sleeping patterns and feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt, may all be indicators of the increasing stress levels new students may experience during their transition to university life”, explains Associate Professor (Mental Health) Dianne Wynaden, from Curtin University of Technology’s School of Nursing and Midwifery.

“With increased levels of stress may come **physical** changes, such as headaches, dry mouth, excessive sweating and muscle tension; **psychological** changes, such as being oversensitive to other people’s comments, difficulty in concentrating, increased irritability and restlessness or **behavioural** changes, such as excessive use of alcohol, drugs or food, or a tendency to lose your temper easily.”

However, all new students can complete simple steps that will assist them to manage their stress levels during the transition period:

Top 7 Stress Free Transition Tips:

1. **Orientate yourself to the campus prior to the first day**

Take time to visit the university and get familiar with the environment **prior** to the first day. If driving a car, get your parking permit early. If catching public transport, plan the journey well in advance. (<http://www.transperth.gov.au>)

2. **Attend orientation programs**

These programs are designed to provide you with useful information and to answer any queries you may have. They also provide you with a forum to seek further information if required.

3. **Become familiar with your School environment**

It is important that you feel relaxed and “at home” in your new learning environment, so take time to explore all of the facilities available to you.

4. **Become familiar with the university learning environment**

Universities utilise a diverse range of teaching and learning techniques to facilitate student learning outcomes. It is important to distinguish between lectures and tutorials sessions. Often self-directed learning programs are utilised. Discuss study expectations with tutors and lecturers. Be familiar with assessment requirements for each unit and read your unit outline regularly and carefully.

5. **Attend scheduled classes**

Scheduled classes provide you with opportunities for learning from peers, lecturers and tutors. Crucial information is often provided during these sessions, so if you are absent it is important to obtain notes and other information from your peers or school staff.

6. **Get to know your lecturers and tutors**

All teaching staff will advise you of times when they are available for student contact. It is important that you utilise the appropriate communications channels with lecturer and tutors. Staff may have regular off campus commitments and are not on campus every day. Times of availability should be on their office door.

7. **Participate fully in university life and get to know other students**

University is about your development as a person and a member of your community. It is important that you spend time within the university, enjoying the social aspects of student life. Remember participating fully in all aspects of life is good for your mental health. Meet and talk with other students - they have similar concerns and questions. Peer support is vital throughout your course so start early to establish friendships.



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It might also be helpful to think of previous transitions in your life. Sometimes the newness of a situation can feel overwhelming and you may feel very intense or even scared. However, your management of previous stressful situations will assist you in your current transition to university. Remember that in the past you have lived through similar experiences and that despite your initial reaction you were able to adjust eventually.

Your time at university can be very demanding and challenging, so make sure that you manage your stress well throughout your university career. Here are our Top Four tips on how to manage stress associated with social issues:

1. Treat your self well

Focus on developing and maintaining healthy behavioural routines. Care for your physical and mental health. Exercise, eat healthy foods, work on relationships and have a regular sleep regime. Talk your problems over with others and seek advice to lessen your stress levels. Avoid the excessive use of alcohol, binge drinking and non-prescription/ recreational drug use. These will increase your stress levels and may impact negatively on your mental and physical health.

2. Share what you are experiencing with family and friends

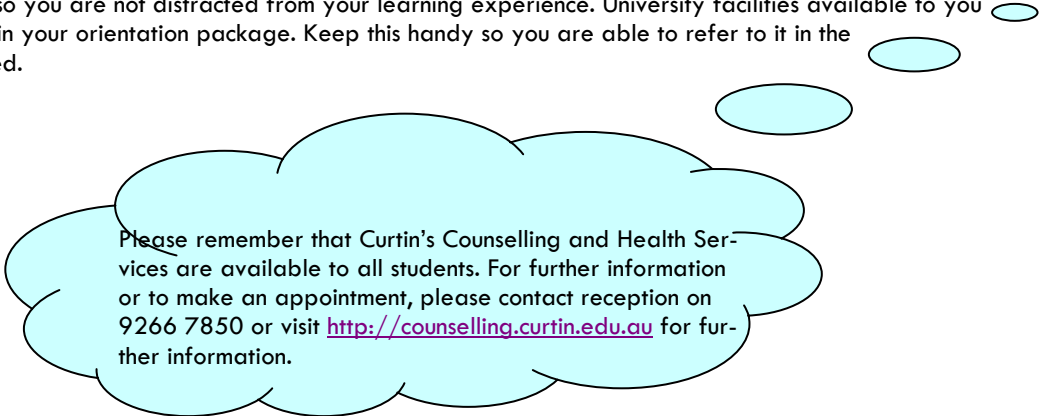
Share your experience of being a student with your family and friends. They will be proud of your achievements and interested in your progress. Their inclusion in your experience is important. They may be able to provide you with practical solutions to issues of concern.

3. Maintain a positive frame of mind

This is particularly important during stressful periods. Keep focused on the task at hand, develop strategies to achieve your goals, understand what is required of you, be organised and maintain a healthy balance between work and pleasure in your life.

4. Don't be afraid to ask for help

All of us are faced with challenges that we are unable to handle by ourselves at some time. Seek help to solve problems early so you are not distracted from your learning experience. University facilities available to you will be covered in your orientation package. Keep this handy so you are able to refer to it in the future as required.



Please remember that Curtin's Counselling and Health Services are available to all students. For further information or to make an appointment, please contact reception on 9266 7850 or visit <http://counselling.curtin.edu.au> for further information.



Dianne Wynaden is Curtin's School of Nursing and Midwifery's newly appointed Associate Professor of Mental Health. With over 30 years of experience in the health industry, Dianne has been particularly interested in the area of mental health. "Mental health is a national priority with one in five people in Australia being affected", she explains. "Therefore, we need to ensure that all nursing graduates are prepared to care for people who have a mental illness".

Associate Professor Wynaden's aim is to develop Curtin University of Technology as a centre of excellence for Mental Health, by raising the profile of Mental Health in the community and increasing the School's networks nationally and internationally.