

# Unit 4: Health and Wellness



“Health is a state of complete harmony of the body, mind and spirit.”

*Unknown*



## 4. Unit 4: Health and Wellness

### 4.1 Introduction

The ability to make healthy choices at university is a very important life skill. It can very well mean the difference between life and death; graduating or dropping out. Many health related behaviours can impact on your ability to continue your education and focus on your studies. If you experience significant stress at university and are unable to cope with the effects of that stress, you can become overwhelmed to the point that you adopt unhealthy behaviours as a “quick fix”, or the pressure becomes so much that you drop out of university. Drop-out rates are significantly high in higher education (Pather, 2018) and are often the result of the inability to cope with a range of psychosocial issues. In this unit we will discuss some important health issues that can affect your wellbeing and provide you with the skills to make informed choices about your health and wellness.

### 4.2 Learning outcomes

*After working through this unit, you should be able to:*

- display skills and make choices that promote health and wellness.

### 4.3 Assessment criteria

1. The habits and behaviours for general health and wellness are described.
2. Stress is defined.
3. The symptoms of stress are listed.
4. The techniques for managing stress are applied.
5. The basic facts of HIV are identified.
6. The transmission and prevention of HIV is described.
7. Testing for HIV is explained.
8. The experience of living with HIV is related.
9. Issues around sexuality and consent are critically discussed.

## 4.4 Learner activities

*For this unit, students are expected to:*

Before Class	During Class	After Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access the prescribed reading / audio-visual materials for this unit.</li><li>• Come to class with a general understanding of the material and be prepared to participate!</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in a Life Skills lecture/workshop on <i>Health and Wellness</i>.</li></ul>	Complete the following <b>activities</b> and tests that will form part of your final assessment for this module: <b>1. Activity 4: My stress busters</b> <b>2. Quiz 4</b> <b>3. Unit Test 4</b>

## 4.5 Health and Wellness

When you hear the word “healthy” what comes to mind? Being diseased? Having to visit a doctor or the clinic? Taking medication? A healthy lifestyle is actually not only about disease or illness. When you think healthy you need to think holistically. Health involves our physical, social, mental, spiritual, and psychological wellbeing. A healthy lifestyle is one that helps you enjoy more aspects of your life.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in 1948 as follows:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

This definition is still in use today. But in 1986, the WHO added the following statement to this definition:

"A resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasising social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities."

This means that health is a resource to support an individual's function in wider society. A healthful lifestyle provides the means to lead a full life (Felman, 2017)

### 4.5.1 General wellness

In this section we will briefly discuss some general health behaviours that you can engage in to improve your overall physical, mental and social wellbeing.

The following section is adapted from an article by Teach (2013).

#### **4.5.1.1 Dietary habits and behaviours**

Your diet, or daily food intake, should really be seen as a lifestyle of eating healthy. Quick fix “diets” may work for the short-term, but very often if they are not realistic, healthy and consistent changes, you can fall right back into your unhealthy habits.

- ✓ Plan healthy meals in advance.
- ✓ Try to buy more organic, real foods.
- ✓ Drink a minimum of eight cups of water every day.
- ✓ Start your day with a healthy breakfast.
- ✓ Eat only until you are 80% full.

#### **4.5.1.2 Physical activity habits and behaviour**

Sitting is dangerous! Get into the habit of moving more than you sit or are sedentary. Try to incorporate at least 30 minutes of activity into your day. Try the following tips:

- ✓ Take advantage of short but intense workouts.
- ✓ Take the stairs instead of the lift.
- ✓ Find a workout partner.
- ✓ Have an exercise journal.
- ✓ Take 30-minute walks.

#### **4.5.1.3 Lifestyle habits and behaviours**

Your health depends on so many things besides diet and physical activity. A healthy lifestyle is a lifelong, long-term commitment. It is about the decisions you make on a daily basis in all areas of your life. Try some of the following:

- ✓ Go to bed at the same time every night.
- ✓ Create a better sleep environment.
- ✓ Avoid bright lights before bed.
- ✓ Before bed, prepare for the next day.
- ✓ Watch the company you keep. Toxic friends make you toxic.
- ✓ Engage in a hobby.
- ✓ Don't spend too much time on your mobile phone or computer.
- ✓ Spend regular time outdoors.

#### **4.5.1.4 Happiness and mental health habits**

There is a large body of research connecting positive feelings and happiness to better health. One way happiness improves health is by its relationship to psychosocial factors such as better relationships, more emotional/practical support, and adaptive coping mechanisms (Steptoe, O'Donnell, Marmot & Wardle, 2008). But it's not just these factors.

Higher well-being, independent of health-related behaviours, is associated with a decreased risk of coronary heart disease (Boehm, Peterson, Kivimaki & Kubzansky, 2011)). How is this possible? Greater happiness is associated with decreased bodily response to stress, including lower cortisol and ambulatory heart rate (Steptoe, Wardle & Marmot, 2005). Happiness has also been associated with better immune response, better cardiovascular function, and improved sleep (Steptoe, Dockray & Wardle, 2009). This should convince you to be happier. Here are some tips to being happier:

- ✓ Practice gratitude.
- ✓ Follow your passion and do things you love.
- ✓ Appreciate the beauty around you.
- ✓ Use cognitive reframing to change your negative thoughts to positive ones.
- ✓ Write about your negative emotions and experiences instead of holding them in.

### **4.6 Stress Management**

A lot of uncertainty and stress comes with being at university, especially in your first year. Students have to deal with studying for exams, finishing assignments on time, worrying about their future, and making new friends. Trying to manage all of these goals can leave you feeling overwhelmed and can lead to more severe mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-confidence. Fortunately, there are techniques and resources that can help stressed-out students cope with the issues they face (Flannigan, 2017).

Before we look at some of these techniques or coping skills, let's first explore what stress is and how it impacts on our lives.

The following information is adapted from [The Campus Mind Works](#).

### **4.6.1 What is stress?**

Stress is anything that alters your natural balance. When stress is present, your body and your mind must attend to it in order to maintain balance. Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones that help you cope with the situation. That in turn takes energy away from the other functions of your brain, like concentrating, or taking action. There are two different sources of stress: *external triggers*, like transitioning to university or your parents getting a divorce, and *internal triggers*, like placing high expectations on yourself (Regents of the University of Michigan, 2018).

Stress is a part of everyday life. There are many instances when stress can be helpful. A fire alarm is intended to cause the stress that alerts you to avoid danger. The stress created by a deadline to finish a paper can motivate you to finish the assignment on time. But when experienced in excess, stress has the opposite effect. It can harm our emotional and physical health, and limit our ability to function at home, in school, and within our relationships. The good news is that, since we are responsible for bringing about much of our own stress, we can also do much to manage stress by learning and practicing specific stress-reduction strategies (Regents of the University of Michigan, 2018).

### **4.6.2 Symptoms of stress**

The following are some important indicators that you could be experiencing too much stress:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased worrying
- Trouble completing assignments on time
- Not going to class
- Short temper or increased agitation
- Tension
- Headaches
- Tight muscles
- Changes in eating habits (e.g., "stress eating")
- Changes in sleeping habits

People with mental illness are more likely to notice that their specific symptoms re-emerge or grow worse during stressful times. In many cases, stress can act as the "spark" that ignites a mental health episode. But this does not mean that every time you are busy or face a difficult

challenge you will have a mental health episode. Not everyone responds the same way to potentially stressful circumstances. For example, during final exams many students feel very overwhelmed and anxious, while others are able to keep their stress under control. If you, like many others, struggle with managing stress during difficult times, there are some helpful tips on this page that can help.

### 4.6.3 Stress management techniques

The following are some techniques that you can use to help you better manage your stress.

Practice time management	Time management skills help you to manage your academic schedule, social activities, and making time for yourself.
Set SMART goals	Setting effective goals will give you much needed direction and vision for your life, which can improve your mood and help you reduce stress.
Exercise regularly.	Physical activity can help you burn off the energy generated by stress.
Sleep well!	Good sleep habits ensure that you are well-rested. Sleep deprivation can cause many physical and mental problems and can increase stress.
Try mindfulness meditation	Mindfulness is a very relaxing technique that helps you focus on the here and now. Look for free courses that offer mindfulness meditation.
Limit the use of stimulants	Students tend to use stimulants a lot to cope with tests or exams. Limiting or eliminating the use of stimulants like caffeine help to reduce the stress response in your body.
Pace yourself throughout the day	Take regular breaks from work or other structured activities. During breaks from class, studying, or work, spend time walking outdoors, listen to music or just sit quietly, to clear and calm your mind.
Start a journal.	Throughout this module we have encouraged the skill of self-reflection. Journaling is a very important way to achieve this. Many people find journaling to be helpful for managing stress, understanding emotions, and making decisions and changes in their lives.

Realize that you have limits.	Learn to work within your limits and set realistic expectations for yourself and others.
Take a break!	Plan leisure activities to break up your schedule.
Watch your thoughts!	Recognise the role your own thoughts can play in causing you distress. Challenge beliefs you may hold about yourself and your situation that may not be accurate. Learn techniques for replacing unrealistic thoughts with realistic ones.
Find humour in your life.	Laughter can be a great tension-reducer.
Seek support from friends and family.	Friends and family can be an important ear to listen when you need to “vent” about situations that bring on stressful feelings. But make sure that you don’t focus exclusively on negative experiences; try to also think of at least three things that are going well for you and share those experiences.

## Relaxation Techniques

Research has shown that relaxation techniques are an effective way to reduce not only stress but many of the symptoms associated with mental illnesses. Try one or more of the following techniques for relaxing your mind and body and reducing the physical and psychological tension associated with stress. Take the time to experiment with these techniques to find out which ones work best for you.

**Breathing Exercise:** Place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage. Inhale slowly through your nose, drawing a deep breath into your lungs. Your chest should move only slightly, while your stomach rises, pushing your hand up. As you exhale, just let yourself go and imagine your entire body becoming loose and limp. It should take you twice as long to exhale as it does to inhale. Practice three times per day for two to three minutes.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Pay a “mental visit” to your muscles, stopping at each area of the body from head to toe (or toe to head), paying attention to individual areas where tension exists. As you pause at each area, tense and relax each muscle, trying to release unnecessary tension. Spend a few more minutes on those areas that seem to be holding the most tension.



**Visual (Guided) Imagery:** Imagine tension flowing out of your body from top to bottom. Visualize tension draining down your shoulders and arms and out through your fingertips into the air, down your thighs and legs, and out through the soles of your feet into the ground. It's also helpful to take a mental "vacation," imagining yourself in a pleasant, relaxing place such as on the beach or in the woods. This can be a place where you've been or a place you'd like to be. Take time to imagine the specific details of what you see, hear and feel in this place.

For more information on these techniques and to access more resources, visit [The Campus Mind Works](#).

## **4.7 HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS is a major public health issue. It has claimed more than 32 million lives (WHO, 2019). However, with increasing access to effective HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, including for opportunistic infections, HIV infection has become a manageable chronic health condition, enabling people living with HIV to lead long and healthy lives (WHO, 2019).

Life circumstances make certain people more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. These include, but are not limited to, age, gender, as well as one's social and legal status. This is why we see higher rates of HIV among the young (adolescents) and the elderly; young women; people in prisons and sex workers (WHO, 2019).

Being a student at university can also increase one's exposure to the virus. We have already discussed in previous units how entering and being a student at university is associated with greater freedom, more stress, exposure to new people and new experiences. Whilst many of these experiences are positive and associated with increased wellbeing, some of them can also be associated with health risk behaviours. With greater freedom comes the opportunity to engage in behaviours without supervision. Students at university report experimenting with alcohol and drugs, sometimes for the first time, because of a lack of supervision and parental guidance. There is a strong relationship between substance use and rates of HIV infection:

Using drugs affects your brain, alters your judgment, and lowers your inhibitions. When you're high, you may be more likely to make poor decisions that put you at risk for getting or transmitting HIV, such as having sex without a condom, have a hard time using a condom the right way every time you have sex, have more sexual partners, or use other drugs. These behaviors can increase your risk of exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Or, if you have HIV, they can increase your risk of spreading HIV to others ([HIV.gov](https://www.hiv.gov), 2018)

Can you think of other experiences at university that can increase your risk of engaging in health-risk behaviours such as unprotected sex, substance abuse etc.?

### 4.7.1 Table of HIV information

The following website, [Avert](https://www.avert.org) is the prescribed resource for this next section. In the table below you will find links to the content that we would like you to access, read and watch.

The following sections on the website are important for this unit:

About HIV & AIDS	Transmission & Prevention	Testing	Living with HIV	Sex and STIs
<a href="#">What are HIV and AIDS?</a>	<a href="#">How do you get HIV?</a>	<a href="#">Why get tested for HIV?</a>	<a href="#">Newly diagnosed</a>	<a href="#">Exploring your sexuality</a>
<a href="#">How HIV affects the body</a>	<a href="#">Sex and HIV</a>	<a href="#">When to get tested for HIV</a>	<a href="#">Sharing your diagnosis</a>	<a href="#">Am I ready for sex?</a>
<a href="#">Symptoms</a>	<a href="#">HIV myths</a>	<a href="#">What's involved?</a>	<a href="#">Treatment</a>	<a href="#">Sexual consent</a>
<a href="#">Cure for AIDS</a>	<a href="#">Safer sex</a>	<a href="#">What happens after?</a>	<a href="#">Health and wellbeing</a>	<a href="#">Video: How to say no to sex</a>
<a href="#">I'm worried about HIV</a>	<a href="#">Video: Forgetting to use a condom</a>	<a href="#">HIV Testing Personal Stories</a>	<a href="#">Video: Talking about HIV with a partner</a>	<a href="#">Video: Dating older people</a>
	<a href="#">Video: Contraception options</a>	<a href="#">Glossary</a>		

Now that you have come to the end of this unit, complete the following activity to assist in your management of stress. It will assist you in finding holistic ways to manage your stress and engage in behaviours that promote balance and wellbeing.

Access Activity 4 on myTUTOR and follow the instructions. Once you have completed the activity, proceed to Quiz 4. **NOTE:** You must successfully complete the quiz to be able to access Test 4 for this unit. You may complete the quiz as many times as you wish.