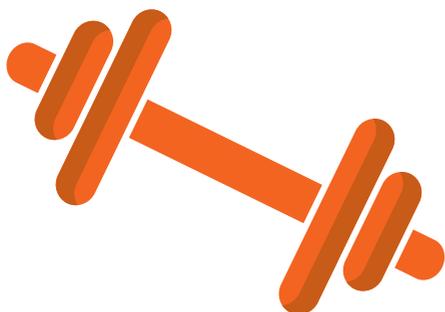
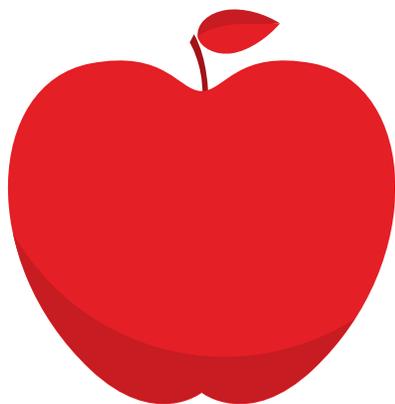


# Your Mental and Physical Health



**SS&D**  
Student Support  
and Development

A Step by Step Guide to  
Improving your Mental and  
Physical Health at University

# Welcome



University is a time of personal growth, and being a student will bring a number of changes to your lifestyle – some will be exciting and interesting and others will be challenging. It is important to look after yourself and to adopt good health and well-being habits that will help you as a student to perform at your best. You may be juggling academic pressures, new environments, new relationships, part-time work, club and society activity, commuting and new living environments. Prioritising your health and wellbeing and finding balance will really support you to work well and feel good during your time at DCU.

It is normal to have difficult times as a student. Your resilience will affect your capacity to stay focused and upbeat during these times. There are many proactive steps you can take to look after your health and to help you be more resilient in tough times. What you choose to do in your day has a powerful impact on your health and wellbeing. Our message to you is don't suffer on your own reach out and talk to a friend, the Students' Union or Student Support & Development staff. There are many supports available to you in DCU that will help you get back on track! If you have good physical and mental wellbeing you will:

.....  
Cope with stress better and be more resilient  
.....

.....  
Feel more confident  
.....

.....  
Feel more engaged with others  
.....

.....  
Be more productive in your studies  
.....

.....  
Enjoy life more  
.....

.....  
Find greater meaning in your life direction  
.....

Sometimes we know what we should be doing for our wellbeing but it can be hard to get motivated and make sustainable changes. This booklet will provide you with wellbeing tips and planning tools so you can think about how you can apply the ideas to your own life. It is important to recognise that it is impossible to keep everything balanced all the time- there are times when we need to speed up or slow down, the important thing is to try to strive for some balance between work, rest and leisure, and to identify when you need to make changes. Make your wellbeing a priority!

# Wheel of Life – Self Assessment Tool



When life is busy, you focus all your time and energy into a few areas and it is very easy to find yourself off balance. This can lead to feelings of anxiety and stress as you juggle commitments and feel that you are not giving enough attention to other areas of your life. At times like this it is useful to step back and take a 'helicopter view'. The Wheel of Life is a great tool to help you assess areas of your life and to clearly see what is off balance.

## How to use the Wheel

### 1. Brainstorm Life Areas

Make a list of the 8 areas of your life that are important to you and put them on the wheel.

### 2. Assess each area

Consider each section of the wheel, and on a scale of 0 (low) – to 10 (high), mark an 'x' at the place at the relevant point in the wheel.

### 3. Join up the marks

Join up the marks on the wheel. Does your wheel look in balance?

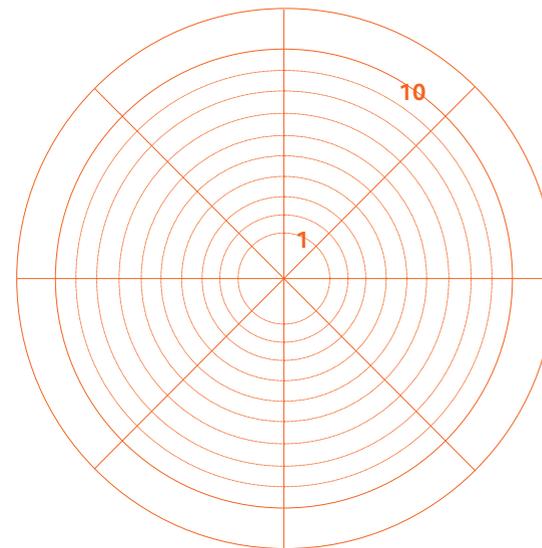
### 4. Think about your ideal level

Now it's time to consider your ideal level in each area of your life. Remember some areas

of the wheel will need more or less attention at certain times and you will also need to make choices at specific times to gain balance.

### 5. Take action

You now have a visual representation of the priority areas of your life and also your ideal balance. You can clearly assess the gaps and look at the actions that you need to take. Remember that gaps can be two way – those in which you are devoting too much or too little time and energy.



Action Plan:  
Print a template Wheel of Life  
at [www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE\\_93.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_93.htm)

# 6 Steps

- 1 Time Management
- 2 Exercise & Fitness
- 3 Nutrition
- 4 Relax & Unwind
- 5 Rest and Sleep
- 6 Study & Exams



# 1

## Time Management



Do you have a 'To-Do' list as long as your arm? Are you stressed about what you have to do? Do you have conflicting priorities and have difficulty making decisions? If so, you need a new Time Management strategy.

### ✘ Unbalanced

Often missing deadlines and feeling stressed

Regularly working long hours

Feeling pressured by lack of time or too many things to do

Jumping from crises to crises

### ✔ Balanced

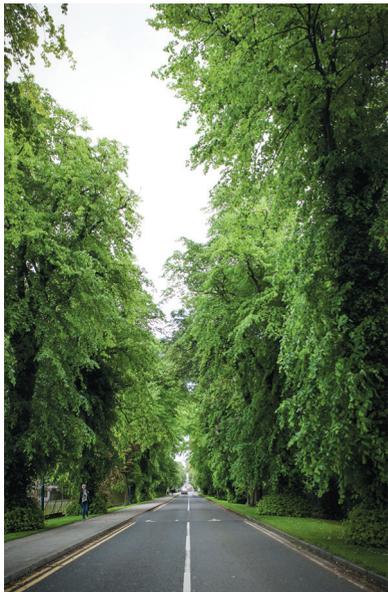
Meeting deadlines and review quality of work

Achieving work/life balance

Lower stress and feeling more control

Spending quality time on important tasks

By prioritising what is most important to you, time management allows you to spend quality time doing things that add value to your life.



Time management is about prioritising your daily/weekly activities and managing those activities throughout the day/week. The foundation of good time management starts with personal goal setting and being clear as to what you want to do. By prioritising what is most important to you, time management allows you to spend quality time doing important things that add value to your life.

To begin managing your time, you first need an idea on how you use your time at the moment. The Well Cast Day Planner is a great tool to do this! Paying attention to how you manage your time will help you manage it more effectively. Poor time management leads to stress and feelings of loss of control and lower productivity.

Date:

Well Cast Day Planner

**1. Record your time**  
Write down everything that you do

7:00

8:00

9:00

10:00

11:00

12:00

1:00

2:00

3:00

4:00

5:00

6:00

7:00

**2. Analyse it**  
Pick out your five biggest time wasters of the day

Time Wasters

Time

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**3. Change**  
Come up with a way to get the time back by prioritising and decluttering. Schedule time for blocks of activities

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Time management is a combination of finding time to do things and using that time well. When you use time effectively, it frees you up to do more of what you want.

## Quick tips for good time management

Use a diary or a task list like Google Calendar, your DCU Student Diary & Planner or your phone planner to plan ahead and log commitments. This saves time in the long run, gives you an idea of what's ahead and minimises nasty surprises.

Set realistic time-frames for activities and use a timer such as the Pomodoro technique <http://pomodorotechnique.com/>

Reduce distractions when studying e.g. phone/Internet/social media.

Leave blank space in your schedule- things often take longer than we think.

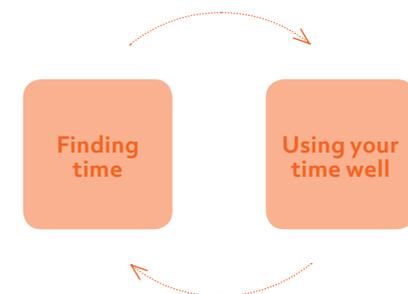
If you're prone to procrastination, do a 'self-check'- ask yourself "What am I doing?" and "Why am I doing this?", and if needs be, redirect yourself to the task at hand.

Write a short 'hit list' - what you must get done, to help keep you focused.

Try to 'work smart, not long'. This involves tight prioritisation - allowing yourself a certain amount of time per task - and trying not to get caught up in less productive activities.

Take breaks - Our brains get bored, tired, and lose focus if we function non-stop without a break. We need rest to be able to do good work, and regular breaks help you gain perspective on what you're doing.

## Planning



## Exercise and Fitness



Being active and getting involved in physical activity is not only good for your body but it is good for your mind!

Physical activity releases endorphins or 'feel good hormones' in your brain that reduce feelings of pain, relieve stress, increasing self-confidence, positive mood and promoting better sleep. Being active does not have to mean joining the gym or running a 10K – it can simply be about moving more throughout the day. Here are a few tips to get moving to improve your mood and health:

Take the stairs

Park your car or bike furthest away from your destination

Get off the bus or train a stop earlier and walk

Speed up your housework

Take regular breaks from study and get up and walk

Put a pedometer app on your phone and aim for 10,000 steps a day

Sit on a stability ball to strengthen your core muscles

### My Physical Activity Actions:

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### Join a DCU Sports Club

This is a fun way to meet new people, learn new skills and to fit in exercise too. Check out [www.dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment](http://www.dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment) for more information. Joining fee is only €4!

### Get on your bike!

Rediscover the truly invigorating and liberating experience of riding a bike and boost your health in the process. Cycling is one of the easiest ways of fitting exercise into your day. It will also save you money! Cycle to university, work or around the city with the Dublin Bikes scheme [www.dublinbikes.ie](http://www.dublinbikes.ie)

### Go for a Walk with Friends

Stay fit and catch up with friends at the same time. Instead of going to the restaurant at lunchtime, enjoy a walk in Albert College Park with friends (located opposite the Hub and Sports Centre entrance). DCU has recently launched a Slí na Sláinte which is perfect for chatting with friends and keeping fit. Just walking at a decent pace for half an hour, five days a week will do wonders for your health and fitness. To keep track of your walking, use a pedometer. 10,000 steps can burn up to 400 calories.

### Start Running with C25K

Start running with the Couch to 5K, a free running plan developed to help absolute beginners get into running. The plan involves three runs a week, with a day of rest in between each, with a different plan for each of the nine weeks. There are also free C25K podcasts to help you to achieve your running goal. Visit [www.c25k.com/](http://www.c25k.com/)

### Home Workout

Devise a mini-circuit in your own home by using steps or stairs for step-ups, do tricep dips on the sofa and use the hallway or garden for shuttle runs. You can work every muscle group and really whittle away your waistline without leaving the house. Check out YouTube for video clips on getting fit at home or borrow fitness DVD's from the library.

### Relaxation Exercises

Why not try Yoga, Pilates, Meditation or Mindfulness techniques. They are a great way to exercise your mind and body and have the added benefits of helping you reconnect with yourself, promoting relaxation and alleviating stress.

### DCU is expanding!

We now have three campuses. Why not visit the St Patrick's, All Hallows or Glasnevin Campus by bike or by foot.

For more travel information - go to [http://www.dcu.ie/info/get\\_to.shtml](http://www.dcu.ie/info/get_to.shtml)



Our diet, more than any other factor, has the biggest influence on our health. When you come to university it may be the first time you have lived away from home and had to fend for yourself. To have enough energy to study and enjoy student life to the full you need to eat regularly and healthily! Here are some top tips that will help you to learn easy ways to make nutritious choices...

### Top Tips

**Get organised** Make a shopping list before you go to the supermarket and plan your meals – not only will you save money, but you will be more prepared to cook healthy choices! Take turns cooking with your house mates.

**Watch your waste** When you buy foods that go off quickly, plan your meals carefully so it gets eaten or frozen straight away.

**Eat a balanced diet** Eat regularly and have a wide variety of foods that include fruit, vegetables and fish. Cut down on saturated fats, sugars and salt. Drink plenty of water and don't skip breakfast! Check out the simple food swaps below that can make a big difference.

Swap	For
Fried foods	Grilled or baked foods
Refined grains (white bread/rice)	Whole grains (brown bread/rice)
French fries	Baked potato or sweet potato
Sweetened drinks	Water
Desserts such as cookies, cake, ice cream	Fresh Fruit, popcorn, frozen yoghurt

**No time to cook or can't cook?** Search the web for easy recipes and cooking tips. Cook extra so you can use the leftovers for a quick meal the following day, or cool the remaining portions and freeze. Cook more one pot dishes like risotto and stews where you throw everything in together, you will save energy, time and washing up!

**Make your takeaway a healthy one** You don't have to give up takeaways completely, as long as you make the right menu choices and don't have them often.

Swap	For
Chipper: Thin chips and battered fish	Chunky chips and plain fish
Pizza: Deep pan stuffed crust	Thin base, vegetable, lean meat
Indian: Creamy Curries eg. masala & pilau rice	Tandoori or Madras, boiled rice
Chinese: Deep fried dishes	Stir fries and boiled rice

**Smart Snacking!** Beat those hunger pangs with smart snacks! It's too easy to reach for the quick fixes when studying and juggling a busy lifestyle. Keep a stock of healthy snacks you can grab when you're hungry, such as crackers, energy bars, fresh fruit, granola bars, high fibre cereal, nuts, popcorn, carrot/cucumber/celery and Hummus!



Your mood and how you feel can be affected by the food that you eat and the subsequent amount of sugar in your blood. When you eat a high carbohydrate meal it is broken down into glucose and your blood sugars rise quickly making you feel mentally good (sugar hit!).

Your body quickly responds by producing insulin and taking the glucose out of the blood to the liver and muscles for energy and storage. This sugar high is subsequently followed by a dip in blood sugar making you feel tired, foggy headed and irritable and craving more sugary carbohydrates and quick fixes! Your adrenal glands also secrete fight or flight hormones that lead to faster breathing, heart rate and anxiety. This rollercoaster of high and low blood sugar can play havoc with your mood, eating habits and health.

Here are some top tips to minimise the blood sugar rollercoaster and to calm your mood:

**1. Eat complex carbohydrates**

A diet rich in high fibre complex carbohydrates such as wholegrains, brown rice, pasta, sweet potatoes etc. will minimise blood sugar imbalances as they are metabolised slowly by the body. They are rich in B vitamins which convert food into fuel and will keep you feeling energised throughout the day.

**2. Add probiotics**

Your gut is considered your second brain as the digestive system is the second largest part of our neurological system. Looking after your gut health will help improve your mood. Add probiotics or 'good bacteria' such as apple cider vinegar, live yoghurt, sauerkraut and miso to optimise gut health.

**3. Omega 3 fats**

60% of the brain is made up of fats so omega 3 fats from oily fish, nuts and seeds help keep your brain healthy, enable the brains messaging signals to work and boost serotonin levels that calms, relaxes and regulates mood.

**4. Add sources of tryptophan**

This can be found in turkey, milk oats, eggs, fish, dairy, poultry, bananas etc. Your brain needs the amino acid tryptophan in order to make serotonin, the neurotransmitter that has a happy-making and calming effect. It also helps to make the hormone melatonin, which regulates sleep.

**5. Add green leafy vegetables**

These are rich in magnesium and B Vitamins. Magnesium is a calming mineral and a co-factor in over 300 enzyme reactions in the body and plays a role in energy production in our cells. While Vitamin B1 aids blood sugar balance, B3 plays a role in serotonin synthesis and B5 is important for adrenal function which controls stress.

**6. Avoid sugar and caffeine**

Turning to sugary treats and caffeine when you are stressed and in a bad mood will further exasperate these feelings. Once the 'sugar/caffeine' high is gone you are left feeling irritable, anxious and craving more sugar.



A lot of the time when we think of having work/life balance, we do not consider the quality of our **rest** and **sleep** to be a part of that **balance**.

Sleep is often the first area to be affected if we are stressed, busy or anxious. Sleep is essential for the body's natural repair systems and it can help you stay alert and make decisions. Lack of sleep can have negative effects on both your body and mind. It can alter the body's metabolism, affect brain and memory, alter appetite, resilience and the stress response. Sleep deficiency can also alter decision making, increase mood swings, lower motivation and increase feelings of sadness and depression. It is good to be aware of your sleep patterns and to make sure that you have adequate rest and sleep especially coming up to and during exams. Here are some good tips to get the balance right.

✘ Unbalanced	✔ Balanced
Leave the TV on while going asleep	Have 8 hours a night sleep (min)
Drink caffeine products 3 hours before bed time	Wake before the alarm clock goes off
Work on the laptop/ smart phone while in bed before sleeping	Wake feeling refreshed after a nights sleep
Wake up in the morning still tired	Find it easy to fall asleep

## How to get ZZZ Balance

**Avoid anything that will stimulate** your brain 3 hours before going to bed. Stimulant foods include coffee, tea, redbull, sugar drinks and large meals. Stimulant activities include working on any electronic device, which is everything from a smart phone to playing video games. Alcohol is also a reason for lack of sleep. Apart from the obvious like long nights out partying, alcohol can hinder the quality of sleep especially if taken on a daily basis.

### Set up a routine for bed-time

If you go to sleep at 11pm, then start to get ready for bed at 10pm. The routine can include, getting lunches ready for following day, washing and brushing teeth, tidying away clothes in bedroom and reading in bed. Even though watching TV for long periods of time is a stimulant, watching TV for a few minutes while you settle down is okay.

### If you find it hard to wind

**down**, a change in the body temperature can make you sleepy. In winter, have a hot shower or bath. As your body cools down after the hot shower, your body will wind down and you will feel sleepy. Alternatively in summer when it can be hot and humid, you can have a cool

shower and have bedroom windows open to cool the body down and help with sleep. **Other remedies to inducing a restful sleep** include a drop of lavender oil on your pillow, drink cold or hot milk before bed, meditate or bring your mind in to focus on your breathing. Listen to your breath for 1 minute without letting the thoughts in your mind take over.



### Do you have an app for that?

**Sleep Meter** – Stop wondering how well you are sleeping and start knowing! This application tracks your sleep habits and presents statistical and graphical analysis. Android – FREE

**Sleep On It** – Sleep tracker and alarm app. Get the alarm that does it all! Set your alarm and with one tap you can record how much sleep, then add info about sleep quality, your mood, meds and more to see what affects your sleep and how much you really need to feel rested and energized. Apple – FREE

You can be more **effective**  
and **successful** if you are  
studying from a place of  
**calm and balance.**



The words **'stress'** and **'relaxation'** get used a lot in articles about studying, exams or work/life balance, but what do they mean? How do we know which 'state' we are in? What effects do they have on the body?

#### ✘ Unbalanced

Spend hours playing video games or surfing the internet

Do not exercise

Do not have hobbies or take part in extra-curricular activities

Find it difficult to sleep at night

Have heart palpitations/shallow breath and feel panicky on a daily basis

#### ✔ Balanced

Take part in extra-curricular activity at least twice a week

Exercise for 20 mins. at least three times per week

Consciously aware of stress points in the body

Meditate

Read instead of watching TV

## Stress

In physiology, **stress is anything that causes the body to respond by releasing stress hormones.** This results in the **'fight or flight' syndrome.** Symptoms include faster heart rate, increased blood flow to the muscles instead of the major organs, faster breathing, increase in blood sugars and increase in ability of blood to clot. This is all good if we find ourselves in a situation where we need to react to an emergency situation, however over a prolonged period of time, these stress responses can interfere with how the body is supposed to work.

#### Chronic conditions include

Back/neck pain

Headaches

Digestive problems

Inability to sleep

Feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, anger, irritability and of being overwhelmed

**The "relaxation response" is the opposite of the "stress response."** The relaxation response causes the exact opposite physical symptoms in the body. Regular use of relaxation techniques can counteract any symptoms of stress that the body may have. In the run up to exams, stress levels will be higher than normal and if you remain in this state for 4-8 weeks, you will more than likely have experienced some of the above symptoms. If however, you have used some chosen relaxation techniques throughout this stressful time you'll have enabled the **physical and emotional body to remain balanced.**

#### Results of relaxation techniques include

Regular heart beat

Slow and deep breathing resulting in more oxygen available in the body

Improved concentration

Increased mental clarity

Increased productivity during the day

Organ function, such as digestion, occurs normally

Memory improves

### Relaxation

The following techniques can be used to help with relaxation and can be used at any time:

☞ **Check out your App Store for Sleep and meditation apps to help you at home.**

<b>Physical Techniques</b>	Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi and Stretching. This will release tension and stress in the muscles, spine and neck areas. Yoga is available in the Inter Faith Centre.
<b>Breathing Techniques</b>	Breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth three times. Breathing should be deep and full. This will slow the heart rate down.
<b>Meditation</b>	YouTube have many 10 minute meditations to help you relax. Find one that suits you. DCU offers 'mindfulness', so watch out for the next scheduled event on the SS&D event pages!
<b>Relaxing Music</b>	If classical music is not your thing, there are many chill out tunes available online on iTunes or YouTube to help you relax when not studying. There are lots of musical, theatrical and creative activities for students through Clubs & Societies
<b>Faith Spaces</b>	There are unique spaces for meditation, quiet and worship for those of all faiths and none across all campuses.



**Do you leave all your studying** to the week before the exams? **Do you feel guilty** when out socialising, feeling you should be home studying? **Do you feel frustrated** that you cannot get a grasp of your studying?

✘ Unbalanced	✔ Balanced
Leaving all studying to last minute before exams	Studying on a weekly basis throughout semester
Not doing any extra research in the run up to exams	Having a study plan for the semester and for the exams
Spending all spare hours socialising and in extra-curricular activities	Having a balance between course work and social life
Having notes and written work in different places and are easily lost	Having notes and written work in one folder
Not having a quiet place to study with no distractions	Having a quiet environment to study

## 6 Study & Exams

At university, studying is left up to you and after years of structure in school, it can be hard to motivate yourself to keep going. The key objective is to break down the tasks ahead of you into small manageable tasks. This will reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do. Also, it will allow you to keep on top of your work and studying for the exams will be less stressful. We have listed below the key areas that can help you be a success at exams.

<b>Study Skills Workshop</b>	Register for an Exam Revision Strategies Workshop. <a href="http://www.dcu.ie/studentlearning">www.dcu.ie/studentlearning</a>
<b>Past Papers</b>	For best exam preparation, see what questions came up last year. You can search for your past papers for all modules online at <a href="http://www.dcu.ie/internal/examinations/papers.php3">www.dcu.ie/internal/examinations/papers.php3</a>
<b>Academic Support</b>	Speak to lecturers in good time if you have any outstanding questions regarding the exams.
<b>Study Plan</b>	Prepare a Study Plan. You can download this Exam Preparation Booklet, which will help you, at: <a href="http://www.dcu.ie/advice/student-guides.shtml">www.dcu.ie/advice/student-guides.shtml</a>
<b>Positive Thoughts</b>	If you are having negative thoughts, e.g. "I am going to fail", "I can't do this", write them down on a piece of paper, read them and then throw it in the bin. Next, take a new piece of paper, write down 10 positives sentences, e.g. "I am a success", "I'll pass my exams", "and I enjoy learning". You may not believe the sentences but it's important to write them to cancel out each negative thought you have.
<b>Ask for Help</b>	Talk to friends, family, lecturers or student support staff if you still feel overwhelmed. It is normal to feel anxious when preparing coursework or studying for exams. Visit the Student Advice Centre or the Students' Union on either campuses, if you are unsure who to speak to or need some study tips. Email: <a href="mailto:student.support@dcu.ie">student.support@dcu.ie</a>

📱 There are many apps in your App Store on your Smart phone. Try a few to help you study, plan or relax.



# My Well-Being & Resilience Plan

Things that have a positive effect on my well-being

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Things that have a negative effect on my well-being

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What changes will I make after reading this booklet to improve my well-being?

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Who/What can help me to achieve these changes?

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## Tips to help you achieve your goals:

- Notes/reminders on your phone
- Make commitments (e.g. sign up for a 6 week class and pay upfront)
- Trying not to break the chain e.g. commit to exercising every day, even if it is not possible to do the same level of exercise each day.
- Choose suitable rewards.
- Make a commitment to yourself "Every weekend/ Sunday/Tuesday, I....."

Join a DCU  
Sports Club  
This is a fun  
way to meet  
new people,  
learn new skills  
and to fit in  
exercise too.

## Useful Contacts

The contact details  
below may be useful:

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**DCU Student  
Advice Centre** Glasnevin Campus  
T 01 700 7165  
St Patrick's Campus  
T 01 884 2004  
[dcu.ie/students/advice](http://dcu.ie/students/advice)

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**Sports  
Development  
Service** [dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment](http://dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment)  
T 01 700 6041

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**Health Care** Glasnevin Campus  
T 01 700 5143  
St Patrick's Campus  
T 01 884 2239  
[dcu.ie/students/health](http://dcu.ie/students/health)

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**Counselling  
& Personal  
Development** Glasnevin Campus  
T 01 700 5165  
St Patrick's Campus  
T 01 884 2239  
[dcu.ie/students/counselling](http://dcu.ie/students/counselling)

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**DCU  
Chaplaincy** Glasnevin Campus  
T 01 700 549  
St. Patrick's Campus  
T 01 884 2224  
E [www.dcu.ie/chaplaincy](http://www.dcu.ie/chaplaincy)

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Dublin City University  
T 01 700 7165  
E [student.support@dcu.ie](mailto:student.support@dcu.ie)

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websites or smart phone  
applications

# SS&D

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Health  
Spirituality

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**Write** [student.support@dcu.ie](mailto:student.support@dcu.ie)  
**Call** (01) 700 7165