

## Your Wellbeing Journal

Your Mind Matters



#### **Contents**

Looking after yourself	4
Sleep hygiene	(
Mindful eating	10
Physical activity	14
Rest	18
Looking after your finances	22
Study skills	26
Procrastination	28
Motivation	30
Time management	32
Exams, assessments and your wellbeing	34
Support network	36
Your support network	38
Supporting a friend	40
Knowing yourself	42
Understanding stress	44
Stress bucket and worry tree	46
Self-compassion	50
Practising affirmations	52
Contact Advice and Counselling service	54
Crisis support	55

It is so important to take time for yourself and find clarity. The most important relationship is the one you have with yourself.

Diane Von Furstenberg

# Welcome to your Wellbeing Journal.

University is a significant step and like most significant steps, it can be many things; exciting, hard, rewarding and confusing – to name a few. It's normal to start university life with high expectations. It's also normal to feel that these expectations are not being met. This is where this journal can hopefully help. Through the self-help techniques provided, you can create autonomy in developing skills to manage the rollercoaster of university life.

Bear in mind that all emotions are natural. Personal growth doesn't mean trying to stop the negative ones. Instead, it's about developing a healthy relationship with these emotions and learning how to support ourselves when we experience challenging ones.

Some of the ideas in the journal may seem simple, but they address areas that frequently suffer first

when you are struggling. Following these tips and techniques can help you to stay well and get the most out of your university experience.

Remember, if you are struggling to manage by yourself, you can always reach out to support services. There is a wide range of support available for you at Queen Mary which you can find more about in this journal.

Keep me somewhere safe.

You may not need me now but I could be useful later.

### Part I:

# Looking after yourself

Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love. Brené Brown



## Sleep hygiene

Difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep are quite common, especially in times of stress. Our ability to get restful sleep (by which we mean tranquil, unbroken sleep) can be affected by many factors. Sleep hygiene is about the process of looking at our sleep environment, what we do in the last few hours before going to sleep and how this can impact our sleeping pattern.



#### What makes good sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene will look slightly different for each person, but the fundamentals remain the same: your sleep environment and your habits should be geared towards having the best, most restful sleep you can. Here are some ways you can make simple changes to improve your sleep:

#### 1. Try to have a fixed bedtime based on your wake-up time.

#### 2. Naps are great, but they can interfere with our night-time sleep.

Don't overdo them and don't have them any later than early afternoon.

#### 3. Have a consistent night-time routine.

This will help send the message to your brain that it's time to sleep.

#### 4. Use the last half an hour before bed to wind down.

This means:

Notes

- No screens (ideally an hour before bed).
   Electronic devices cause mental stimulation and the blue light from screens disrupts melatonin production, the hormone we need to sleep.
- Keep the lights dim (for the same reason as above).

#### 5. Our daytime habits impact our sleep too. Try to do the following:

- Get as much exposure to daylight as you can to regulate your circadian rhythms.
- Be physically active.
- Reduce alcohol, nicotine and caffeine intake.
   Each of these interferes with sleep.

#### 6. Optimise your sleep environment as follows:

- Have a comfortable mattress, pillow, duvet and sheets.
- A cooler room is better, around 18C is optimal.
- Ensure all light is blocked out, and noise too.
- Try a calming scent in your bedroom, like lavender.


#### Action plan for better sleep

Sleep factors	What I currently do	What I want to change
What do you typically do in the day?		
What do you do before bed?		
If you use your phone to sleep, how long are you on your phone?		
What is your sleep environment like?		

#### Tips for better sleep





If you are still struggling to sleep after a while of trying, why not **try to do something to help you get tired**? For example, reading a book, looking over assignments, etc.

Eating certain foods and drinks that contain **caffeine** or large amounts of **sugar** can make it **harder to sleep**. Why not try a milky hot drink or chamomile tea?







Use a **relaxation technique** (such as **breathing, grounding or meditation**) to help you relax and increase the likelihood of being able to sleep. Remember that relaxation techniques take practice and may not instantly work the first time.

### Mindful eating

There's been a real shift in our awareness of mindfulness in recent years. From colouring books to podcasts, there's a wealth of mindfulness resources out there. But what is mindfulness fundamentally about? And what does it mean to practise it? Let's explore what mindfulness means and how we can apply it to eating.

Mindfulness simply means showing awareness to the present moment, while accepting with compassion your feelings, thoughts and sensations.

"[...] mindful eating goes beyond the individual. It also encompasses how what you eat affects the world. We eat for total health," (Mindful Eating, Mindful Life, Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr Lillian Cheung). So when it comes to mindful eating, we should consider sustainability as well as the nutritional benefits of what we eat.



#### A practical guide to eating more mindfully

Take the following steps to enjoy your next meal in a mindful way!

#### 1. Write a mindful shopping list

Consider the nutritional value of the food you are buying and try to avoid impulse purchases. A well-thought-out shopping list can help you to save money too. Just remember – never shop on an empty stomach.

#### 2. Start with a small portion

Try eating enough to soothe your appetite, rather than eating until you are full. You can use the NHS Eatwell Guide, available on their website, to calculate a healthy serving.

#### 3. Switch off from distractions

#### 4. Eat with the senses

 Look: What colours can you see. Does the food look appetising? How does the light shine off your meal? What do you notice?

- Smell: Can you identify the aromas in the food?
   Can you notice how your body responds to the smell of food? Maybe you begin to salivate, or your belly rumbles.
- Touch: What are the different textures you notice when you place the food in your mouth?
   Can you feel the temperature of the food in your mouth?
- Taste: Try to note the flavours of all the ingredients and seasoning as you eat. How does the food taste, and does it make you want to take another bite?

#### 5. Don't eat too quickly

Try to savour each bite and listen to when your body signals for more food.

11

Notes	

#### Four week meal plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				

Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Notes
	1		J

### Physical activity

Between classes and independent study, making time for physical activity can be difficult. But if there's ever a time to make time, it's now. Here's what you need to know, and what you can do to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine.



#### What's meant by 'physical activity'?

Quite simply, physical activity is movement from the body that requires energy expenditure.

The 2018 British Active Student Survey (BASS), revealed that active university students were found to have greater personal wellbeing, mental wellbeing, social inclusion, and perceived academic attainment and employability compared to inactive students.

Ask yourself, do you fall into the active or inactive category? Below is an illustration of the UK Physical Activity Guidelines to help you know whether you're currently active enough.

#### Getting active at Queen Mary

Feel like you could be doing more to stay fit and active? Don't be hard on yourself. Instead, take a look at some of the options below at Queen Mary.

- Qmotion is the Students' Union run Sport & Fitness Centre, located on the Mile End campus. It provides great facilities in a safe and welcoming environment. Visit the QMotion website to find out more about prices and membership plans.
- There are over 60 student-led sports clubs at Queen Mary, offering the chance to get active, make friends and develop new skills.
- As well as these, the Students' Union also run a range of programmes and initiatives, such as Get Active and the Sport Leadership & Workforce Development Programme. Find out more on the Students' Union website
- We all have different levels of ability. The important thing is to include movement of some sort that makes you feel good, and therefore supports your physical and mental wellbeing.

No	tes	 	 	 		 	 	 	 	 	 	 
•••••		 	 	 	• • • • • • •	 	 • • • • • •	 	 	 	 	 
•••••		 	 	 		 	 	 	 	 	 	 
•••••		 	 	 	• • • • • • •	 	 • • • • • •	 	 	 	 	 
•••••		 	 	 		 	 	 	 	 	 	 
•••••		 	 	 	• • • • • • •	 	 • • • • • •	 	 	 	 	 

#### Physical activity guidance



Some is good, more is better



Make a start today: it's never too late



Every minute

At least **75** minutes of **vigorous** exercise a week



OR



At least **150** minutes of **moderate** exercise a week



Minimise **sedentary** time by breaking up periods of inactivity



Build strength **twice** a week to keep muscles, bones and joints strong



Brisk walk



The benefits of physical activity:



Benefits health



**Improves** sleep



Manages stress



Improves quality of life

#### Chart your activity

Use this table to see how physically active you were in the last seven days and where you can make improvements:

	Moderate intensity physical activity / min	Vigorous intensity physical activity / min
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Total		

gmul.ac.uk 17

### Rest

Rest looks different to each of us, but one thing is certain – it is vital to maintaining a sense of wellbeing. Prioritising rest is hard when you're juggling all the components of student life. We hope these tips help you find the time to get the rest you need.



#### I don't have time for it...

We often long for the chance to rest but when it comes, we worry about being lazy or not being productive enough. However, resting is key to our wellbeing and our ability to engage with and enjoy all elements of our lives.

Without rest, we are likely to experience a range of health issues including stress, lower immunity, depression and long-term health conditions. Rest is, therefore, not a luxury but a necessity. It's essential. Claudia Hammond

#### What is rest?

Rest is different for everyone – it might be a physical activity which rests the mind and allows the body to calm and recover afterwards – or it might be stopping and being still for some people. It may involve some mental effort or none at all.

It's helpful to notice how activities impact us and find what suits us: what allows our minds and bodies to settle and feel at ease?

#### What's restful for me?

Here are some questions to help you explore how you might want to spend time resting:

- What helps you feel recovered and refreshed?
- What things give you more energy than they take away?
- What do you enjoy doing or feel passionate about?
- Are there things you used to spend time doing which have stopped because of being busy?
   Would you like to do these again?

Notes	

#### Making rest a part of our schedule

As a student, it can feel really hard to prioritise anything but studies or extracurricular activities that contribute to our future goals. However, it's important for our health and wellbeing to make time for rest, enjoyment and relaxation.



It can be useful to block out time in your **schedule each day** for down time to make sure it happens.

If you're trying or reintroducing activities, **take your time** with this – you don't want to feel like you're adding more to your to-do list.





You may want to put in a **specific activity** or you may want to check in with what you feel like doing when you get to your protected time.

Think about whether you want this time **alone** or **with others**.



NIOTOS		
Notes		
	 	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

gmul.ac.uk 21

# Looking after your finances

Going to university is often our first experience of being responsible for managing our own finances. This can feel like a daunting prospect and takes some adjustment. Read through the following advice, put together to support you in thinking about your finances, and remember you can access specialist support on money issues from the Welfare Advisers in the Advice and Counselling Service.



#### How to manage your finances

Managing finances can be hard whether you are a university student or not! It can take time to work out how best to manage funds and resist the urge to splurge. Mis-managing finances can cause anxiety and stress but there are some simple tips that can help.

#### 1. Plan ahead

This is a life skill that will do wonders for your finances. Budget for everything, whether it's food, nights out, travel, study materials, rent, etc. The golden rule is if you are expecting to spend on it then budget for it.

#### 2. Review your spending regularly

Spending more than you were expecting? Go through your bank statements and find out why. It's often smaller, impulse purchases that add up, like hot drinks, takeaways or getting lunch while out and about. We all need these treats from time to time, but recognising the sum total of them is useful for budgeting.

#### 3. Open a second bank account

It's a common trap to think you've got loads of money to spend when you get that first lump sum from a loan or grant. A second bank account will enable you to set up a Direct Debit from your main bank account to send the budgeted amount of money weekly into the second account that you spend on. Monzo and Starling group purchases into categories, making it even easier to keep an eye on your spending.

#### 4. Need or want?

A simple question that requires you to be honest with yourself. Do I need this, or do I just want it? Once you have the answer, save the wants for the special occasions.

#### 5. Recycle everything

This has two real benefits – one for the environment, and one for your wallet. If you don't need something but it's still in good condition then sell it or swap it for something else. Likewise, never buy new if you can get it just as good second hand.

#### 6. Try part time work

Consider whether you would be able to manage your academic work with a part time job. Not only are there financial benefits but it's a good way to meet people and boost your CV. The Careers and Enterprise Service run QTemps, an internal recruitment service that places students into temporary work either on campus or in the local community. Placements are paid the London Living Wage as a minimum plus holiday pay. If you're studying while on a visa, do remember to check your working restrictions. For more information visit q-temps.co.uk and the Advice and Counselling international pages.

#### Get specialist advice

If you're struggling financially, it can be difficult to see what the issues are, or what you can do about them. A Welfare Adviser in the Advice and Counselling Service can discuss your individual circumstances with you and offer you confidential, non-judgemental advice about your options. You can book an appointment to see a Welfare Adviser in person or online. Contact information is on Page 54. You can also visit the Money pages of the Advice and Counselling Service website for detailed advice and guidance.

Notes	 	 	 	 	 	 

#### Budgeting resources

There are a number of resources designed to help students get a handle on their budgeting. These are some of the free apps:



#### **Money Lover**

This app works across all your devices to allow you to track your finances and manage your overall spending. It notifies you of recurring transactions (for example, rent and other direct debits) before they leave your account.

Cleo



An app that works through Facebook and takes a readonly look at your spending. No one can move money in and our of your account via this app.

Money Dashboard



This categorises your spending and displays all incoming and outgoing amounts on a dashboard chart, allowing you to see a breakdown of your spending.

5

#### HyperJar

A handy free tool for budgeting and payments that also has a function for group-shared expenses (useful for when you're in shared accommodation and splitting bills).

#### **Budgeting sheet**

Total Income	
Maintenance Loan	£
Bursaries/scholarships	£
Part-time job	£
Parents' contributions	£
Other family contribution	£
Savings	£
Other	£
Total	£

Essential Outgoings	
Accommodation	£
Course materials	£
Transport (Tube, bus, coach, rail journeys home)	£
Food	£
Entertainment (socialising, cinema, birthdays)	£
Utilities (gas, electric, water)	£
Internet	£
Phone	£
Insurance	£
Toiletries	£
Clothes	£
Extra study expenses	£
Total	£

### Part II:

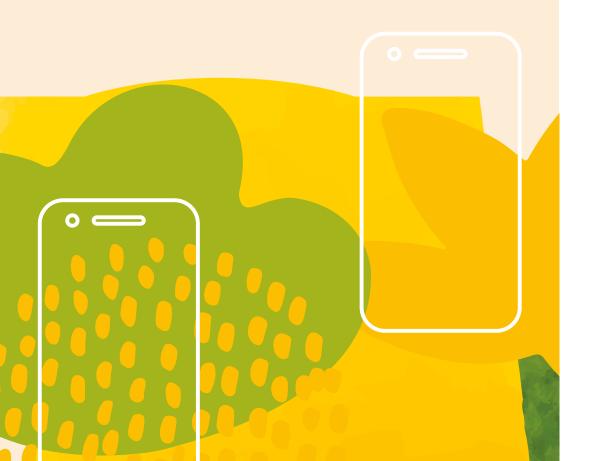
# **Study** skills

The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary. Vidal Sassoon



### Procrastination

If motivation is one of the best assets when it comes to studying, then procrastination is one of the biggest obstacles. We all procrastinate. It's natural. Luckily, there are some mechanisms we can use to help move past these blockages.



## Procrastination is about emotions, not about our productivity or study skills

Specifically, procrastination is an "emotion-focused coping strategy to deal with negative emotions," Tim Pychyl, Clinical Psychologist, says. It goes something like this:

- 1. We sit down to do a task.
- 2. We project into the future about what the task will feel like.
- 3. We predict that the task will not feel good (e.g. it will stress us out).
- 4. Our emotional coping strategy kicks in to keep us away from this bad feeling.
- 5. We avoid the task our brain thinks it's helped by protecting us!

#### What makes it so difficult to deal with?

Beating ourselves up, feeling guilty and aiming for perfection all contribute to a negative cycle and exacerbate procrastination.

Putting off work to an unrealistic future ideal of self or time can also contribute to the problem. Shame and guilt sometimes become our motivators to get things done but this isn't a healthy method and again reinforces negative feelings about the work and ourselves.

#### So what can we do?

Questions to think about when we start procrastinating...

#### 1. Taking some space to notice your feelings

- What's going on emotionally?
- What do I need to respond to these emotions and feel more regulated?

#### 2. What's going on (literally)?

- Notice your distractions...
- · How can I tackle the distractions?
- Do I need to change something about the way I'm studying?
- Do I need a break or some rest?
- Refer to our Time management section for more support on this.

#### 3. Revisit your motivations for studying

- Why are you doing this?
- What do you want to get from it?
- Refer to our Motivation section for more support on this.

#### 4. Practise self-compassion

- Be understanding and try not to go to a frustrated critical place with yourself.
- Remind yourself that procrastination is a natural part of studying.

Notes	 

### Motivation

Motivation is intrinsic to studying, which often requires using your initiative and working independently. But how do you drum up motivation, and how do you maintain it? Let's think a bit more about motivation to help us work out how to manage low motivation.

We all struggle with feeling motivated or staying motivated at times, particularly during prolonged busy periods or when there is a lot going on in our lives.



#### Types of motivation

According to researcher Ian Taylor, the gold standard type of motivation is fun, or the love of something. This might sometimes be difficult to access if we're doing an essay on something we're not particularly into.

The next best motivator is a task/ activity being linked to our identity. We need to find the connection between a behaviour/ activity and ourselves. So, if we are trying to get the energy to go for a swim, 'thinking about being a better swimmer...' will be more motivating than: 'I really should go swimming...'

#### What to avoid

Sometimes we think we should just have the willpower to get something done and are critical of ourselves if we cannot muster this energy. Try not to rely on this as it can lead to more complicated emotions. For example, shame and guilt are frequently used motivators that may seem to work for us, but they are not usually a long-term option as they have ultimately led to us feeling bad about ourselves, and therefore negatively impact our wellbeing.

#### How to support yourself with motivation

#### 1. Revisit your motivations

- Why am I doing this?
- What do I want to get from this or to achieve?
- What enjoyment may be involved?
- How does this link to my identity and who I am?

#### 2. Acknowledge your barriers

- What's getting in the way?
- What do I need to do about it?
- Are there negative thoughts affecting my emotions?
- How can I challenge these thoughts and respond to my emotions?

#### 3. Get started

- Set micro goals rather than thinking about the overarching task.
- Work for shorter periods. Think about how long you can usually focus for before getting distracted and set an alarm for this amount time to remind you to take a break.

 Rewards can sometimes help with short-term motivation e.g. I will do this if I finish my tasks today.

#### 4. Schedule time for breaks and fun

Sometimes we aren't motivated because we haven't had enough time away from studies or more challenging tasks. Timetable in space for rest and relaxation and fun.

#### 5. Be kind to yourself.

Try to take a self-compassionate approach so you support yourself through struggles with motivation, rather than contribute to further difficulty with a self-critical response.

Notes	

## Time management

When we manage our time effectively, we feel in control of our lives. However, it can be really challenging to organise ourselves and our studies when there are so many competing commitments and changing deadlines. Here are some important questions for you to ask yourself when trying to manage your time.



#### Managing my time

Remember, time management is as individual as you are. It's important to find a way that suits you!

#### 1. Be aware from the outset that a schedule needs to be:

- Flexible we can never be certain of how long things will take, and so reviewing where we are and making changes to a planner is an intrinsic part of managing our time. When we manage our time well, it can help us to feel more settled emotionally and mentally.
- Realistic try to be realistic about what's manageable depending on how busy you are and try to learn from what works/doesn't.

#### 2. How are you going to keep track of your timetable/schedule?

Electronic diary? Paper diary? Wall planner?
Do you need a separate to-do list?
Make use of reminders on your phone?
Will it help to make it more visually striking through use of colour for example?

#### 3. Outside of your regular commitments, what suits you in terms of studying?

- Do you work better 9–5pm or on a later schedule?
- When do you work most productively in the day? Make sure to do your most difficult tasks at this time of the day!
- How long can you focus for and therefore when do you need to plan breaks?
- What environment do you work best in and therefore will be the most productive place for you to study?

#### 4. Be specific in your planning when scheduling in study time outside of classes

- What are the tasks you need to do?
- What do you need to put in for tomorrow to keep track?
- Remember to block out time for fun, socialising, relaxing and rest.

Remind yourself regularly that managing your time is an ongoing learning process! And what suits you may change depending on other things happening in your life, or even the modules you're doing.

Notes

# Exams, assessments and your wellbeing

Congratulations! You've nearly completed the academic year, (re) adjusted to the demands of university life and met your (multiple) deadlines. Now, just when you want to be winding down, it's exam time. It's perfectly normal to feel stressed at this time. How you manage it, though, can have a big impact.



#### Looking after your wellbeing

During an assessment period, it is natural for our baseline anxiety level to increase because it is such an intensive period of work. This often means that the day-to-day ways in which we look after ourselves are de-prioritised.

To help our bodies manage the increased level of work (and stress), it is important to try and maintain healthy practices in the areas listed below. These may seem like simple things, but it can be really helpful to have a reminder to do them when we have so much going on. Use the space beneath each area to make a note of what is important for you or how you can make sure these are part of your schedule.

Taking time off from studying	Eating nutritious food regularly
Restful/relaxing/fun activities	Getting enough sleep to feel recharged
Exercise/ movement/ time outdoors	Connecting or socialising with others

#### How to approach your revision and exam period

- Break your revision down into small chunks and form a tentative plan that can be adapted as and when you need to. Run it past friends, a family member or a tutor you trust.
- Prioritise: Which exams do you have, how are the marks allocated, and how much do you need to learn for each one? Don't expect to learn everything, but knowing where you'll get the marks can help you prioritise.
- Set realistic goals and tick them off as you go.
   This will help you feel a sense of achievement to keep the drive system activated.
- Try to remind yourself of your motivations for

- doing the exams; how do these fit in with your overall goals?
- Balance your work with rewards and factor in breaks. These should be enjoyed guilt-free.
- Keep in touch with your family and friends during this time also. Stress is compounded by feeling isolated so make sure you reach out to people when you need to. Joining or establishing a study group is a great way to get work done and boost morale.
- Sleep is crucial during this time. Try to get eight hours and ensure your sleeping environment is set up so you can have a truly restorative rest.

#### Resources

The Library's Learning Support and Engagement Team provide advice and guidance to help students to develop the academic and research skills. Visit the Academic Skills pages on the QMUL Library Services website. The Advice and Counselling Service has wellbeing resources to support you throughout the year, including at exam time. Visit the Wellbeing pages on the Advice and Counselling Service website. Contact information can be found on Page 54.

Part III:

# **Support** network

Be who you are and say how you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.

Dr Seuss



# Your support network

Managing your wellbeing and having a support network go hand-inhand. However, sometimes when we are struggling, we don't always remember who to reach out to.

Use this section to create a list of people and services you can turn to when you're struggling, in case you need to remind yourself that help is available.



Friends	
Family	
Queen Mary	
For academic issues: Student Support Officer	
For emotional, wellbeing or mental health support: Advice and Counselling Service	
For practical welfare support or international student advice: Advice and Counselling Service	
Student advice. Advice and Counselling Service	
External support services	
For emotional support:	
Phone: Samaritans on 116 123	
<b>Text:</b> SHOUT. Start a conversation by texting SHOUT to 85258	
<b>Online:</b> Visit <b>Togetherall.com</b> to join the mental health community. Free with your qmul.ac.uk email address.	

# Supporting a friend

Friendship can play a key role in supporting someone to manage difficulties in their lives. But it can be hard to know what to say when a friend is struggling.

If you would like to offer support to a friend, then try and start that conversation with the help of the following tips.



#### Where to talk

Do something relaxing and choose somewhere quiet without interruptions. This could be a walk in a park, inviting your friend over for dinner or a film or finding somewhere quiet on campus.

#### When to talk

Try to start the conversations when it is one to one. It is unlikely that your friend will be as comfortable opening up if you are with other people such as in a friend group.

Make sure you also start the conversation when you have enough time to chat. For example, before the start of a lecture may put pressure on the conversation or your friend may interpret you having to leave in the wrong way.

#### How to start the talk

Maybe your friend's behaviour has changed recently, maybe they are falling behind with work or maybe they mentioned something in a previous conversation that concerned you. 'I'm ok, thanks' tends to be the go-to response when asked about how we are doing so being more specific about why you are asking.

#### Tips for during the conversation

- Try to keep your body language open and approachable throughout.
- Show that you are actively listening by clarifying what your friend has said.
- Use open ended questions to give your friend more scope to open-up about their concerns.
- If your friend is unsure about what to say, then maybe suggest writing a letter.
- Respect privacy. You can advise your friend to speak to their GP, access Advice and Counselling or speak to family but your friend may not be ready to do this yet.

#### Supporting your friend afterwards

- You don't need to be on hand 24/7 but checking in every so often can remind your friend that your door is open.
- Arrange different activities you could do together. Offering the option for your friend to get out and about by going to the cinema, joining a running club, meeting for a coffee or exploring London can make all the difference.
- Make sure you are looking after your own wellbeing by keeping up with activities you enjoy and talking to other friends and family.
- Maintain boundaries and if a topic comes up that you do not feel comfortable discussing then maybe recommend your friend access other services such as counselling.

Part IV:

# Knowing yourself

The final mystery is oneself.
Oscar Wilde



# Understanding stress

Stress is a natural part of life and it can be useful in certain situations. If unmanaged, stress can be detrimental to our physical and mental wellbeing. Here you'll learn more about stress, how to recognise it, and how to better manage it.



#### Why do we feel stressed?

Stress and anxiety are our body's natural reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure. It can be caused by a range of triggers such as academic work, family or financial pressure. Feeling stressed can be helpful for some people at certain times. For example, if you have an assignment due, stress can enable you to feel more motivated and in turn, get things done instead of procrastinating. However, feeling stressed all the time or more specifically feeling distressed can have a negative impact on the way that you feel, your mood and your relationships.

If you are stressed, signs might include:

- Feeling overwhelmed.
- · Racing heart rate.
- Feeling constantly worried.

- · Having trouble with sleep.
- · Change in eating.
- · Drinking or smoking more than usual.

#### How do we cope with stress?

Everyone manages stress differently. This means there is no universal solution to dealing with stress. It might take time to figure out what works best for you. Below is an activity to help you start thinking about your individual toolbox of coping strategies.

Positive coping strategies may include:

- Mindful breathing
- Gratitude journaling
- Going for a walk
- Talking to a friend or family member
- Eating well and sleeping well (including practising good sleep hygiene)
- · Hobbies, such listening to music or being active

Notes	 

# Stress bucket and worry tree

Whilst all of us will experience worry at some point, constant worry about everything and anything can be unhelpful. If you find yourself thinking upsetting thoughts, and you feel like you are going round and round in your mind, you may find the below approach helpful in managing some of your worry.

See the instructions on the right hand side and use the following two pages to map out your own stress bucket and worry tree.



#### Stress bucket

The stress bucket is an analogy for how we manage stress. Every stressor adds to the bucket, filling it up, while the tap can let our stress out. The tap represents our coping strategies, and can be used to make sure that the bucket does not overflow. Use the next page to put together your own stress bucket, including your stressors in the bucket and the coping strategies next to the tap.

#### Worry tree

The worry tree is a tool for you to manage your worries in a better way. It can help you challenge thoughts of worry and replace them with more positive thoughts.

You may also want to set yourself dedicated "worry time" where you can allow yourself 20–30 minutes of quiet time for problem solving. If you notice yourself worrying throughout the day, you can jot it down and remind yourself that you will come back to this during the "worry time". Once you have decided this, your focus can shift back onto the here and now.

#### Some pointers

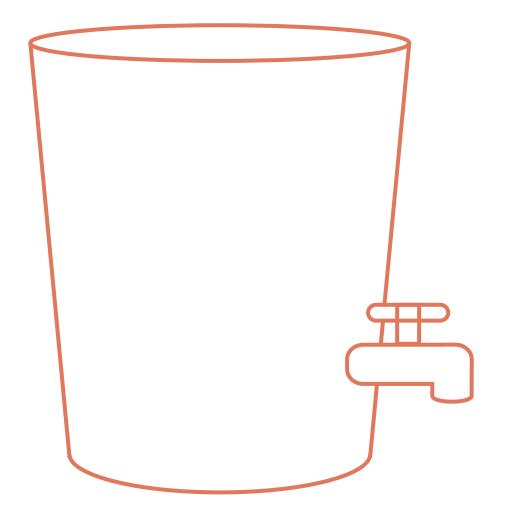
- 1. Worry is our body's way of telling us that we feel threatened, and can feel very similar to anger.
- 2. We worry either about hypothetical scenarios or current situations.
- 3. If it is a hypothetical scenario, no amount of worrying or attempts at problem-solving will help. If it is a current situation, we can often use problem solving to find a way forward.

#### My worry tree

- 1. Notice the worry
- 2. Ask yourself and write down what you are worrying about
- 3. Can you do anything about this?

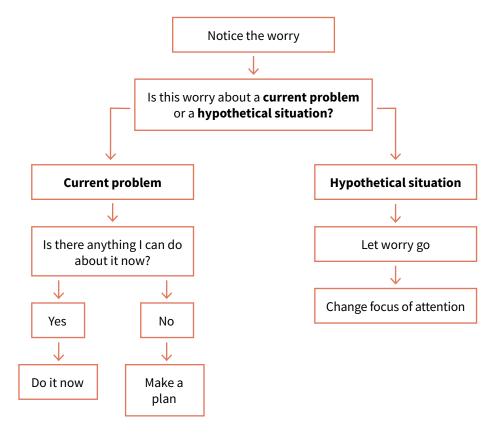
Notes	

#### Stress bucket



Notes .....

#### Worry tree



Notes .....

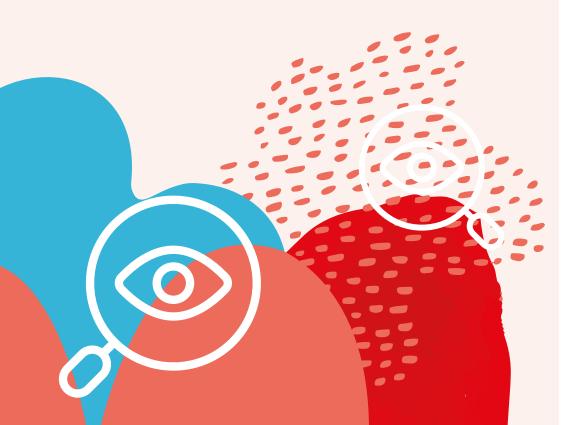
### Self-compassion

We are often our own harshest critics, and it can take time to "unlearn" this ingrained behaviour. By understanding the nature of self-compassion, as well as the right questions to ask yourself, you can begin to treat yourself with more care.

Compassion is 'a basic kindness with a deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other living things, coupled with the wish and effort to relieve it' (Paul Gilbert).

So *self-compassion* is a practice of applying this to ourselves, where we may usually move towards a harsher response. We aim to reduce our distress when we struggle, fail or notice something we don't like about ourselves. (Kristin Neff)

It's interesting to consider: would we speak to our friends or family the way we often speak to ourselves? Maybe it's time to treat ourselves more thoughtfully.



#### The elements of self-compassion

- Self-kindness instead of self-judgement: unfortunately our brains have evolved to focus on the negative and therefore it takes practise to be kind to ourselves.
- Common humanity instead of isolation: understanding that it is a part of being human
- to have difficulties and struggle and that we are not alone in this.
- Mindfulness: being aware of what we feel or experience without holding on to difficult emotions as a reflection of ourselves.

#### The self-critic

Many of us have an inner critic that has been around for some time, and so the idea of challenging this with self-compassion is overwhelming. For example, we may believe a critical voice is a key part of motivating ourselves, but this approach tends to stop working at some point, as we struggle to deal with the side effects of the critic such as low mood and anxiety.

It's helpful to remember that easing the self-critic takes time, and things may not change straight away. But moving towards a self-compassionate response can improve our wellbeing as well as our self-esteem and feelings about ourselves generally.

#### Starting to practise self-compassion

When we notice we are struggling or feeling self-critical, it is helpful to do the following:

- 1. Show understanding: 'it makes sense I feel this way because...'
- 2. Show kindness: what would you say to a friend in your situation?
- Comfort yourself: notice your emotions and think about what you need to feel soothed.

51

#### Read more about self-compassion:

Paul Gilbert, *The Compassionate Mind* Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion* 

Notes	

# Practising affirmations

Why are affirmations important? And how can they help? We know it may seem counterintuitive, or even awkward, to acknowledge your own achievements – especially out loud! Practising affirmations can be a helpful way to maintain a healthy sense of self-integrity and self-identity.



#### **Affirmations**

"The self-system is activated when a person experiences a threat to an important self-conception or image... these events are threatening because they have implications for a person's overall sense of self-integrity" (Sherman and Cohen, 2006).

In response, affirmations can help bolster self-worth, acting as "an opportunity to restore [one's] self-integrity" (Sherman and Cohen, 2006).

Below you'll find some affirmations that, in times of stress and self-doubt, it may be useful for keeping a balanced sense of self. You don't need to necessarily say these aloud if you don't feel comfortable with that. Just try committing them to paper to reinforce the positive things you have done.

Today, I am proud of myself because	Write down a problem you solved today.
What is something you've appreciated or liked about yourself recently?	What is your most recent act of kindness?
What is the most creative thing you've done recently?	How would a friend or family member describe you in 3 words?
What is something you feel you have achieved recently?	If you are struggling for some answers, what might you be able to do in the near future to support your sense of self?

#### Contact the Advice and Counselling Service

The Advice and Counselling Service is here to provide you with a range of confidential, specialist services to help with financial, immigration and practical matters, and to support you with your mental health and wellbeing. On our website, you can find out more about the services we offer, access a wealth of guidance and resources and find out how to access the support you need: <a href="mailto:qmul.ac.uk/welfare/">qmul.ac.uk/welfare/</a>

#### How to find us

The Advice and Counselling Service is on the ground floor of the Geography Building, on the Mile End Campus. Our entrance is located on the west side of the Geography building. We are building number 27 on the campus map.

#### **Opening hours**

Our reception is normally open Monday to Friday from 10:00pm – 4.00pm apart from University closure days.

You can visit our reception and our Frontline Team can help with an initial enquiry or give information about how to access more specialist support.

#### Get in touch

Visit our Contact Us web page: qmul.ac.uk/welfare/about-us/contact-us/

For urgent mental health support, visit our Help in a Crisis web page: qmul.ac.uk/welfare/help-in-a-crisis/

#### **Your Mind Matters**

This Wellbeing Journal is part of the Your Mind Matters series of resources, designed to support your emotional and mental health while studying at Queen Mary.



Click or scan to explore our other resources, including a blog, podcast and webinars.



Click or scan to access a PDF version of this journal.

54 gmul.ac.uk

#### Crisis support



If you are in immediate danger of harming yourself or others, call 999 or go to your nearest Accident & Emergency department. To find your nearest Accident & Emergency department click or scan this QR code.



If you need urgent mental health support or crisis support for sexual assault or domestic abuse, please visit the Advice and Counselling Service's Help in a Crisis page. Click or scan this QR code to access it.



If you have an **academic related issue**, please contact the **Student Support Officer** for your department. Click or scan this QR code to find out contact information for your Student Support Officer.



For support in **Queen Mary Halls**, please visit **Residential Life's Contact Us** website page – click or scan the OR code to access it.

