

How to Stay Healthy In College

Happy New Year! This time of year is full of excitement, hope and resolutions. One of your top resolutions may include a new found desire to get healthy. However a couple of weeks into this you may begin to question how it is possible with your college student budget, class and work schedule.

Before you entered college, you lived with your parents or guardians who helped you stay healthy. If you were sick, they took you to the doctor. They fed you healthy meals, encouraged you to exercise or participate in activities that kept you moving. Now that you are on your own, you are responsible for meeting your own needs. Health and wellness are two things that are thrown to the wind in college due to the amount of stress, work and commitments. College will always have it's ups and downs but there are a number of things that you can do to experience more peaks than lows. Take advantage of all of the resources your campus has to offer health wise, such as health care, activities, and gyms. Health is vital to your success.

How to Eat Healthy in College

Resist Routine

It is easy to get into a routine, especially when it comes to meals. You know what you like and you may not think you have time to plan for a new meal every day. Just make sure that you aren't just living on McDonald's dollar menu. While it may be convenient, it isn't a sustainable way of living. Have some healthy options peppered in.

Don't Skip Breakfast

Breakfast sets the tone for the day and provides you with energy to make it through the afternoon. If you aren't someone who can eat a full meal, try a smoothie instead.

Don't Binge Eat

When you feel stressed, it is easy to binge eat. Eating large portions like this isn't healthy. Try to keep track of the different food groups you're eating and eat smaller portions. If you get hungry throughout the day, prepare smaller snack foods to bring along with you. Eating smaller, healthy, and natural snack foods throughout the day will keep up your energy and focus. Stay away from the vending machines. Stick with your own snacks from home.

Drink More Water

Drinking water throughout the day will steady those hunger pangs and will keep your energy levels up.

Help Your Liver

Consuming too much alcohol can have a damaging effect on your health. It contains way more calories than you think it does. It can also cause dehydration, and of course, potential hangover. If you do drink, don't overdo it.

Don't Eat After 8:00 PM

By finishing dinner before 8:00 p.m., you're giving your body enough time to digest before it hits sleep mode. Making late night eating a regular habit is not healthy.

Exercise Tips

Workout First Thing in the Morning

An early morning workout can start the day off right, and it can give you momentum. By forcing yourself to work out in the morning, it's also often easier to make sure you get the exercise in rather than trying to cram it in after class when you're likely tired.

Get a Gym Buddy

Plan to go with a friend. This will ensure you have someone to rely on and hold each other accountable for workout sessions.

Try a Fitness Class

Not a fan of the gym? Many people aren't! Try a class instead, like Spin, Zumba, yoga, or Pilates. These classes give you a great workout and are fun and challenging. It is often easier to work out when you have a teacher guiding you.

Walk to Class or Park Far Away

If you slightly alter some of your daily habits, you can maximize your step count. By taking the long way to class or parking farther away from school, you can add more steps to your day. Just make sure you give yourself more time to get to class.

Get a Bike

Ride a bike to school instead of driving. You can start out by setting a goal of doing this once a week, and then build on it from there.

Sleep Tips

Prioritize Sleep

Proper sleep is one of the most important habits you can develop. Yet it's often the most sacrificed in college. It's important to make sleep a priority for your immediate and long-term health.

Master the Power Nap

If you get home from class and feel exhausted, a quick power nap can do wonders to your energy levels before you have to tackle the second half of your day. Set your alarm for 20 minutes to give yourself enough time to fall asleep without feeling groggy when you wake up.

Turn off Your Devices 30 Minutes Before Bed

It's tempting to sit in bed with your phone or computer and browse through Facebook and Instagram. However, the light emitted by the device's screen can stimulate your brain, making it more difficult to fall asleep.

Don't Consume Caffeine in the Evenings

The effects of caffeine can linger for some time. Try cutting off your caffeine intake by the early afternoon so it doesn't hurt your sleep pattern.

Set a Bedtime Routine

Having a set of nightly routines before bed will send signals to your body to start shutting down for the night. Try listening to calm music or reading a book.

Have a Party Strategy

Social gatherings, sporting events, dance parties, and other forms of nightlife make up a big part of the college experience. Going out on the weekends can be both fun and entertaining, but there's often a turning point of when it can be unhealthy. Try calling it a night around 11 p.m. instead of 1 a.m.

Don't Pull All-Nighters

You may think an all-nighter is the only way to prepare for exams or to finish a project, but this isn't true. All-nighters, especially when done regularly, can severely damage your health and weaken your immune system.

Health Tips

Wash Your Hands

There are countless surfaces you touch that are shared with others at school. This is why it's critical to develop a good hand washing routine. This simple habit will prevent a number of illnesses.

Clean Your Living Space

Little things like cleaning your surfaces, door knobs, keyboards, and mouse can go a long way in keeping your living space sanitary. Be sure to clean the bathroom and bed sheets regularly too. During the winter, air circulation in rooms can be poor because windows and doors are kept shut, meaning more dust and other sneeze-inducing particles floating around. Although it can be cringing to spend hard earned money on things like basic cleaning supplies, these are necessities.

Don't Share

An easy way to prevent the spread of illness is to avoid sharing items with others. This can include school supplies, books, food, or drinks.

Take a Sick Day

If you legitimately feel an illness coming on, then it's best to stay home. Pushing yourself can make yourself worse and spread your sickness to others.

Get Immunized

Most immunizations were given to you as a child, but there are some specifically for college students. A physician can tell you which ones need to be updated.

Mental Health Tips

Know Your Limit

Every college student experiences a point when they've reached their max. Once you hit this point, you can start setting limits for yourself to prevent burnout moving forward. Set restrictions on work hours and stick with them.

Don't Procrastinate

Putting off important and unpleasant tasks is a natural thing to do, but it's a habit that can leave you feeling stressed and anxious. It can affect your confidence as well. So try prioritizing the most difficult first. Once completed you will feel a huge sense of relief!

Practice Relaxation Techniques

Developing positive mental practices like relaxation exercise, meditation, and deep breathing can help keep you calm throughout the day. It's especially important to practice these when you start to feel stressed or anxious.

Surround Yourself With Positive People

In college, you will meet many new people, and some will be a positive influence. Identify these people early on and make a point of spending time with them. It will help reduce your stress levels and build your confidence.

Take Breaks

When working on projects or homework, set increments of time for work and for breaks. Use an alarm if you need to, but be sure to remember to pause your work every now and then.

Get a Hobby

Hobbies are a good way to develop a creative side or to release stress. By trying new things, you may end up developing a passion- or at least impressing your friends.

Try Not to Rush Out the Door

Make sure to give yourself lots of time in the morning to get ready and get out the door. Leaving yourself feeling stressed every morning to make it to school on time can take its toll on your mental health. Try not to do this to yourself daily.

Develop Time Management Skills

Time management is key. You will be very busy and have lots of responsibilities. Being aware of everything that needs to be done and making a plan to accomplish it all is the way to prevent stress and burnout.

Emotional Well-Being Tips

Volunteer Your Time

The quickest way to feel happy and good about yourself is to give back to others. Find a cause you believe in, and donate your time to helping others. The positivity you feel from volunteering will improve all areas of your life.

Set Personal Goals

You likely have a general idea of what it is you want to achieve in school and in your personal life. Make these goals as specific as possible. This will help keep you on track when things get challenging.

Embrace Change

College is a new experience for everyone, and it can seem scary and uncomfortable at first. Try not to let it overwhelm you, though. Instead, embrace the change, and don't get caught up in the little things that stress you out. These experiences only help you grow.

Don't Be Too Hard on Yourself

We tend to beat ourselves up when things don't go the way we planned, but don't get discouraged. Find the opportunity to learn from every situation, and remember that eventually all things will come together.

But most importantly, listen to your body. Acknowledging when something doesn't feel right, whether physical, mental, or emotional, is the critical first step to overcoming it. If you're feeling a cold coming on, then sleep and some medicine. If you're feeling pain in your neck or low back, you may want to avoid vigorous exercise.

Going to college is a significant stage in life that involves a lot of decision making. The choices you make and habits you cultivate during college will ultimately influence who you will become in the future. Adopting good habits and staying healthy in college will serve you well now, and down the line.