

## **Health & Wellness**

Travelling abroad, meeting new people, and learning and living in a different culture are all part of a great experience. To ensure this experience is uninterrupted, you should be aware of their health and wellness. As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. This module will help students become more aware of the different aspects to health and wellness, especially while abroad.

Some things to remember:

- Ensure you have taken the necessary medical precautions before travelling abroad
- Remember to have sufficient supply of medication and proper documentations for pre-existing medical conditions
- Wellness includes all facets of health: general, physical, mental and emotional health

### **General Health**

#### **Doctor**

The stresses of international travel, especially if it is over a longer period of time, can often intensify pre-existing medical conditions. Ensure your doctor is aware of where you are going and the duration. If applicable, be sure to obtain referrals or resources that will help you while abroad.

#### **Medication**

If you regularly take prescription medication, be sure to bring an adequate supply of the medication with you, provided that it is non-perishable and legal in your destination country. For more information, visit the [Global Affairs website for prescription medication](http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/medication) <<http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/medication>>.

To facilitate your clearance through customs and to ease the process of refilling prescriptions by mail, clearly label your medication with your name, the prescribing doctor's name, and the prescription number.

#### **Notes and Records**

If your prescribing doctor advises against taking a large supply of medication, he/she should provide a note with the diagnosis and the recommended medication so that an overseas physician can fill your prescription properly. In some cases, this physician may conduct an examination and confirm the diagnosis before filling the prescription provided by your Canadian doctor. You may also request a copy of your personal health record to carry with you throughout your travels and present it to the attending physicians in case of an emergency.

If your pre-existing medical condition has the potential to become problematic on your trip, consider wearing a [MedicAlert bracelet](https://www.medicalert.ca/) <<https://www.medicalert.ca/>>.

## **Physical Health**

### **Immunizations**

Before leaving for your host country, it is important to be aware of travel health information, such as the types of immunizations and vaccines needed for certain destinations. For more information and recommendations on vaccinations, visit a travel clinic such as [Vancouver Coastal Health](http://www.vch.ca/) <<http://www.vch.ca/>>, or the [Public Health Agency of Canada](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/) <<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/>> website.

### **Food and nutrition**

Maintaining a healthy and well-balanced diet can help support an enjoyable experience while living abroad. Planning ahead can help with eating well on a budget.

Food and water-borne diseases are common in some countries and can lead to diarrhea. To avoid contamination, it is useful to prepare food and water in sanitary conditions, cook foods thoroughly, and boil water for three minutes for proper disinfection. For further information on food and water preparation, you can visit the [Center for Global Education](http://globaled.us/peacecorps/food-and-water-preparation.asp) <<http://globaled.us/peacecorps/food-and-water-preparation.asp>> website.

### **Travel Health Kits**

While travelling, you might not have access to health items and supplies, so it is a good idea to plan ahead and pack some over-the-counter medication and first aid supplies for unexpected health events.

Some health issues to prepare for are:

- Allergies
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Heartburn and stomach acid
- Infection and inflammation
- Insect bites
- Pain
- Travel sickness and vomiting

Suggestions for supplies to include in a first-aid kit are (*slides presentation*):

- Bandages (Band-Aids, ace bandage)
- Gauze
- Antiseptic
- Hand sanitizer
- Tweezers, scissors, lighter (ensure these items are allowed to be brought on a plane)

## **Mental Health**

### **Mental Health and Wellness**

Travelling and studying abroad can trigger mental health issues such as stress, depression and homesickness. Learn how to take care of your mental health by recognizing symptoms and learning strategies to cope with mental health issues. Click through the slides below for more information.

#### **Mental Health (*Slide Presentation*)**

<<http://files.flipsnack.com/iframe/embed.html?hash=f1js7qa5&wmode=window&bgcolor=EEEE&t=1361872273>>

#### **Stress**

Stress can affect all aspects of your health and wellness, and can manifest in four ways: behavioural, cognitive, physical, and emotional.

The following table outlines some of the stress warning signs and symptoms:

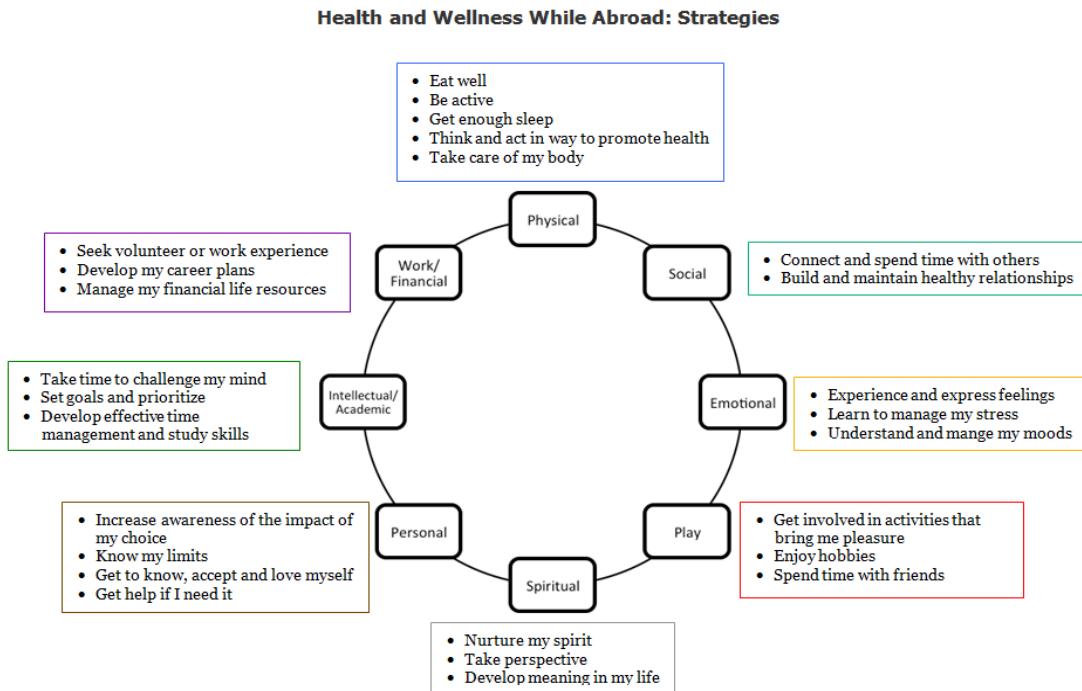
Behavioural	Cognitive	Physical	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eating more or less</li> <li>- Sleeping too much or too little</li> <li>- Isolating yourself from others</li> <li>- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li> <li>- Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax</li> <li>- Prone to crying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Memory problems</li> <li>- Inability to concentrate</li> <li>- Poor judgement</li> <li>- Seeing only the negative</li> <li>- Anxious or racing thoughts</li> <li>- Constant worrying</li> <li>- Lack of motivation</li> <li>- Inability to suppress negativity</li> <li>- Loss of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aches and pains</li> <li>- Diarrhoea or constipation</li> <li>- Nausea, dizziness</li> <li>- Chest pains, rapid heartbeat</li> <li>- Loss of sex drive</li> <li>- Frequent colds</li> <li>- Loss of energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moodiness</li> <li>- Irritability or short temper/anger</li> <li>- Agitation, inability to relax</li> <li>- Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>- Loneliness, isolation and/or rejection</li> <li>- Depression or general unhappiness</li> <li>- Denial of problems</li> <li>- Nervousness</li> <li>- Hopelessness</li> </ul>

Learning about the warning signs and symptoms of stress can help you manage stress and mitigate its negative impacts. The strategy for success is finding your personal balance. Take a look at the many different aspects of health and wellness and try to identify some strategies that will help you monitor and manage stress.

Here are some examples:

- *Physical* – be active, get enough sleep
- *Emotional* – talk to friends or family, express yourself in some way
- *Intellectual/Academic* – talk to your professors, manage your time effectively

For more information on stress and other mental health/wellness issues, visit the UBC Wellness homepage: “Live Well, Learn Well” (linked in the *Quicklinks* section). For an example of a strategy in managing your health and wellness, please review the following chart (next page):



## Depression

Everybody experiences highs and lows in their lives, but depression is a persistent low mood that lasts for more than two weeks. Feelings of severe despair might cloud the “light at the end of the tunnel” and interfere with your simple daily activities.

Some common symptoms of depression are:

- Feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities
- Loss of energy and motivation
- Difficulties with concentration and retaining information
- Thoughts that you are worthless
- Thoughts of suicide

Being aware and taking care of yourself can help manage your depression and your mood. Some ways to maintain such wellness include:

- Setting small, specific and realistic goals
- Reaching out for support and staying connected
- Sustaining a healthy lifestyle through diet and physical fitness
- Self-motivation with supportive thoughts

If you or someone you know is having recurring thoughts of suicide, contact a mental health professional to seek help immediately.

For more information on depression, check out the following website provides information on clinical depression for travellers: <http://matadornetwork.com/notebook/how-to-manage-clinical-depression-on-the-road/>.

### **Homesickness**

Leaving home and attending school in a foreign place can be quite overwhelming. You might experience feelings of nostalgia for familiar surroundings, people, and things give you a sense of security, like your friends and family. Being away from those support networks can be stressful and, in some cases, can lead to anxiety and depression which may then affect your overall wellbeing.

Here are some tips that might help to lessen the impact of homesickness:

- Bring with you something that reminds you of home
- Write about your feelings in a journal and/or sharing your feelings with someone you trust
- Stay active by getting involved in your host country (e.g. joining clubs, participating in available activities and programs, decorating your new home, doing something fun)
- Familiarize yourself with people in the new environment

### **Services for Travel**

#### **Medical Services Abroad - Insurance**

As a UBC student, you are covered under the provincial health plan (basic insurance). Be aware that some countries require travellers to present proof of extended travel health insurance coverage to enter. For more information, please visit the [Insurance](#) learning module.

#### **Student Health Services Abroad**

While abroad, familiarize yourself and be aware of local doctors' and health services' office locations and phone numbers. In an event of an emergency, this information will come in handy. For further information on well-being and counselling, be sure to contact your host organization's student services centre.

## **Quicklinks**

[UBC Wellness Homepage](http://www.students.ubc.ca/livewelllearnwell/index.cfm) <<http://www.students.ubc.ca/livewelllearnwell/index.cfm>>

Provides more information and options on how to deal with health and wellness issues.

[Canadian Mental Health Association](http://www.cmha.bc.ca) <<http://www.cmha.bc.ca>>

Provides resources to learn more and to be informed on services to help with mental health issues.

[Health Canada](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/travel-voyage/index-eng.php?utm_source=travel_voyage_13&utm_medium=banner_link&utm_campaign=hpfeaturebox) <[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/travel-voyage/index-eng.php?utm\\_source=travel\\_voyage\\_13&utm\\_medium=banner\\_link&utm\\_campaign=hpfeaturebox](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/travel-voyage/index-eng.php?utm_source=travel_voyage_13&utm_medium=banner_link&utm_campaign=hpfeaturebox)>

Provides general advice and information for healthy living while travelling.

[Helpguide.Org](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/mental_emotional_health.htm) <[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/mental\\_emotional\\_health.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/mental_emotional_health.htm)>

[WellPeople](http://www.wellpeople.com/What_Is_Wellness.aspx) <[http://www.wellpeople.com/What\\_Is\\_Wellness.aspx](http://www.wellpeople.com/What_Is_Wellness.aspx)>

## **What do you think?**

Which of the following are important for maintaining both physical and mental wellness?

- Exercising regularly  
*Correct. You may want to check out the other answers as well.*
- Eating nutritiously  
*Correct. You may want to check out the other answers as well.*
- Getting enough sleep  
*Correct. You may want to check out the other answers as well.*
- All of the above  
*Correct! Wellness includes all facets of health: general, physical, mental and emotional health. All of the above are important for maintaining wellness. For additional tips on better health and wellness, visit the [UBC International Physical & Mental Health](http://www.students.ubc.ca/international/international-students/wellness-safety/physical-mental-health/) <<http://www.students.ubc.ca/international/international-students/wellness-safety/physical-mental-health/>> page.*

Poll: Who would you most likely talk to/confide in if you are feeling mentally unwell?

- Parent (s)
- Friend (s)

- School Health Centre
- Other