



Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



# Your Health and Wellbeing



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



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# Welcome

University is a time of personal growth, and being a student may bring a number of changes to your lifestyle – some will be exciting and interesting and others will be challenging.

**You may be juggling:**

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Academic pressures

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New environments

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New relationships

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Part-time work

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Club and society activity

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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. Sometimes life at university will be challenging for you. If you feel like you are struggling with anything, let us know. Our message to you is don't suffer on your own reach out and talk to a friend, the Students' Union or Student Support and 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

The Wheel of Life is a great tool to help you assess areas of your life and to clearly see what is off balance. Read the instructions on page 05 and use the wheel provided to map out areas you want to focus on.

Choose 5 actions at the end of the exercise to help bring balance into one area of your life today.



## 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

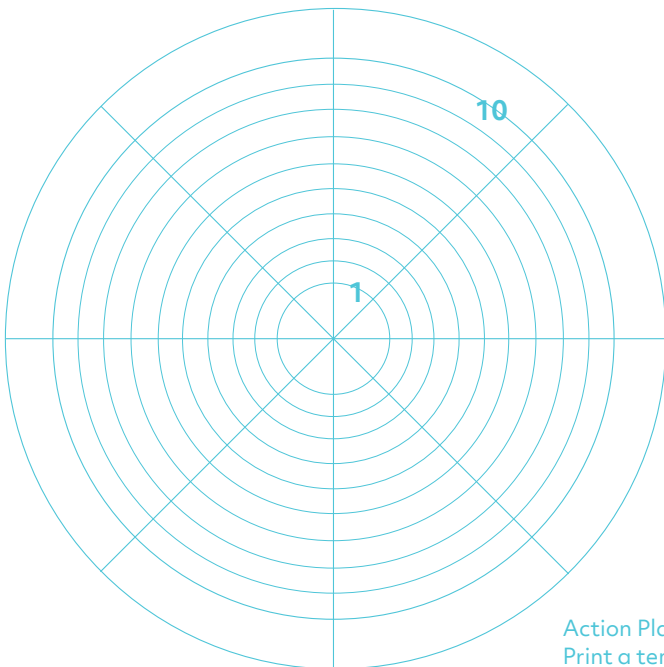
Join up the marks on the wheel.  
Does your wheel look in balance?

### 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  
[mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE\\_93.htm](http://mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_93.htm)

# 6 Steps

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. Read through the following steps to see what you can do today to create balance.

- 1 Time Management
- 2 Physical Activity
- 3 Healthy Eating
- 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

## 1 Time Management

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. A 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:

### 1. Record your time

Write down everything that you do

### 2. Analyse it

Pick out your five biggest time wasters of the day

### 3. Change

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

## Day Planner

7:00am

8:00am

9:00am

10:00am

11:00am

12:00pm

1:00pm

2:00pm

3:00pm

4:00pm

5:00pm

6:00pm

7:00pm

Time Wasters

Time

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## 1 Time Management

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, visit: **[pomodorotechnique.com](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.

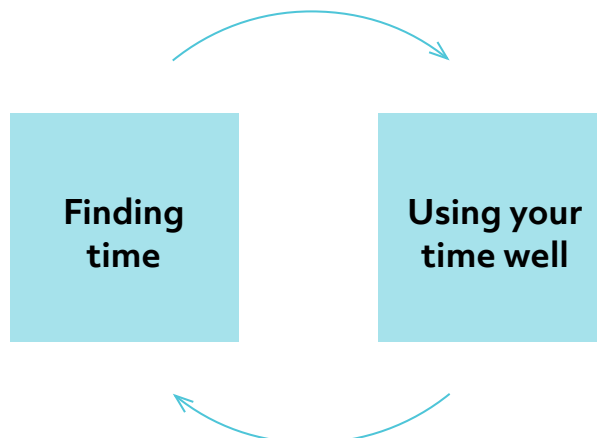
If you're prone to procrastination, do a 'self-check' – ask yourself "What am I doing?" and "Why am I doing this?", and if needs be, redirect yourself to the task at hand.

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





## 2. Physical Activity

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:

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Take the stairs

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Get off the bus or train a stop earlier and walk

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Walk into the city centre from your campus. Take in the neighbourhoods.

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Take regular breaks from study and get up and walk

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

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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. Joining fee is only €4. For more information visit: [dcu.ie/sports-wellbeing](https://dcu.ie/sports-wellbeing)

### **Get on your bike!**

Cycling is one of the easiest ways of fitting exercise into your day. It will also save you money! Cycle to university, between campus, work or into town with Bleeper Bike [bleeperbike.com](https://bleeperbike.com) For more information visit: [dcu.ie/info/walking\\_cycling.shtml](https://dcu.ie/info/walking_cycling.shtml)

### **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.

### **Take a fitness class**

Check out the many fitness classes on campus: [dcu.ie/dcusport/classes.shtml](https://dcu.ie/dcusport/classes.shtml)

### **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: [c25k.com](https://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. Check out YouTube for video clips from fully qualified fitness instructors: [nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/](https://nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/)

### **DCU has Multiple Campuses**

Why not visit the DCU St Patrick's, DCU All Hallows or DCU Glasnevin Campus by bike or by foot.

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

### 3. Healthy Eating



The food we eat has an 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!

#### Top Tips

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<b>Get organised</b>	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.
<b>Watch your waste</b>	When you buy foods that go off quickly, plan your meals carefully so it gets eaten or frozen straight away.

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<b>Eat a balanced diet</b>	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.	
	<b>Swap</b>	<b>For</b>
	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
<b>No time to cook or can't cook?</b>	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!	
<b>Make your takeaway a healthy one</b>	You don't have to give up takeaways completely, as long as you make the right menu choices and don't have them often.	
	<b>Swap</b>	<b>For</b>
	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 and pilau rice	Tandoori or Madras, boiled rice
	Chinese: Deep fried dishes	Stir fries and boiled rice
<b>Smart Snacking!</b>	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!).





The national healthy eating guidelines and food pyramid can be found at this web address:  
[healthyireland.ie/health-initiatives/heg/](https://healthyireland.ie/health-initiatives/heg/)

For more information on healthy eating in DCU, go to:  
[dcu.ie/catering/healthy-eating.shtml](https://dcu.ie/catering/healthy-eating.shtml)

### **Here are some top tips to eating well:**

#### **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 brain's messaging signals to work and boost serotonin levels that calm, 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 exacerbate these feelings. Cut down on pizza, sugar drinks and alcohol.

## 4. Rest & Sleep

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:

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Alter the body's metabolism

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Affect brain and memory

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Alter appetite

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Affect resilience and the stress response

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Sleep deficiency can also alter decision making, increase mood swings, lower motivation and increase feelings of sadness and depression. Here are some good tips to get the balance right.

### ✖ Unbalanced

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Leave the TV on while going asleep

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Drink caffeine products 3 hours before bed time

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Work on the laptop/smart phone while in bed before sleeping

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Wake up in the morning still tired

### ✔ Balanced

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Have 8 hours a night sleep (minimum)

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Wake before the alarm clock goes off

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Wake feeling refreshed after a nights sleep

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Find it easy to fall asleep



## How to get ZZZ Balance

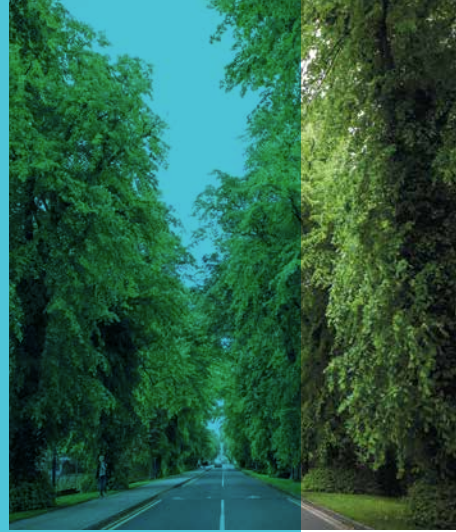
**Avoid anything that will stimulate** your brain 3 hours before going to bed. Stimulant foods include coffee, tea, energy drinks, sugar drinks and large meals. Stimulant activities include working on any electronic device, which is everything from a smart phone to playing video games. Alcohol is also 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.

## 5. Relax & Unwind



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

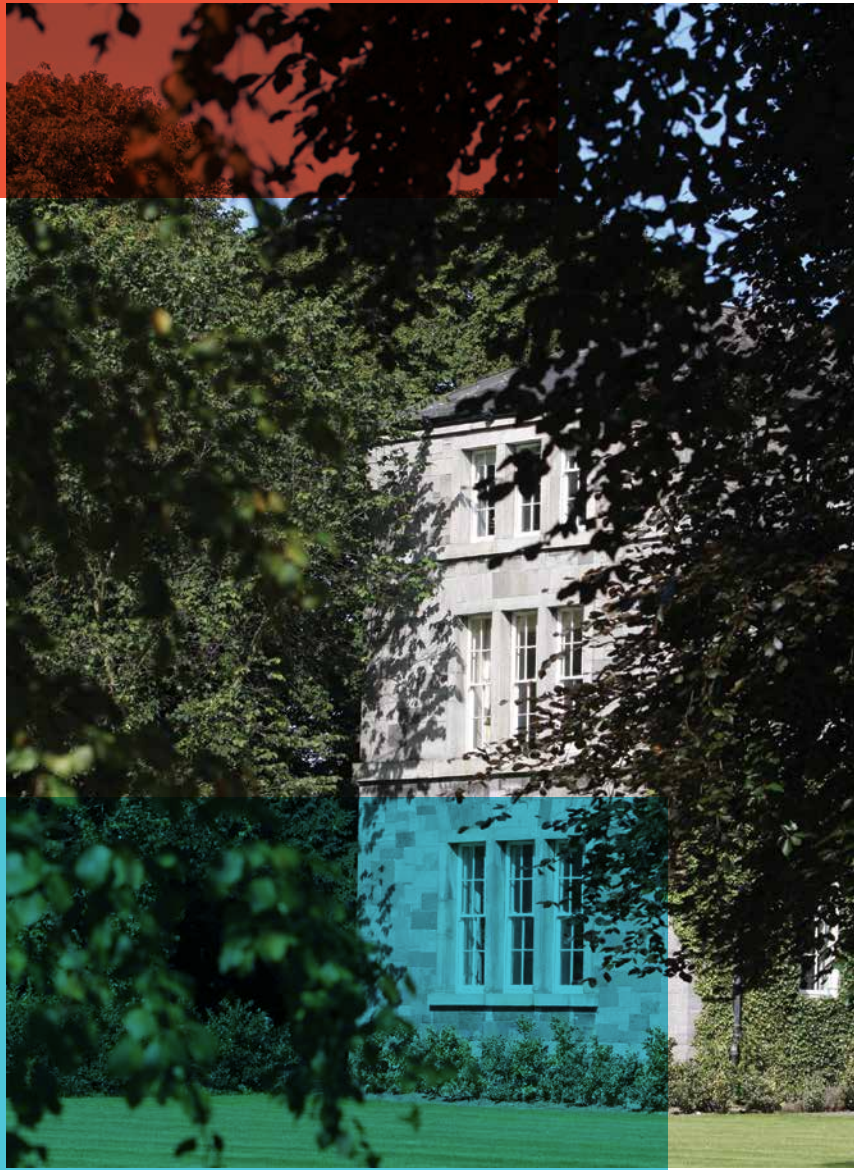


### Relaxation

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

<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.





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

## 6. Alcohol

Alcohol interferes with the chemicals in the brain's control system. The effect alcohol has on our brain makes us drunk, but it can also cause longer lasting or even permanent damage to our brains.



**Effects of  
alcohol can  
include**

Mood changes

Learning and concentration difficulties

Mental health problems like anxiety and depression

Poor memory dementia

Alcohol related brain injuries

Source: [askaboutalcohol.ie](http://askaboutalcohol.ie)

**It's important to consider  
your drinking and how it  
might be affecting your  
sleep, study, work and  
relationships.**

**Want to know about how drinking  
is affecting you?**

Take the DCU ePUB test.

The test will provide you with:

- Your individual drinking pattern
- Your risk patterns
- Your aspirations and goals
- Helpful resources at Dublin City University

[interwork.sdsu.edu/echeckup/epub/alc/  
coll/index.php?id=dcu](http://interwork.sdsu.edu/echeckup/epub/alc/coll/index.php?id=dcu)

# 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
- Commit to the goal you set for yourself.
- 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...”
- Remind yourself what is motivating you to do well.



**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:

<b>DCU Student Advice Centre</b>	DCU Glasnevin Campus T: +353 (01) 700 7165 DCU St Patrick's Campus T: +353 (01) 884 2004 W: <a href="http://dcu.ie/students/advice">dcu.ie/students/advice</a>
<b>Sport &amp; Wellbeing Service</b>	W: <a href="http://dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment">dcu.ie/sportsdevelopment</a> T: +353 (01) 700 5625
<b>Health Care</b>	DCU Glasnevin Campus T: +353 (01) 700 5143 DCU St Patrick's Campus T: +353 (01) 884 2239 W: <a href="http://dcu.ie/students/health">dcu.ie/students/health</a>
<b>Counselling &amp; Personal Development</b>	DCU Glasnevin Campus T: +353 (01) 700 5165 DCU St Patrick's Campus T: +353 (01) 884 2239 W: <a href="http://dcu.ie/students/counselling">dcu.ie/students/counselling</a>
<b>DCU Chaplaincy</b>	DCU Glasnevin Campus T: +353 (01) 700 549 DCU St Patrick's Campus T: +353 (01) 884 2224 W: <a href="http://dcu.ie/chaplaincy">dcu.ie/chaplaincy</a>
<b>Campaigns and Social Media</b>	HSE – The Little Things Campaign HSE – Your Mental Health Campaign  Orla Walsh RD 📧 <a href="mailto:orlawalshnutrition">orlawalshnutrition</a> W: <a href="http://orlawalshnutrition.ie">orlawalshnutrition.ie</a>  📧 <a href="https://www.thefoodmedic.com">thefoodmedic</a> 📧 <a href="https://www.dietitianconnection.com">dietitianconnection</a> 📧 <a href="https://www.moderationmovement.com">moderationmovement</a>  W: <a href="http://spunout.ie">spunout.ie</a>

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E: [student.support@dcu.ie](mailto:student.support@dcu.ie)  
  
DCU cannot stand over the content of any  
external websites or smart phone applications



## Student Support and Development

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**Log on** [dcu.ie/students](https://dcu.ie/students)  
**Email** [student.support@dcu.ie](mailto:student.support@dcu.ie)  
**Call** +353 (01) 700 7165  
**Drop in** Student Advice Centre  
DCU Glasnevin Campus  
Henry Grattan Building

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