

COUNSELLING SERVICE

MEN
AND
MENTAL HEALTH

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER[®]

MIND MATTERS

MEN AND MENTAL HEALTH

A GUIDE FOR MALE STUDENTS

Coming to University was supposed to be so easy. You had it all planned.

The social life. The first week should go like a dream. You will make friends instantly. You find that you are quickly into that close relationship you always wanted. You will be having the time of your life away from those annoying parental restrictions. And, of course you'll fit in.

And the work? That should just tick over. You will be producing written work you always knew that you were capable of. You won't be panicked by deadlines and if you get the odd low mark, it won't get to you.

You know that life isn't like this, but it is hard to stop hoping.

Often male students have a strong sense that they should manage and when they don't, they can take it very hard. Sometimes they try to manage the anxiety and disappointment by using alcohol and/or drugs. They try to make it look like nothing is wrong, but this strategy doesn't always work.

MENTAL HEALTH

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AT UNIVERSITY

At university there are times of hard work and times of good fun; there are times of worry and times when you feel in control; there are times when your friendships are fine and other times when it's a struggle. In order to manage all this you need to look after yourself, both your body and your mind. They are connected and when something goes wrong with one it has an impact on the other. Men tend to force their bodies and minds to feel well even when the signs are to the contrary.

YOUR BODY

You might often think that your body will just go on. You might assume that it will look after itself. Sometimes you don't pay it the attention that it needs. You exercise, but maybe you don't always heed the signs that it isn't working quite as well as it should be. Feeling ill might be a sign that you are actually ill. Don't just ignore it; it may just make matters worse.

YOUR MIND

Your mind and emotional life need just as much care as your physical body. How you feel and think can have a huge impact on your life. Unfortunately, men are often the victims of thinking that they can and must cope with everything, even when they are miserable, worried or frightened. Often they find it hard to admit that they are feeling anything other than fine. Ignoring your feelings doesn't stop them affecting your life.

A BODY CHECK

Your body is finely tuned into how you think and feel. If there are things about your body that don't feel right, they may reflect how you are feeling. Or if your body isn't working well it will have an impact on how you feel. It is important to respect this link in order to look after the whole of you. Either way around, having a physical check up is important.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AT UNIVERSITY

Things to look out for include:

- Stomach pains
- Bleeding gums
- Loss of appetite
- Disturbed or loss of sleep
- Changes in skin tone or skin becoming sensitive or irritable
- Loss of sexual drive
- Sudden changes or fluctuation in weight
- Loss of energy
- Having frequent accidents even if they seem minor
- Increasing dependence on drink or drugs

If you are experiencing any of the above or are worried about your body in any way, let a nurse or doctor check you over. The evidence is that men tend to leave things until there is no option but to get help.

YOU CAN TAKE MORE PROACTIVE ACTION BY SEEKING MEDICAL HELP AND ADVICE AT THE FIRST SIGN OF THINGS NOT BEING RIGHT.

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DEPRESSION

We all feel lonely and hopeless at times but when the feelings get overwhelming it makes the world seem a grey and empty place. Nothing seems to provide any fun. You find talking to people a chore or irritating. These may be signs of depressions and it may help to talk to someone.

Signs of depression include:

feelings of helplessness and hopelessness • feeling useless, inadequate, bad • self hatred, constant questioning of thoughts and actions • an overwhelming need for reassurance • being vulnerable and over-sensitive • feeling guilty • a loss of energy and motivation, that makes even the simplest tasks or decision seem difficult • self harm • sudden loss or gain in weight • difficulty with sleep, either too much or too little • agitation and restlessness • loss of sex drive • finding it impossible to concentrate for any length of time • forgetfulness, a sense of unreality • physical aches and pains, being preoccupied with the fear that you are seriously ill

STRESS AND ANXIETY

Some pressure is necessary to move things along. Deadlines for essays may make you tense but they are things to aim for. So a certain amount of anxiety is needed to get the hard things done.

But when the pressure builds up to point when you can't do anything but worry, then the pressure is no longer serving its purpose and is working against you. It may feel that you will never get over it.

Signs of anxiety and stress include:

muscle tension • sweating • breathing fast • trembling • headaches • heart beating faster • irregular heart beat • feeling sick • diarrhoea

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RELATIONSHIPS

In an atmosphere of greater sexual freedom, it is not surprising that there are anxieties about sex and relationships. Fretting about being good sexually, being attractive to others or feeling confused about sexuality is common amongst male students. Of course, what men are not so good at is talking about these worries.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Becoming over dependant on drink or drugs may seem a reasonable way to deal with worry, but it can undermine your academic performance and can be damaging to social relationships. Men who are depressed are more likely than women to mask symptoms and feelings with alcohol and/or drugs.

"... MEN WHO ARE DEPRESSED
ARE MORE LIKELY THAN WOMEN
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If you experience any of the following, it could be a sign that drug use is becoming a problem:

- Needing to use the drug regularly and, in some cases, many times a day
- Needing to maintain a supply of the drug
- Failing repeatedly to stop using the drug
- Doing things to obtain the drug that you normally wouldn't do, such as stealing
- Using the drug as a way of dealing with other problems
- Risking harming yourself and others when under the influence of the drug, eg drink driving.

If you experience any of the following, it could be a sign that alcohol is becoming a problem:

- Craving – a strong need or urge to drink
- Loss of control - not being able to stop once you have started
- Physical dependence - withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, confusion, depression, irritability and anxiety
- Tolerance - the need to drink greater amounts to be satisfied.

YOU CAN GET HELP, BUT TAKING THE FIRST STEP IS OFTEN THE HARDEST. IT IS ODD AND EMBARRASSING TO GO AND TALK TO STRANGERS ABOUT WHAT YOU FEEL AND ABOUT YOUR BODY BUT THE EVIDENCE IS THAT IT'S LIKELY TO HELP YOU BEGIN TO FEEL RELIEVED, LESS WORRIED AND MORE ABLE TO GET ON WITH WORK.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND HELP

INSIDE THE UNIVERSITY

- The **Counselling Service** offers free, confidential, individual and group counselling and workshops to all students. The Service also offers support and guidance, to those concerned about the welfare of a friend or relative. To arrange an initial appointment, telephone 020 7911 5000 ext 66899 or email counselling@westminster.ac.uk. See webpage westminster.ac.uk/counselling for further information.
- **Disability Learning Support** offer information, support and advice with managing as a student with physical disabilities or mental health conditions. Tel 020 3506 8800 (Central London) or visit westminster.ac.uk/disability
- The **Students' Union** offer advice and support. They can be contacted on 020 7911 5000 ext 5454 or email su-info@westminster.ac.uk. Visit uwsu.com for more info.
- The **Student Advice Service** offer advice and information on funding, benefits, visa and immigration matters. They can be contacted via email studentcentre@westminster.ac.uk. See westminster.ac.uk/advice for more info.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND HELP

OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY

- Your **GP** can offer you support, advice, medical treatment or referral to specialist help. All GP practices offer an out-of-hours service for emergencies.
- **London Nightline** offers a confidential telephone listening service, run by students for students, which is available from 6pm-8am every night during term-time, Tel 020 7631 0101.
- **The Samaritans** offer a listening ear 24 hours a day, Tel 116 123, this number is FREE to call.
- Information, resources and links to useful organisations can be found at studentdepression.org

Details of organisations offering help can be found on the **Counselling Service** webpage, westminster.ac.uk/counselling

"THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE INSIDE
AND OUTSIDE OF THE UNIVERSITY,
TO WHOM YOU CAN TURN TO FOR SUPPORT...
...BE STRONG - GET HELP!



DETAILS OF OTHER SPECIALIST HELP CAN BE FOUND AT:
WESTMINSTER.AC.UK/COUNSELLING

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