

AMIAN HEALTH & WELLBEING

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The summer holiday season is coming to an end and, for many of us, that September '**back to work**' feeling is already encroaching.

Saying goodbye to the sun, sea and freedom not to look at your emails can often feel like the end of the world. It doesn't all have to be doom and gloom, though. **AMIAN** has put together a Health and Wellbeing Update this September which focuses on looking after your emotional and physical wellbeing.

Please take the time to read these simple yet effective techniques for keeping your body and mind in tip top condition.

Don't forget **AMIAN** is here to provide **ALL** Bolton University employees with free, impartial and confidential advice and support, 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week. Please visit our new website for information on our full range of services.

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Take care of your emotional wellbeing

Be aware of the effects of stress...

These days, everyone is faced with worries, be they work-related or to do with your finances, relationships, children, etc. This can make you feel stressed and everything seems too much. You may feel overloaded and don't feel you can meet all the demands placed upon you.

You might experience emotional symptoms, such as feeling angry and impatient with people close to you, feeling close to tears over trivial things, or behaving differently from usual. You may also experience physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite or irregular eating, panic attacks and difficulty breathing or low energy and lack of concentration.

If you feel stressed out, here are some things you can do:

1. Give yourself some space

If you start to feel that you're getting stressed – take a step back. Give yourself some space, take some time every day doing something you enjoy and not thinking about anything else.

Impossible! Most people will claim.

Not so. Everyone has 15 minutes in a day that they can reserve for themselves. It might just be a walk round the block, a bit of gardening or a bath with the door locked and some earplugs in. The important thing is that you get the time to yourself.

2. Know your limits

If your expectations of yourself are always sky high, you will inevitably spend a great deal of time being disappointed and frustrated. Instead, be realistic in what you can achieve and celebrate success at every opportunity.

Remember that you are entitled to breaks and annual leave at work – take them. And make sure you get a reasonable amount of sleep.

Not taking on too much, accepting offers of help from others and doing one thing at a time are ways to prevent stress.

3. Learn to relax physically

Believe it or not, being able to relax your body is a skill. You must teach yourself to do it effectively and once you do, it can be very powerful. Relaxation is best done every day and at a time and place where you will not be disturbed. People relax in different ways. For some, physical exercise is a way of relaxing. Try walking, dancing, or your favourite sport. Others may prefer to sit quietly and go through a relaxation exercise. Try different things to find what's right for you. But don't overdo it on the booze or other substances!

Relax your muscles to relieve stress

Try this simple exercise...

This technique takes around 20 minutes. It stretches different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from the body and relax your mind.

Find a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Get completely comfortable, either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing; breathing slowly and deeply.

You may want to play some soothing music to help relaxation. As with all relaxation techniques, deep muscle relaxation will require a bit of practice before you start feeling its benefits.

For each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat it a couple of times. It's useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups:

- **Face:** push the eyebrows together, as though frowning, then release.
- **Neck:** gently tilt the head forwards, pushing chin down towards chest, then slowly lift again.
- **Shoulders:** pull them up towards the ears (shrug), then relax them down towards the feet.
- **Chest:** breathe slowly and deeply into the diaphragm (below your bottom rib) so that you're using the whole of the lungs. Then breathe slowly out, allowing the belly to deflate as all the air is exhaled.
- **Arms:** stretch the arms away from the body, reach, then relax.
- **Legs:** push the toes away from the body, then pull them towards body, then relax.
- **Wrists and hands:** stretch the wrist by pulling the hand up towards you, and stretch out the fingers and thumbs, then relax.

Spend some time lying quietly after your relaxation with your eyes closed. When you feel ready, stretch and get up slowly.

4. Talk

If things do feel like they're getting on top of you, perhaps you could consider the most difficult of all things - talking. Speak to someone you trust about the things that are causing you stress.



Do you suffer from migraines?

Steps you can take to help prevent them

Migraine is more than just a headache; it is the most common neurological condition. Two thirds of sufferers are women, and all sufferers are more likely to experience migraine between the ages of 20-50.

A migraine attack can last from 4 to 72 hours, with most sufferers keeping well between attacks. Non-sufferers often find it extremely difficult to understand how someone can be fine one minute and then totally debilitated the next.

What triggers an attack? It is believed that the release of serotonin from its storage sites into the bloodstream causes changes to the neuro-transmitters and blood vessels in the brain, resulting in a migraine. However, exactly what prompts this chain of events is still unknown. Most people who suffer from migraine will have realised that certain circumstances sometimes act as a 'trigger', such as:

- Emotional stress - tension, depression, anger, worry
- Physical stress - over-exertion, overtiredness, tension in neck & shoulders
- Diet/Food – long gaps between meals, alcohol, certain foods such as chocolate, cheese, citrus fruits, artificial sweeteners and food additives
- Environmental – flickering or flashing lights, loud noise, intense smells
- Other – high blood pressure, eye strain, toothache, sinus problems

Understanding your migraine The first stage of understanding your migraine is to keep a diary to try to identify your trigger factors. You may find that a pattern emerges, and by making changes to your diet and/or lifestyle, you can reduce the severity and/or frequency of your attacks. Doctors and health professionals encourage their patients to keep a diary, as it allows them to make a more accurate diagnosis, offering the most appropriate treatment for you.

What can you do to help prevent migraines? People with migraine often need to make lifestyle changes or take medication to help control their migraine. But there are steps you can take to help prevent a migraine, such as:

- Avoid triggers which you know you are sensitive to
- Eat regularly, avoid sugary snacks and include slow-release carbohydrate foods in your diet
- Drink plenty of water, at least 2 litres a day
- Maintain a regular sleep pattern
- Take regular exercise, get plenty of fresh air and practise deep breathing
- Limit your intake of drinks containing caffeine and alcohol
- Ensure that ventilation indoors is good and try to keep rooms at a constant temperature
- Avoid bright, flashing or flickering lights (e.g. fluorescent) and reflective surfaces
- Take regular breaks, especially if you are working at a computer screen or if you're carrying out repetitive tasks
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Wear sunglasses and/or a hat in bright sunlight
- Ensure that computer screens are properly adjusted and fitted with anti-glare filters

Remember migraine and headaches can be your body's way of telling you to slow down and recharge your batteries.



Beat stress with exercise and fresh air

Take a walk in the countryside

Physical exercise and fresh air are the best stress beaters. When it comes to unwinding, there's nothing like a walk in the woods or beside the sea. It's an ideal way of driving away unhappy thoughts, annoyances and physical tension.

Physically....

Physical exercise is the best and most natural anti-stress medicine. Add to that the open air and you've got the lot! However, to be beneficial and trouble-free, sport must be regular, moderate and suited to your physical capabilities. This is what makes walking the ideal sporting activity for people who are not naturally sporty.

If you walk at quite a brisk pace, you exercise all the muscles in your body and breathe more deeply. As a result, physical tension vanishes, breathing improves, the tissues receive more oxygen, blood circulation gets better, metabolic waste is disposed of more rapidly and the muscles and joints become more supple.

Mentally...

Meanwhile the rhythm of your footsteps will enable you to think more clearly. You can help by concentrating on details of the landscape around you, thus turning a walk in the countryside into a period of active meditation.

Finally, the contact with nature helps us to get problems into perspective: problems that sometimes seem insoluble until we stand back from them.

Did you know?

To ensure that walking effectively combats stress, there are some rules you should follow:

- Regularity: 20 minutes walking a day is better than 1 hour every now and then.
- Try to go for a walk at least 4 times a week.
- Intensity: Don't push yourself too hard and tire yourself too much.
- If you walk regularly your fitness, speed and strength will all improve.

Key Facts:

- Physical activity in the open air is the best method for combating stress.
- The body is freed from built-up tensions.
- Contact with nature encourages a meditative state of mind and puts our problems into perspective.



Keep your brain healthy

Steps you can take today...

Every 71 seconds, someone in the world develops Alzheimer's disease. Today, it is estimated that about 30 million people worldwide suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia - a collective name for progressive degenerative brain syndromes which affect memory, thinking, behaviour and emotion.

Dementia knows no social, economic, ethnic or geographical boundaries. Although each person will experience dementia in their own way, eventually those affected are unable to care for themselves and need help with all aspects of daily life.

Risk factors: Age and a strong family history of dementia are risk factors with a strong link to dementia. Excessive alcohol consumption, head injury, and risk factors for heart disease such as high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and being overweight also seem to increase the risk of getting dementia.

There is increasing research evidence to suggest that having a healthy lifestyle may help to reduce an individual's risk of dementia.

Steps you can take: Whatever your age, there are steps you can take to keep your brain healthy:

1. Regular exercise According to the Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation, physical exercise reduces your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by 50 percent. Regular exercise can also slow further deterioration in those who have already started to develop cognitive problems.

2. Healthy diet Just like the rest of your body, your brain needs a nutritious diet to operate at its best. Focus on eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean protein, and healthy fats.

3. Mental stimulation Those who continue learning new things throughout life and challenging their brains are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and dementia, so make it a point to stay mentally active. Reading, engaging in a hobby such as playing bridge or chess, or doing crosswords and word puzzles may help to reduce risk.

4. Quality sleep Your brain needs regular, restful sleep in order to function at optimum capacity. Sleep deprivation not only leaves you cranky and tired, but impairs your ability to think, problem-solve, and process, store, and recall information. Deep, dreamy sleep is critical for memory formation and retention. If nightly sleep deprivation is slowing your thinking and affecting your mood, you may be at greater risk of developing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The vast majority of adults need at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Any less, and productivity and creativity suffers.

5. Stress management Stress that is chronic or severe takes a heavy toll on the brain, leading to shrinkage in a key memory area of the brain known as the hippocampus, hampering nerve cell growth, and increasing your risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. So try to keep your stress levels in check.

6. An active social life Human beings are highly social creatures. We don't thrive in isolation, and neither do our brains. Studies show that the more connected we are, the better we fare on tests of memory and cognition. Staying socially active may even protect against Alzheimer's disease and dementia, so make your social life a priority.

The more you strengthen these areas of your daily life, the healthier and hardier your brain will be. When you lead a brain-healthy lifestyle, your brain will stay working stronger...longer.



How many steps do you walk each day?

Increase your daily steps!

Many people will have heard the recent guidelines about walking 10,000 steps per day. But most people have no idea just how far 10,000 steps is.

Mr and Mrs Average person's stride length is approximately 2' 6" or 45cm long. That means it takes just over 2,000 steps to walk one mile, and 10,000 will be close to 5 miles.

Also, most people have no idea how many steps they take in an average day. Wearing a pedometer is a great, inexpensive way of tracking your steps. It's often surprising how many steps we take during the normal course of our day.

Start by recording your daily steps in a notebook, so by the end of the week you will have a record of your average daily steps.

On average a sedentary person may only take 1,000 to 3,000 steps a day and adding to this will have many health benefits. Regular walking has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, stroke, and some cancers.

A reasonable goal for most people is to increase their average daily steps each week by 500 per day until you can easily average 5,000 steps per day, or even be heading towards 10,000 per day.

The easiest way to walk more is to make walking a habit. There are many ways to increase your daily steps, for example:

- Take a walk with your partner, spouse, children, or friend
- Walk to work or walk the children to school
- Leave the car at home for short journeys
- Get off the bus a stop early
- Walk the dog regularly, perhaps extending the circuit
- Use the stairs instead of the lift
- Park at the furthest point in the supermarket car park
- When possible, walk to the shops
- Try window shopping with gusto!
- Try walking to stretch your legs every lunchtime

However you fit extra steps into your life, you should try to get 150 minutes of activity a week. This could be a couple of 10-minute bouts of activity every day or 30-minute exercise sessions, five times a week, for example.

You might walk for 10 minutes three times a day or 15 minutes twice a day at first.

30 minutes a day is all it takes to start to feel the difference!



Top tips for maintaining a healthy weight

Changes you can make to your daily routine

These 10 simple weight loss tips will help you take in fewer calories and burn more energy through activity. They've been based on scientific evidence and can help you build healthy habits that will have a positive effect on your health. Sticking with all 10 tips in the long term will help you lose weight safely and keep it off.

1. Keep to your meal routine

Try to eat at roughly the same times each day, whether this is two or five times a day. This will help you to avoid unplanned meals and snacks which are often high in calories.

- Pick a pattern that fits your daily routine and stick to it.

- If you tend to snack, try to snack around the same time each day.
- Plan when you intend to eat and check at the end of the day if you have achieved this.
- If you're eating out at night, get into the habit of thinking about what you eat during the rest of the day. Don't skip meals - this might make you overeat later. Instead, plan to eat lighter meals earlier on in the day so you don't take in too many calories.

2. Go reduced fat

Choose reduced fat versions of foods such as dairy products, spreads and salad dressings. Use them sparingly as some can still be high in fat.

It's easy to overeat on foods like butter or spreads, salad dressings, mayonnaise, cheese, pastries, chips, biscuits and crisps. High fat foods contain a lot of energy, even in small portions. So without actually eating large amounts of food, you could be eating more calories than you can burn every day. And because you've not eaten that much, you may still feel hungry.

- Change to semi-skimmed milk and save 60 calories a day (based on consuming 300mls of milk a day).
- Try to cut down on food that has been cooked in lots of oil or butter, e.g. try steamed fish instead of fried fish, bruschetta instead of garlic bread, and steamed rice instead of egg fried rice.
- Try to avoid sauces based on cream or coconut milk. For example, you could have tandoori instead of a korma, a stir-fry or steamed Thai dish instead of a green curry, or a marinara instead of a carbonara.

3. Walk off the weight

Walk 10,000 steps (about 60-90 minutes of moderate activity) each day. Use a pedometer to help count the steps and break up your walking over the day.

- 5,000 extra steps a day (40 mins walking at a brisk pace) will burn around 1,240 calories over a week.
- Take the stairs rather than the lift.

4. Pack a healthy snack

If you snack, choose a healthy option such as fresh fruit or low calorie yogurts instead of chocolate or crisps.

- Have a banana instead of a standard-size chocolate bar (46g) and save around 150 calories.
- Take a piece of fruit to work with you.
- Choose yoghurts with less than 100 calories per pot. The calcium will also keep your bones healthy.

5. Look at the labels

Be careful about food claims. Check the fat and sugar content on food labels when shopping and preparing food.

- 'Low fat' doesn't always mean low in calories. For example, a low fat digestive biscuit has the same number of calories as a standard digestive biscuit at 70 calories. And low fat sausages, spreads and crisps are still high in fat compared to other foods.
- A 'portion' of food as defined by the manufacturer may not be the same as the amount that you would eat.

6. Caution with your portions

Don't heap food on your plate (except vegetables). Think twice before having second helpings.

- Cook smaller quantities and eat off a smaller plate.
- Put away left-overs as soon as you've served your meal.
- Don't eat from the bag - place foods in a bowl or on a plate so you can see how much you're eating.
- If you're eating out, try sharing a starter or side dishes with a friend. Meals designed to be shared, like tapas or dim sum, can be healthy but be careful how many you order.
- Don't feel you have to clear your plate.

7. Up on your feet

Breaking up your sitting time has many benefits beyond just weight loss.

- Try standing rather than sitting for bus or train journeys.
- When watching TV, try to stand up during the ad breaks and do a few chores (e.g. wash the dishes or put the rubbish out).

8. Think about your drinks

Choose water or sugar-free squashes. Unsweetened fruit juice is high in natural sugar so limit it to one glass per day (200ml or 1/3 pint). Alcohol is high in calories so limit the amount you drink.

- A pint of ordinary strength beer (3-4%) has two units of alcohol and 182 calories. Cutting down on alcohol can help with keeping a healthy weight and benefits your overall health. Alcohol also increases your appetite - some people notice that they tend to eat more when they drink alcohol.
- High street coffee shops offer a wide choice of drinks. Large drinks with lots of cream, milk or sugar can be loaded with fat and calories. Try buying smaller sizes, and asking for 'skinny' drinks that use skimmed milk. Try to avoid cream, flavoured syrup or sugary toppings. Use skimmed or semi-skimmed milk if you're making hot drinks at home.

9. Focus on your food

Slow down. Don't eat on the go or while watching TV. Eat at a table if possible.

- Eating meals at the table will help you focus on the amount of food you eat.
- Don't eat while walking, wait until you get there.

10. Don't forget your 5-a-day

Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, whether fresh, frozen or tinned (400g in total).

- A medium sized apple or banana, or three heaped tablespoons of peas, is one portion.
- Try having fruit or vegetables with every meal - this makes it easier to reach 5-a-day.
- Many people see salads and vegetarian dishes as being automatically healthy. It's true that they are a good way of getting some fruit and vegetable portions into your meals. But pay attention to the ingredients and dressings - they can often be loaded with fat and sugar.

Track your progress

Record-keeping increases success in developing healthy habits. Use the **Ten Top Tips** tick sheet to record your progress. Keep this up until the tips become automatic.

AMIAN Counselling and support service provides all Bolton University Staff with unbiased, impartial, independent, free advice and support and is a practical and positive way to help resolve concerns and difficulties. Not all staff accessing our service require counselling, some just need the assistance from someone outside of the situation to help explore possible options and provide advice, support and information. Visit our webpage to see the range of services we provide.

The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is available to all employees.

If you have any further questions or wish to book an appointment, please do not hesitate to contact AMIAN:

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