



**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

# **Wellness for Postgraduates**

**Wellness and Counselling Centre  
Office of Student Affairs**

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# Anticipating Changes

*As you prepare for postgraduate studies, you may be experiencing a mixture of emotions. You probably feel both excited and apprehensive towards entering this new phase in your life which promises to be very different from your undergraduate years in the following ways:*

- The PG enjoys greater autonomy and independence but needs to exercise even greater self-discipline in managing daily living, emotions, studies, relationships, etc.
- The PG needs to learn to balance multiple roles and responsibilities as scholar, teaching assistant, son/daughter, friend, spouse, etc.
- The PG needs to enjoy working alone, but is also required to apply positive interpersonal and communication skills in relating to his/her supervisor, collaborators and peers.
- The PG who is studying in a foreign place will face additional stress and challenges in adjusting to a new cultural environment, particularly in the absence of established support systems.
- Postgraduate studies rely on synthesis and integration of massive information rather than on rote memory.
- Postgraduate studies demand a mastery of academic knowledge, not merely regular class attendance and good course examination results.

*To help you adjust to the multiple changes as well as achieve a smooth transition from being a student to a scholar, we have included useful tips and reminders on five topics in this booklet for your easy reference.*

*It is obvious that different facets of our lives are closely inter-related and influence each other both in positive and negative ways. Because of this, major principles which are of general applicability will reappear in various chapters to highlight their importance to your pursuit of health, happiness and success.*

# Pursuing Wellness

*Pursuing Wellness implies being able to experience health, happiness, peace and satisfaction. Enjoying healthy foods or beautiful scenery alone may not instil a sense of well-being. Rather, by living smartly and attending to your daily routine according to the following principles, you may be able to safeguard your physical health as well as psychological well-being.*

## **Build good health**

Take proper care of your daily needs; develop a balanced and nourishing diet, ensure sufficient rest and sleep, exercise regularly. Avoid unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking or drug abuse.

## **Organize your schedule**

Develop and adhere to a realistic and manageable schedule to ensure a balanced daily routine as well as successful completion of important tasks.

## **Take time to relax**

When you feel tired or stressed out, take short breaks to relax and renew your energy. Develop relaxation skills and pursue leisure activities that suit you, such as sports, music, outings, handicraft, etc.

## **Stay motivated**

Reward yourself with rest and recreation when you have done good work or achieved your work target. Strengthen your self-confidence by reflecting on positive experiences or daily achievements before going to bed each night.

### ***Appreciate your positive qualities***

Do not be over-demanding or over-critical towards yourself as it can generate negative emotions and self-doubts. Recognize your own strengths and seek opportunities to actualize your potential.

### ***Seek continuous improvement***

Avoid unnecessary comparison with others which can lead to envy or jealousy; on the other hand, seek continuous self-improvement by learning from positive role models.

### ***Connect with others***

Spend quality time with family and friends; it helps to consolidate relationships and release negative emotions. Get involved in community affairs and activities to broaden your horizon and expand your social network.

### ***Enrich your spiritual life***

Develop personal strengths and resilience by reading inspiring books or pursuing self-enhancing experiences. Add joy and laughter to your life by nurturing a sense of humour.

*Attaining wellness through a healthy and balanced lifestyle is essential to your pursuit of success and happiness.*

# Building Relationships

*Having strong social and emotional support can make your postgraduate life more pleasurable and satisfying. It not only contributes to your psychological well being, but is also important to your success in graduate school. In order to establish a strong supportive network, there are certain things that you can do:*

## **Communicate with your supervisor**

You will be working closely with your supervisor in the coming years. Do not assume that your supervisor/advisor can fully understand you or vice versa. It often takes time to adjust to each other and to cultivate a mutually trusting and understanding relationship. Discuss your ideas and concerns openly as well as consider your supervisor's/advisor's views and advice objectively.

## **Practise active listening**

Show genuine interest in understanding others' thoughts and feelings by active listening and attending to nonverbal communication. Listen patiently instead of jumping in with a suggestion, conclusion or criticism. Try to consider matters from the other person's point of view.

## **Make new friends**

Developing a new social network can be anxiety-provoking. Remind yourself that anyone entering a new environment often feels uneasy initially and needs to go through an adjustment phase. Start by greeting your classmates, hall-mates or colleagues with a warm smile, a friendly 'hello', or light conversation.

### **Get involved**

You need to look for opportunities to get to know others better by participating in activities and events that you enjoy. You are likely to meet people who share similar interests and preferences there.

### **Maintain contact**

After you have met someone whom you like and feel comfortable with, stay connected. Do not always wait for others to initiate contact or gatherings. Actively call, email, SMS your friend or organize get-togethers from time to time.

### **Capitalize on your strengths**

Gain a good understanding of your interpersonal strengths such as genuineness, helpfulness, sense of humour, etc. and try to further enhance and manifest such strengths in interacting with others.

### **Accept differences**

Cultivate an open and non-judgmental attitude towards others. Tolerate and accept interpersonal differences in character, values, lifestyles..... Such differences can be interesting and inspiring.

### **Develop skills**

Actively develop positive social and communication skills by reading, training, or modelling on others' behaviour.

*Developing healthy and satisfying interpersonal relationships is like growing plants in that both require attention and cultivation in order to flourish.*

# Managing Studies

*Taking up postgraduate studies must have been an important decision and investment for many of you. It is therefore understandable that ensuring academic success would be your primary goal. As a good beginning is half success, it is hoped that the following reminders can lead you off to a good start:*

## **Recognize differences**

Postgraduate studies differ from undergraduate studies in that the focus is on students' independent academic pursuits rather than class attendance. You are progressing from a 'student' to a 'scholar' and the assessment of your performance will be based on ongoing academic and/or professional development instead of Term GPA.

## **Collaborate with your supervisor**

A good working relationship with your supervisor/advisor is of paramount importance in determining whether your postgraduate studies would be productive and enjoyable. Build mutual trust and understanding through open and active communication. Clarify and agree on goals and expectations, responsibilities, work schedule, mode of supervision, etc. Convey your concerns and anxieties and actively seek advice and guidance from your supervisor/advisor as necessary.

## **Organize your work**

Research and independent studies place greater demands on effective time-management, systematic organization of your work and self-discipline. Keep a diary, plan your work schedule realistically, adhere to your plan as much as possible, review your strategy and redefine your work targets when you feel that you are not making satisfactory progress.



## ***Balance multiple roles***

For research students in particular, they may need to assume dual roles as ‘scholars’ and teaching assistants. Others may also need to take up outside work or fulfill family obligations. Review and understand your priorities at different periods in order to deploy your time and efforts sensibly and realistically. Seek others’ help and understanding when your responsibilities become overwhelming.

## ***Socialize with your peers***

Enjoying positive relationships with your peers and colleagues in your department can enrich your social life as well as facilitate inspiring and constructive exchanges and collaborations in your academic pursuits and official responsibilities.

*As you pursue higher level studies, you are learning to go beyond documented data and information. In your quest for new knowledge and discoveries, you may experience occasional setbacks and frustrations. In such circumstances, it will be important for you to reaffirm your goals in taking up postgraduate studies and to maintain your curiosity, tenacity, optimism and perseverance in order to achieve eventual success.*

# Handling Stress

The transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies often involves environmental changes as well as intellectual and developmental challenges. Recent studies have shown that academic pressure, financial concern, relationship with supervisor and other factors can create intense stress and anxiety for many postgraduate students, affecting both their physical and psychological health. It is therefore important to safeguard your well-being and effectiveness in daily functioning and academic performance by developing useful stress-management skills.

## **Identify stress reactions**

Start by learning to detect the following common signs and symptoms of persistent stress:

### **Physiological Reactions**

- clenched jaw, facial tension
- headache, muscle pain
- gastrointestinal discomforts
- insomnia
- chronic colds, flu

### **Psychological Symptoms**

- irritability, impatience
- anxiety, depression
- inability to concentrate
- proneness to accidents and errors
- reduced efficiency and productivity

## **Exercise regularly**

Exercise can release neurochemicals in the brain that aid concentration. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. For some people, even a short walk is sufficient to relieve stress.

## **Learn to relax**

Practise deep breathing or simple stretching movements. Training and material on progressive muscular relaxation and other exercises can also be obtained from our Section.

## **Regulate your emotions**

Let your feelings out by talking, laughing, crying or writing them down. Emotional ventilation can help lighten the psychological burden.

## **Think positively**

Try not to over-react to or exaggerate the consequences of difficult situations. Remain optimistic and focus on developing practical and flexible ways of solving immediate problems instead of worrying too much about future outcome.

## **Strengthen social support**

Spend time with people who can understand and give you strength. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.

## **Manage time effectively**

Specific strategies such as setting goals and priorities, developing an action plan, overcoming procrastination and organizing time are effective in managing the numerous demands and stress placed upon you.

## **Seek help**

When necessary, actively seek help from family, friends, professors or service units on Campus (refer to the “Seeking Help” page at the end of this booklet for further details).

*Remember, stress is a fact of life. We may not be able to get rid of stress but we can try to keep it under control. Moreover, an appropriate level of stress can sometimes act as our positive motivator in confronting and overcoming daily demands and life’s challenges.*

# Crossing Cultures

*Studying and living abroad can be both exciting and challenging. When living at home, you probably had resources and support to deal with difficult situations which may not be available to you now. As a result, you may feel anxious, helpless and alone here especially in times of trouble. However, rest assured that many of your adjustment reactions are **common** but **temporary**. Just be patient and give yourself time to get over the initial stress and confusion. The following suggestions can help you gradually fit into and enjoy your new environment:*

## ***Establish a healthy daily routine***

To make life more stable and comfortable, it is essential for you to develop a balanced and healthy daily routine that can adequately attend to your physical and psychological needs (eat, work, rest, play.....).

## ***Explore your new environment***

Actively explore different parts of our campus and Hong Kong. Seek information about services and resources available to you in the University and local community so that you can obtain appropriate assistance when necessary. You will feel more secure and at ease once you have familiarized yourself with your new surroundings.

## ***Strengthen social support***

Maintain regular contact with your family and friends back home as well as network with students from your hometown. You can acquire the social and emotional support that you need particularly during your initial arrival to a foreign place.

### ***Socialize with local students***

Befriend local students although it may take extra efforts to overcome language and cultural barriers initially. They can become your cultural informants, local resource persons or even life-long friends.

### ***Be open and non-judgmental***

Do not reject or criticize aspects of the local culture that may seem strange or confusing at first. Try to understand, respect, accept and even appreciate such diversities.

### ***Be adventurous and flexible***

Do not be afraid to make changes or try out new things(food, pastime, social practices.....). Experiment with new ways instead of cling on rigidly to old habits. You may develop new tastes, interests or perspectives that can enrich your lives.

### ***Develop stress-management strategies***

As everyone is bound to experience various levels of stress from time to time, it is important to develop ways to relax or reduce stress that are appropriate and effective for you, such as sports, social gatherings, art, music, etc.

### ***Integrate into the community***

Expand your social circle and become a true member of the community by actively participating in various academic/extra-curricular activities and organizations both on campus and in the local community.

*Seize this opportunity to become more independent and adaptable, to broaden your horizon and to appreciate cultural diversities.*

# Seeking Help

## CUHK

Service Unit	Telephone	Email/ Website
<b>Office of Student Affairs (OSA)</b>		www.osa.cuhk.edu.hk
<b>Career Planning and Development Centre</b> - Organizes career guidance and enrichment programmes - Provides career counselling, job information and placement services	3943 7202	cpdc@cuhk.edu.hk
<b>Learning and Cultural Enhancement Section</b> - Facilitates non-local students' adjustment and organizes cross-cultural diversity programmes - Provides off-campus housing information	3943 7945 3943 1533	lces@cuhk.edu.hk
<b>Student Development &amp; Resources Section</b> - Organizes and coordinates student activities - Manages student facilities and amenities	3943 7323 3943 3733	sdrs@cuhk.edu.hk
<b>OSA General Enquiry</b> - Provides enquiry and counter service - Provides updated information on on-campus/off campus enrichment activities	3943 8652	osa@cuhk.edu.hk
<b>Wellness and Counselling Centre</b> - Provides student psychological counselling - Promotes mental health awareness	3943 7208 3943 3493	wacc@cuhk.edu.hk
<b>CUHK 24-hour Emotional Support Hotline</b>	<b>5400 2055</b>	
<b>Graduate School Office</b>	3943 8976	www.gs.cuhk.edu.hk
<b>Postgraduate Halls</b>	3943 3000 / 3943 0652/ 3943 5000	
<b>University Health Service</b>		
Enquiry	3943 6422	
Appointment	3943 6439	
Internet Booking	www.uhs.cuhk.edu.hk	
<b>Security Office</b>	3943 7999	security_office@cuhk.edu.hk

## External Resources

Service	Telephone
Hong Kong Police Force (Emergency Call)	999
Accident & Emergency Department of Nearby Hospital * For Shatin District - Prince of Wales Hospital	3505 2211
The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Hong (24 Hour Hotline)	2389 2222
The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Hotline Service for Youth (「關心一線」)	2777 8899
Suicide Prevention Services (24 Hour Hotline)	2382 0000
“Open Up” online text platform (WhatsApp / SMS)	9101 2012

*“If we could learn how to balance rest against effort, calmness against strain, quiet against turmoil, we would assure ourselves of joy in living and psychological health for life.”*

*Josephine Rathbone*



## Wellness and Counselling Centre Office of Student Affairs

**Office Hours:** Monday to Thursday  
8:45am – 1:00pm  
2:00pm – 5:30pm  
Friday  
8:45am – 1:00pm  
2:00pm – 5:45pm

**Address:** 2/F, Pommerenke Student Centre, CUHK

**Enquiry:** 3943 7208 / 3943 3493

**Fax:** 2603 7388

**Email:** [wacc@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:wacc@cuhk.edu.hk)

**Website:** [www.cuhk.edu.hk/osa/wacc](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/osa/wacc)

**Initial Assessment Booking System:** <https://wacc-initial-assess-booking.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/>

