

# Mental Health Wellness Abroad



"I met with my counselor to talk about coping strategies if I felt unsteady. I met with my psychiatrist to make sure I knew what to do if things went wrong, to make sure I knew the most fragile times in my journey. I was told about the importance of sleep to someone with bipolar when experiencing jetlag. I learned how to manage my medication when eight hours of my day has been deleted. I had told my teachers that I may need certain accommodations, and I told myself it would be okay. I was ready and prepared for everything and I was elated at my opportunity to go."

- Linnea Johnson (read more <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/johnson2>)

## Mental Health – Wellness Abroad

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## Overview

If you decide to study abroad, in most cases you will be earning credit toward your academic degree. Therefore, it is important to be able to access the same level of learning that you would receive at the University of South Florida. In addition, you want to be involved in other aspects of the overseas studies program outside of the classroom. A successful study abroad experience often requires preparation, which includes planning so your mental health needs will be met while abroad.

The stress of adjusting to an unfamiliar culture, a different academic environment, and a new system of support services can give rise to a wide array of unexpected and overwhelming reactions. To maintain your emotional health when you travel abroad, consider doing the following things before you travel:

- Familiarize yourself with cultural practices in your destination country by reading, or talking to people familiar with the culture
- Talk to members of your support system in the U.S. about mutual expectations regarding keeping in touch while you are away, so that you continue to have access to established support systems
- Identify and practice realistic self-care and stress management techniques that you will be able to use when you are abroad; remember that the practices that you use in the U.S. may not be practical or safe when you are abroad, so be creative!
- Keep an open mind and try to be flexible when things don't go as planned
- If you think you have experienced or are currently experiencing a mental health issue, consider disclosing this information to Education Abroad. **Disclosing mental health issues will not prevent you from participating in any program**
- Free mental health screenings are available online for students of The University of South Florida for Depression, Anxiety, Posttraumatic Stress, Eating Disorders and Alcohol. No identifying information will be solicited and your IP address is not recorded. [www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/USFCCHD/](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/USFCCHD/) (Keyword: usfcchd)

## How to Adjust to a New Cultural Experience

- **Have realistic expectations before you go.** Talk to other students who have been to your destination country. Read about other students' experiences adjusting to a new culture on USF's blogsite [goingplaces.blog.usf.edu](http://goingplaces.blog.usf.edu) or search "blog culture shock study abroad" on the internet to read about student's real life experience with culture shock. Don't stay in denial! Plan ahead!
- **Connect with others while you are away.** Don't isolate yourself! Share your feelings with a roommate, your host family, your professors, education abroad staff, or your family back home. If you are talking with other American students abroad, be sure you don't get caught up in being negative together! Working through culture and adapting to a new culture can be a valuable growth experience—one that strengthens identity and intercultural competence.
- **Reach out and make friends with host country residents.** Connect with people from your host country. Ask about their customs and traditions! Understanding more about why certain customs and traditions are important to residents can help broaden your understanding of their culture. They'll likely want to know about your family's customs and traditions as well!
- **Pay attention to good nutrition.** Try new foods and keep in mind maintaining a healthy balance of food. Eat regular meals, have snacks on hand between meals, and keep yourself hydrated. If your body isn't nourished, you are going to have a more challenging time focusing in class and enjoying your travels abroad.
- **Exercise and move.** Exercise is usually the first thing people forget about while traveling abroad. However, exercise is calming and helps you re-energize and re-focus. You may have to get creative if your host country doesn't have a gym or park nearby. Think about jogging with a friend; explore your surroundings while you get the adrenaline pumping. Consider memorizing an exercise routine before you go that will be easy to practice in your room (ex: yoga, pilates, stretching). Use ordinary objects as weights and do some lunges or arm lifts.
- **Journaling.** Reflective writing can serve as a productive "refuge" while you are abroad, allowing you to gather thoughts and feelings in one safe place. Journaling does not have to be reflective to be useful. You might prefer to write poetry, draw, or paint to express yourself creatively.

- **Control how much you talk to people back home.** Keep in touch too little and you will miss people back home due to lack of contact. Talk to them too much and you will become dependent on them. Set up regular times to talk so they know when to expect your call. Also, when internet access is available, consider e-mail, Skype, or Facebook as a way to connect home. Start your own blog as a way to share your experiences with friends and family back home!
- **Explore your host country.** Get out and see the sights safely and with a friend. If it helps, think of traveling as your reward for staying well enough to do all of your work. Reward yourself for good behavior!
- **Get out of your room.** Go have a cup of coffee with some friends. Feel free to talk about your feelings, remember it is normal to be homesick, just stay positive. Keep in mind this is an once-in-a-lifetime experience, and the time you spend in your room is time you will never get back. By studying abroad, you are more fortunate than 80% of other college students out there!
- **Make sure you are getting a healthy amount of sleep.** You may have trouble adjusting to time changes and jet lag. Your sleep cycle should start to look like your regular sleep cycle back home after a few days. Be careful about time differences when communicating via the internet – you need regular sleep to function the next day! See the “Sleep Health - Getting a Good Night’s Rest” section for helpful hints to help you get just the right amount of sleep.
- **Don’t abuse alcohol or other drugs.** You may be tempted to use drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with your stress or as a way to reduce anxiety in new social situations. This could result in legal problems and may be a threat to your physical and emotional health.
- **Expect to feel depressed sometimes.** Homesickness is natural, especially if you have never been away from home. Don’t let thoughts of home occupy you to the point that you are incapable of enjoying the exciting new culture that surrounds you.
- **Expect to feel frustrated and angry at times** You are bound to have communication problems when you are not using your native language or dialect. Even if they speak English in your host country, communication may be difficult! Moreover, people will do things differently in your new home, and you will not always think their way is as good as yours.

## Cross-Cultural Adjustment (aka “Culture Shock”)

Culture shock is not a psychological disorder, but in fact, it is a *developmental phase* that is both common and expected when one adjusts “properly” in a cross-cultural context. Culture shock is perfectly natural.

Culture shock can be described as a clash between one’s personal way of viewing and interacting with the world (which is determined by one’s home culture) and the new cultural environment. When a person struggles through such a challenge, the person grows and they mature.

Culture shock can result from differences related to:

- Food
- Health
- Relationships
- Finances
- Transport
- Communication
- Worldviews or values
- Academic Demands

Many students are unprepared for the intense feelings that accompany studying in a different culture. These intense feelings can affect your emotional well-being, including:

- Mood
- Stress Level
- Behavior
- Identity Development

In addition, the process of adjusting to a new culture can aggravate preexisting concerns or challenges you may have been managing quite well at home.

Most students expect to quickly adapt to the new culture—and they need to adjust rapidly if they are to effectively meet the academic demands placed upon them. However, the many cultural differences that seem exciting to them at first can also be distressing and quickly lead to feelings of misunderstanding, loneliness, and culture shock.

## Symptoms of Culture Shock

Possible symptoms of culture shock follow. If you continue to experience these symptoms for a long period of time, and/or these symptoms begin to impact your functioning (school, work, family), please consider seeking help:

- Chronic physical symptoms (e.g., headache, stomach ache)
- Sadness
- Difficulty studying or working
- Frequent crying
- Nervousness
- Relationship stress
- Feeling sick often
- Irritability/anger/frustration
- Withdrawal from others
- Extreme homesickness
- Intense feelings of loyalty to native culture
- Over- or under-eating
- Boredom
- Excessive sleep
- Poor academic performance

Such reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations and are to be expected under the circumstances. They are usually transitory—lasting a couple of days or weeks—and do not imply mental illness or an inability to cope. Nevertheless, there are occasions when the experience of culture shock can stir up deeper emotional issues.

## Working Through Culture Shock and Homesickness

Going abroad requires that you adjust to the same sorts of things as if you would move to another part of the United States: being away from family and friends, living in an unfamiliar environment, meeting new people, adjusting to a different climate, and so on. These changes alone could cause high stress levels, but you will also be going through cultural adjustments and you may experience “culture shock.” In another cultural context, you will often find that your everyday “normal” behavior becomes “abnormal.” The unspoken rules of social interaction are different and the attitudes and behavior that characterize life in the United States are not necessarily appropriate in the host country. These “rules” concern not only language differences, but also wide-ranging matters such as family structure, faculty-student relationships, friendships, gender, and personal relations.

## Stages of Culture Shock

One way to handle these social and personal changes is to understand the cycle of adjustment that occurs.

- **Excitement/Honeymoon Phase.** You can expect to go through an initial period of euphoria and excitement as you are overwhelmed by the thrill of being in a totally new and unusual environment. This initial period is filled with details of getting settled into housing, scheduling classes, meeting new friends, and a tendency to spend a great deal of time with other U.S. students, both during orientation activities and free time.
- **Withdrawal Phase.** As this initial sense of “adventure” wears off, you may gradually become aware that your old habits and routine ways of doing things are no longer relevant. A bit of frustration can be expected, and you may find yourself becoming unusually irritable, resentful and even angry. Minor problems suddenly assume the proportions of major crises and you may grow somewhat depressed. Your stress and sense of isolation may affect your eating and sleeping habits. You may write letters, send e-mails, or call home criticizing the new environment and indicating that you are having a terrible time adjusting to the new country. Symptoms include anxiety, sadness and homesickness.
- **Adjustment Phase.** The human psyche is extremely flexible and most students weather this initial period and make personal and academic adjustments as the months pass. They may begin to spend less time with Americans and more time forming friendships with local people. They often forget to communicate home.
- **Enthusiasm Phase.** Finally, when the adjustment is complete, most students begin to feel enthusiastic, and that they are finally in tune with their surroundings, neither praising nor criticizing the culture, but becoming, to some extent, part of it.

### Recognize the value of culture shock

Culture shock is a way of sensitizing you to another culture at a level that goes beyond the intellectual and the rational. Just as an athlete cannot get in shape without going through the uncomfortable conditioning stage, so you cannot fully appreciate the cultural differences that exist without first going through the uncomfortable stages of psychological adjustment.

## **Should I Disclose My Mental Health History with Education Abroad?**

To disclose or not to disclose? That is the question. Many students struggle with disclosing their mental health concerns with Education Abroad. Some students fear the stigma associated with mental illness or feel that they will be able to handle it on their own. There are a number of things to consider before you to decide to disclose or decide not to disclose any mental health concerns. Remember, when you have been diagnosed with a mental health-related disability, your medical information is confidential. This information can only be shared with your written permission or in the case of an emergency.

### **Disclosing mental health issues will NOT prevent your acceptance into a program**

**When should I disclose?** Individuals can choose to disclose any time during the process of applying for, enrolling in, or attending a program or international exchange experience. You can also choose not to disclose at all. However, keep in mind that self-advocacy and communicating your needs are important tools for success. According to U.S. non-discrimination law, programs cannot ask about nor consider disability status during the application process.

**You can disclose before the application process.** You may wish to contact program administrators or advisors to find out whether or not a program is fully accessible and how straightforward or complex it might be to arrange and fund necessary accommodations. If you are concerned about potential discrimination, wait until after you are accepted or ask questions in a way that is not connected to disability reasons, the admissions process, or your name.

**You can disclose your disability during the application process.** Students are encouraged to think about what programs would suit their personal and educational goals, as well as what program they will thrive in best. Consider disclosing during the application process so Education Abroad can help you find the placement where you can have the most success.

**You can disclose after you have been accepted for a program but before you go.** If you choose not to disclose during the application process but plan to request disability accommodations, this is the best time to disclose your disability. By disclosing before you leave, you have time to coordinate care with your mental health provider(s) and your education abroad program.

**You can wait until you start your program or classes to disclose your disability.** By this time, it may be too late to arrange accommodations, especially complex ones. This method may work if you plan to informally ask program administrators, your host family, or professors for accommodation or support.

**Experienced travelers with mental health-related disabilities suggest setting up a support system in advance, even if you think you won't need it.** All individuals traveling to new countries and unfamiliar cultures experience some level of stress related to this transition.

- Prepare to expect additional stress on a study abroad program, at least initially.
- See proactive planning as a way to make the experience more successful.
- Bring your treatment with you whether it is medication, personal strategies, or a support network through remote telecommunications.

Initially, you may want to share your history with specific individuals on a strict need-to-know basis, and then decide as you develop relationships of trust if there are others with whom you want to share your history of a disability.

If you do decide to disclose to the education abroad advisors at the University of South Florida or to your overseas hosts, they may be able to provide you with information on how mental health emergencies are handled in the host country (and help to plan to evacuate you from the country if the conditions are not up to par).

When disclosing, you might want to:

- Provide them with your plan for arrangements if your condition were to worsen overseas; some may choose a legal route with an advance directive, which is a document to clearly establish who you empower to make treatment decisions, if needed, in the case of declining health.
- Ensure that they keep this information in their confidential files. Ask what procedures they have in place for protecting confidential information.

In the event that you do not disclose to education abroad advisors at home or abroad, you may want to:

- Write down your plans of what should be arranged if something were to happen or leave an advance directive with a good friend or family member that will be in regular contact with you while abroad.
- Try to request accommodations or services that are needed without revealing your condition. For example, you could just say, “Because I’m not a morning person, I need to arrange my schedule such that my courses don’t begin before 10 a.m.”
- Bring up with education abroad staff the discussion of emergency or contingency plans in event of a physical or emotional crisis without divulging your history. After all, this is something all travelers need to think about ahead of time.

When deciding to disclose or not, remember that providing education abroad advisors with information about your mental health-related disabilities can help future study abroad program participants. Education abroad advisors who have firsthand experience working with students with known mental health-related disabilities become better informed about the diversity amongst their students and better able to assist students in planning for a successful experience abroad. This awareness can help to break down preconceived notions, and encourage more forethought in ensuring resources and support is available on education abroad programs for you and all students.



## Making Preparations to Participate in Education Abroad

- Students managing chronic medical, psychiatric, or psychological conditions need to continue treatment while studying abroad.
- Discuss with your healthcare provider whether traveling abroad is appropriate at this time.
- It is important to discuss the potential stresses of traveling abroad with your therapist. Work with a mental health care provider to create a mental health plan for your study abroad. Be sure to identify how you will access social support, engage in self-care behaviors, and cope with emergencies while you are abroad.
- If you are currently being prescribed medication, find out whether your medication will be available in your destination country and information about carrying prescription medication abroad. Check out [www.embassy.org/embassies](http://www.embassy.org/embassies) to make sure your prescriptions and over-the-counter medications are permissible in the countries you expect to visit.
- Do not plan on sending medications abroad since it will require customs paperwork and may be delayed in delivery. Be aware that your medications may not be available in your host country. They may have a different name or have a different strength. (see the following section on Questions to Ask...)
- Investigate mental health services in your destination country, and consider purchasing insurance that will cover these services, should you have an emergency. Mental health providers may be available locally. You may want to pre-identify an English-speaking provider: [www.goodtherapy.org/therapy-international.html](http://www.goodtherapy.org/therapy-international.html)
- Consider confiding in a “travel buddy” about your health condition in case of an emergency provide that person with emergency contact information for your health care provider in the U.S. so that they can assist you if you become overwhelmed.

## Tips from Travelers with Mental Health-Related Disabilities

- Recognize that some of what you may experience overseas as part of the intercultural adjustment cycle (sometimes called “culture shock”) and that it is common to all study abroad participants. The low points are not necessarily attributable to a mental health-related diagnosis (e.g. home sickness, anxiety about understanding/speaking a foreign language, loneliness, fear of being robbed or getting sick from the food, etc.). You may also experience feeling very good and elated on the high point of the cycle, which may make you feel that you no longer need medications if you use them. Keep taking your medication and consult with a doctor first.
- Learn the vocabulary associated with your condition before leaving the United States if you are going to a non-English speaking country. Bring a translated copy of needed medical records and release forms.
- Connect with international mental health-related groups to learn about what types of situations and attitudes exist in the host country and peer/support groups you can contact while there.
- If you are comfortable disclosing your condition to others, ask for a few minutes to talk about your condition during orientation; for some individuals, self-disclosure to others on a group program can reduce anxiety and creates opportunities for others to better understand their access needs.
- Another option is to find someone on the program that you can trust to understand your condition and whom you can teach about the support needed if he/she sees changes in your health or behaviors.
- Be clear and direct with clinical specialists, friends and family at home, if staying in contact (receiving letters, emails, etc.) is important and necessary support for you while abroad.
- Plan in advance for contingencies, such as arranging to talk by phone with a familiar therapist in the United States, planning for more privacy or down time, and consulting with other students with similar disabilities who have studied abroad.
- Consider pre-paying for sessions with your home therapist in case you need to call and have a session over the telephone while abroad.

- When searching for a program, make sure the study abroad staff members are responsive and receptive to you in the planning process. This may indicate their reaction to your issues once you are overseas.
- Many of the problems that you could experience overseas will seem minor compared to the good experiences that you will have. However, if you feel that your health or safety is deteriorating, give yourself an outlet and permission to leave the program.
- Anyone can feel fear or trepidation before traveling abroad, but self-knowledge about what strategies work at home can also help once abroad. Plan ahead when you can. If you are staying with a family in the host country, you may want to communicate with them honestly about your needs before you arrive (if the program can provide this overseas contact information before your arrival).
- Read about a young woman who studied abroad in Africa after disclosing that she had obsessive-compulsive disorder:  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113846968>
- This young woman traveled to Ireland after disclosing that she had bipolar disorder. She planned her trip with the help of a mental health counselor:  
<http://www.miusa.org/ncde/stories/johnson2>



## Identifying When another Student is in Crisis

**Be on the lookout for the following symptoms of a student in crisis:**

- Depressed mood most of the day.
- Markedly diminished interest in almost all activities.
- Significant weight loss when not dieting, weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite.
- Insomnia or increased sleeping.
- Restlessness or slowing down of body movements.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt.
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness.
- Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent thoughts of suicide, or a suicide attempt.
- Substance abuse (alcohol or drug or both) can also be a sign of an underlying condition as students try to alter or mask symptoms they have detected but have not addressed with a counselor.

**If you decide to help, then do it with H.E.A.R.T.**

### **Hear**

- Stop what you're doing and really listen to what the student is saying.
- Reflect back what the person is saying and try using their own words.
- Validate their experience and avoid the temptation to problem solve.

### **Empathize**

- Acknowledge what you have heard and let the student know you understand.
- Express concern and interest.
- Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- Remember, even if the problem does not seem real to you, it may be very important to the student.

### **Assess**

- Ask the student, "What have you thought about doing?"
- Discuss the pros and cons of different courses of action.
- Don't expect to have all the answers.

## Refer

- Be honest about your concerns and limitations.
- The student may need professional help.
- Do not agree to be secretive about his or her problem.
- Help the student find appropriate resources.
- Offer to go with him or her to talk with a professional.

## Tell

- Do not ignore comments about suicide, violence, or harm to others.
- Seek professional assistance.

## Taking Care of Yourself

### There Really are Limits of What You Can and Can't Do

In dealing with a distressed person, personal safety and wellbeing are just as important as that of the person in distress. It is important to recognize the limits of what can be done to help someone in distress.

### What can be helpful:

- Be genuinely concerned and supportive
- Be honest about the time and effort you can afford to spend in helping
- Be aware of personal needs and limitations
- Maintain and respect healthy boundaries

### What isn't helpful:

- Trying to control how another person is going to respond
- Attempting to force another person to change
- Forcing someone to take action to help themselves

[\*Adapted from USF Students of Concern Assistance Team]



## Self-Help Tips for Depressed Mood

It is estimated that 5% of Americans – some 15 million people – suffer from depression at a given time. Below are some do's and don'ts for combating a depressed mood:

- DON'T over do the caffeine.
- DON'T overindulge in comfort foods.
- DON'T turn to alcohol and other drugs.
- DON'T hibernate.
- DON'T procrastinate/avoid.
- DON'T isolate yourself.
- DON'T accept a bad mood and wallow in it.
- DON'T blame others or take out your bad mood on them.
- DO get a reasonable amount of rest.
- DO eat well (protein and carb's to boost energy without a "crash.")
- DO exercise. Physical activity (even a 10 minute walk) will boost mood. A longer workout will stimulate a release of endorphins.
- DO take action. If you're feeling lazy/worthless, prove yourself wrong. Remember past successes. Set small goals; break big tasks into smaller ones and give yourself credit for accomplishing each one.
- DO eliminate negatives where you can (e.g., avoid bad news or pessimistic people for a while).
- DO add small pleasures. Savoring a cup of tea, listening to music, taking a walk, calling an old friend...Plan them into your schedule.
- DO stimulate the senses. Eat spicy food, listen to powerful music, dance energetically, wear bright colors, take a very long hot bath, or a cold shower.
- DO something for someone else. Call your grandma, iron your roommate's shirt, smile and say "hi" to people you don't know.

Depression is likely to color our view of the world so that our successes seem minor and our failures seem major. A person who is depressed often feels unable to focus on the positive, to put failures in the context of other successes and to accurately assess their own strengths and weaknesses. Some depressed people say things like "Even though I know the world is full of color, to me everything looks gray."

As depression becomes more serious, we are likely to experience physical symptoms such as restlessness, the inability to sleep or a need to sleep excessively, fatigue, appetite changes, crying spells, or the an inability to enjoy normally pleasurable activities, feelings of worthlessness, inability to concentrate, indecisiveness, or thoughts of suicide.

Many professionals believe that depression is really anger turned in on ourselves. Instead of getting angry at people or events in our lives that are negative, we blame ourselves for what has happened—even if we have no control over it. It is also known that people who are overly responsible or self-blaming are more likely to experience depression.

Here are some things that we know about the causes of depression. Some people are predisposed to experience depression. If there is a history of depression in your family, you may be more likely to become depressed. For some people, depression is a reaction to excessive stress. Burning the candle at both ends, not sleeping, etc., may trigger depression. Finally, some people seem to get “stuck” when dealing with a difficult negative experience and move from sadness to depression.

Is there some good news about all of this? There is. For many people, depression runs its course and they start to feel well again. Some people seek counseling and it is clear that counseling can help them manage depression and often shorten the depressive cycle. Finally, almost every few months a new anti-depressant comes on the market. For people with more serious depression, these products can be very helpful. If you believe that you are experiencing depression while abroad, tell someone, ask for help, and reach out to others.



## Five Techniques to Reduce Your Stress While Abroad

**Progressive Relaxation:** Progressive relaxation of your muscles reduces pulse rate and blood pressure as well as de-creasing perspiration and respiration rates. Deep muscle relaxation can be used as an anti-anxiety pill. The body responds to anxiety-producing thoughts and events with muscle tension, which in turn increases the anxiety. Muscle relaxation reduces tension and is incompatible with anxiety. Typically, it involves tensing individual muscle groups for several seconds and releasing the tension allowing the muscles to relax gradually.

**Deep Breathing:** Proper breathing is essential for good mental and physical health. The next time you feel a surge of stress, try a few moments of deep breathing. Sit in a comfortable position and take deep, measured breaths, e.g., inhaling while counting from 1 to 4; exhaling while counting down from 4 to 1. Do this 20-30 times and you are sure to feel refreshed. Deep breathing assists in relaxation by increasing the amount of oxygen in the body.

**Visualization:** If you think anxious thoughts, you become tense. In order to overcome negative feelings, you can use the power of your imagination to refocus your mind on positive, healing images. Get into a comfortable position, close your eyes, and visualize a scene or place that you associate with safety and relaxation. It does not matter what you visualize, as long as it is calming to you. As you relax your mind, your body also relaxes.

**Thought Stopping:** Thought stopping helps you overcome excessive worry, repetitive thoughts, and negative thinking, which may take the form of self-doubt, fear, and avoidance of stressful situations. Thought stopping involves concentrating on the unwanted thoughts and after a short time, suddenly stopping and emptying your mind, by using the mental command “stop” or a loud noise to interrupt negative thinking. Then, you may use thought substitution to focus on positive thoughts and outcomes. If the thoughts can be controlled, stress levels can be significantly reduced.

**Assertive Skills:** Being assertive can reduce stress as you express personal thoughts and feelings. You are behaving assertively when you express your true feelings and do not let others take advantage of you. Be specific and clear about what you want, think, and feel; deliver your message in a clear and non-blaming manner; Make personal statements such as, “I want ... , I think ... , I feel ...” etc; Ask for feedback and cooperation. Being assertive means being able to express yourself openly, honestly, and directly, while being considerate of others’ feelings.

## Sleep Health - Getting a Good Night's Rest While Abroad

"I'LL SLEEP WHEN I'M DEAD!"

"I don't have time to sleep!"

"I don't need sleep. That's what coffee is for!"

"My mind won't quiet down enough for me to fall asleep at night!"

"I have to take in every second that I can while I'm here!"

Do those sound familiar? Sleep is highly undervalued, even more so in our world with 24/7 internet access. And yet, it's one of the most important actions you can take to keep yourself performing at a high level. In fact, many people in highly competitive skilled fields - from professional athletes to concert violinists - have cited sleep, after regular practice, as being the most important element in their success. Yet, college students are one of the most sleep deprived groups in this country.

Why should I make sleep a priority over something else?

### ***Sleep deprivation affects your mind.***

- When studying for a test or practicing a skill, the rest periods are just as important as the practice periods. When you sleep, your brain keeps working on the material, synthesizing the information.
- Sleep is also a requirement for mental and emotional resilience. When you are sleep deprived, it is much easier to fall into negative thinking patterns and moodiness, both of which then make it harder to get good sleep at night.
- Inadequate sleep can set the stage for depression, and make it much more difficult for someone dealing with depression or anxiety to recover.
- It can make it much more difficult to concentrate, learn new information, and remember what you are studying.

### ***Sleep deprivation affects your body.***

- Sleep deprivation can lower your immune functioning, making it harder for you to fight off a cold or the flu.
- Sleep deprivation has been linked with un-healthy weight gain.
- Sleep deprivation can affect your reaction time, motor skills, and coordination. Driving when you are sleep deprived can be just as dangerous as drunk driving.
- Other possible effects of sleep deprivation include hand tremors, headaches, and increased blood pressure.

## How Much Sleep Do We Need?

For most adults, 7 - 9 hours a night appears to be the best amount of sleep, although some people may need as few as 5 hours or as many as 10 hours of sleep each day.

The amount of sleep a person needs also increases if he or she has been deprived of sleep in previous days. While we may get used to a sleep-deprived schedule, our judgment, reaction time, and other functions are still impaired. Experts say that if you feel drowsy during the day, even during boring activities, you haven't had enough sleep. If you routinely fall asleep within 5 minutes of lying down, you probably have sleep deprivation.

## How do I get myself a good night's sleep?

**1) Set a schedule:** Go to bed at a set time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Disrupting this schedule might lead to insomnia. Sleeping in on weekends also makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it resets your sleep cycle for a late awakening.

**2) Exercise:** Try to exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day. Daily exercise often helps people sleep, although a workout soon before bedtime may interfere with sleep. For maximum benefit, try to get your exercise about 5 to 6 hours before going to bed.

**3) Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol:** Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, which acts as a stimulant and keeps people awake. Sources of caffeine include coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, non-herbal teas, diet drugs, and some pain relievers. Smokers tend to sleep very lightly and often wake up in the early morning due to nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol use can interfere with deep sleep.

**4) Relax before bed:** A warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine can make it easier to fall sleep. You can train yourself to associate certain restful activities with sleep and make them a part of your bedtime ritual.

**5) Don't lie in bed awake:** If you cannot get to sleep, do not just lie in bed. Do something else, like reading, watching television, or listening to music, until you feel tired. The anxiety of being unable to fall asleep can actually contribute to insomnia.

**6) Control your room temperature:** Maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom. Extreme temperatures may disrupt sleep or prevent you from falling asleep.

## **Questions to Ask Education Abroad and Your Health Care Providers (Suggestions from the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange)**

When making preparations to participate in Education Abroad, the following are suggested questions to ask your:

- Clinical specialists (therapist, psychiatrist, physician, etc.)
- U.S. disability service provider (Students With Disabilities Services)
- Education abroad advisors

### **Cultural and Educational Setting Differences**

- How is the classroom setting and physical environment (e.g. noise level, crowded desks, etc.) in the host country different from the University of South Florida?
- What are the cultural attitudes toward people with mental health-related disabilities in the host country?
- Are there general cultural differences that I should be aware of that impact my condition?

### **Health and Medical Services**

- Are the same student health center and hospital services available in the host country as in the United States? If not, what kind of health services can I count on? Is there a local crisis telephone hotline?
- Will my insurance cover my medications, therapy or other related needs while overseas?
  - If so, what is the payment/reimbursement process?
  - If not, what alternative accommodations and services can be provided that still fulfill my needs? (e.g. Are there other free or low-cost counselors/support groups in the host community? Will I have access to my home clinical specialist?)
  - Will my insurance pay for me to bring enough medication with me for the entire time I am abroad?
  - If not, how will I obtain the medication that I need abroad? What is the payment/reimbursement process?
- If I am not fluent in the language of the host country, are these services available in my native language? If not, who can provide simultaneous translation should I be in need of medical care or be hospitalized?

- Who will I ask to provide a translated psychiatrist/psychologist letter to inform “professional to professional” the seriousness of my condition?

### **Questions for Students Who Take Medications**

- Are there pharmacies near where I will be living?
- How do I find out what overseas equivalent of my medications are available? How can I get medication from home if the local medication isn't effective or if my usual medication needs to be changed or is lost?
- What if I feel my condition has improved overseas, and I stop taking medication that I'm typically on? What effects could this have? Who will I consult for medical advice about discontinuing or decreasing my medication?
- How soon do I need to consult with my clinical specialist about availability of medications abroad and the possibility of taking enough medication abroad with me to cover my entire time abroad?
- What happens if I am taking medications that are still under strict patent in the United States or may not be legal overseas?
- If I can't find the same medications, how much time will my doctor need to change the prescription and make sure my condition is stable before traveling abroad? (Note that education abroad advisors often can provide information about transporting and obtaining medications abroad.)
- Are there any medications that I will need to take while abroad (e.g., anti-malarial medication) that could interfere with my current medication? If so, what is the best way to manage this?
- How do I adjust my medication regimen when crossing time zones? (Some travelers start to adjust their schedules gradually while in transit, while others change to a new schedule after adjusting to the new time zone. Your clinical specialist can provide guidance on making adjustments.)

## Legal Issues

- Will there be a contact person overseas for me to work with who is familiar with U.S. legislation regarding the provision of accommodations and services to people with disabilities and/or who has experience with my type of disability?
- What is the policy for overseas staff regarding confidentiality about my disability?
- Will specific information regarding my disability be shared only on a “need-to-know” basis or when it’s strictly medically necessary?
- Who will be able to access my disability information and why?
- What privacy protections apply abroad?
- What grievance-related systems can I make use of if I run into resistance regarding the provision of appropriate accommodations and services?
- What are the laws or procedures in the host country regarding hospitalizations for psychiatric disabilities? What are my rights in the host country?
- What policies or contingency plans does my education abroad program have in place regarding emergency return to the United States?
- If I am under 21, do my parents need to sign a mental health release for in-patient care, and/or my attending mental health provider?
- How do I write about how I want things to be handled if my condition were to become unstable while abroad? If I decide to write an advance directive, who will be responsible for seeing that it is properly carried out? (see “Disclosure and Making Advance Arrangements” section)
- If I encounter barriers after disclosure of my mental health-related condition to education abroad advisors regarding my acceptance into the program, what recourse do I have? (TIP: Read the free online publication “Rights and Responsibilities,” <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/rr>)

## Emergency Mental Health Care Abroad

Inpatient or outpatient treatment for a *disabling* “nervous or mental disorder” may be covered through your CISI health insurance (see your current plan for coverage and restrictions).

In the event that you require urgent mental health care while abroad:

- 1) All students on USF sponsored programs are covered through CISI health insurance. You will receive an ID card with the dates of coverage and important phone numbers in case you need to contact them.
- 2) Report any illness to your local host coordinator, roommate, USF or local faculty, and ask for assistance.
- 3) **Notify AIG Assist:** Your ID number is **Policy # 0101 GLB# 9111690**. Worldwide, call collect (001-817) 826-7143. If you can't call, have someone call on your behalf. They will give you referrals to English-speaking physicians, emergency rooms, hospitals, or other health care facilities that they are familiar with.
- 4) **AIG Assist** will call you back regularly to follow-up. They will call your mental health care provider to check on appropriate treatment. They will notify USF of your situation and, where needed, request staff assistance. They will notify your parents only at your request.
- 5) Keep receipts for any medical care, prescriptions, or medical costs. You must have these in order to file a claim with CISI when you return to the U.S. If you are staying longer than two months, you may wish to mail these receipts to your parents, family, or other trusted caregivers in the U.S. so they can file a claim for you.
- 6) Make sure that you familiarize yourself with the host institution's support infrastructure on arrival. It will be something you don't want to worry about if you do have a mental health emergency.

## RESOURCES

### **University of South Florida Counseling Center**

Student Services Building (SVC) - 2124

Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

(813) 974-2831

Web: [usf.edu/counsel](http://usf.edu/counsel)

The Counseling Center at the University of South Florida is staffed with mental health professionals (licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and mental health counselors) who are trained to help you through the challenges of college life. Their goal is to help you experience the most optimal learning environment and services are designed to help you reach your academic and personal goals.

### **Students of Concern Assistance Team (SOCAT)**

Student Services Building (SVC) - 2129

Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

(813) 974-6130

E-mail: [socat@usf.edu](mailto:socat@usf.edu)

Web: [studentsofconcern.usf.edu](http://studentsofconcern.usf.edu)

SOCAT is a campus program that can help a student manage significant life stressors that impact academics and personal wellbeing. The SOCAT Outreach staff works to address the needs of students through a variety of interventions, referrals, and case management services. Faculty, staff, students, family members, or acquaintances may contact SOCAT if they are concerned about a student's wellbeing.

### **Students with Disabilities Services**

Student Services Building (SVC) – 1133

Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

(813) 974-4309

E-mail: [sa-sds-information@usf.edu](mailto:sa-sds-information@usf.edu)

Web: [www.sds.usf.edu](http://www.sds.usf.edu)

USF strives to ensure students with disabilities participate in all aspects of university life. If you are a student with a disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please register with SDS. See the "Students" section of their website for an outline of the process. You may also call the SDS office for more information.

### **Education Abroad**

4202 East Fowler Ave. CGS101  
Tampa, FL 33620-5550  
(813) 974-4314 (from 8:00am -5:00pm)  
Fax: (813) 974-4613  
<http://educationabroad.global.usf.edu>

### **Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention**

Student Services Building (SVC) – 0067  
Hours: Monday – Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm  
Office: (813) 974-5756                      Crime Victim Helpline: (813) 974-5757  
E-mail: [va@admin.usf.edu](mailto:va@admin.usf.edu)                      Web: [www.sa.usf.edu/advocacy/](http://www.sa.usf.edu/advocacy/)

Empowering survivors of crime, violence or abuse and preventing victimization by promoting the restoration of decision making and control to survivors, by advocating for their rights and honoring their experiences, and through education and collaboration, fostering a safe university community that respects the rights and dignity of all. A crime victim advocate is available weekdays, 8:00 - 5:00 by calling or dropping by the office. An advocate is available after hours, on weekends and holidays in the case of violent crime, through the USF Police Department.

## **EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

### **Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)**

2212 Sixth Street  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
ADA Hotline: (800) 466-4232 (voice/TTY)  
Tel/TTY: (510) 644-2555 Fax: (510) 841-8645  
E-mail: [dredf@dredf.org](mailto:dredf@dredf.org) Web: [www.dredf.org](http://www.dredf.org)

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) works to advance the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. They can provide technical assistance and resources regarding accommodation for students with mental health-related disabilities.

### **Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI)**

1156 15th Street, Suite 1001

Washington, DC 20005

Tel: (202) 296-0800 Fax: (202) 728-3053

E-mail: [mdri@mdri.org](mailto:mdri@mdri.org) Web: [www.mdri.org](http://www.mdri.org)

Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI) enforces the rights of people with mental disabilities by working with human rights advocates in the Eastern European, the Middle East and South American regions. Depending on the country, MDRI may have contacts of peer or support groups and information on cultural views of mental health-related disabilities abroad.

### **MindFreedom International**

PO Box 11284

Eugene, OR 97440-3484

Tel: (877) MADPRIDE (623-7743) or (541) 345-9106

Fax: (541) 345-3737

E-mail: [office@MindFreedom.org](mailto:office@MindFreedom.org) Web: [www.MindFreedom.org](http://www.MindFreedom.org)

MindFreedom International is an international coalition of groups that advocate for human rights in psychiatry, and includes current and former mental health consumers. They can provide information on support and advocacy groups abroad in several countries.

### **The National Empowerment Center**

599 Canal Street

Lawrence, MA 01840

Tel: (800) POWER2U (769-3728) or (978) 685-1518

TTY: (800) TTY-POWER (889-7693)

Fax: (978) 681-6426

E-mail: [madpride@aol.com](mailto:madpride@aol.com) Web: [www.power2u.org](http://www.power2u.org)

National Empowerment Center is an organization offering information and referral to people who have been diagnosed with mental illness. In addition to providing referral to local resources, they can assist with information on self-help techniques and advocacy information. They are also a resource for information on accommodating people with mental health-related disabilities in international exchange. Their information is available in English and Spanish.

### **World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation**

Department of Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences, University of Athens.

Zografou Community Mental Health Center.

42 Davaki-Pindou St.

15773 Athens. Greece.

Tel: +30 210 7481174 / 7718320

Fax: +30 210 7481174

Email: [madianos@nurs.uoa.gr](mailto:madianos@nurs.uoa.gr) Web: <http://www.wapr.info/>

The exclusive mission of the World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation (WAPR) is to improve the quality of life of individuals and families throughout the world affected by disabling mental illnesses. Currently WAPR has 86 chapters worldwide who are representatives of consumers, families and voluntary organizations.

### **World Federation for Mental Health**

12940 Harbor Drive, Suite 101

Woodbridge, VA 22192

Tel: (703) 494-6515

Fax: (703) 494-6518

Email: [info@wfmh.com](mailto:info@wfmh.com)

Web: <http://www.wfmh.org/>

World Federation for Mental Health, with members and contacts in 112 countries on six continents, has responded to the international mental health crisis through its role as a worldwide grassroots advocacy and public education organization. The Federation's organizational and individual membership includes mental health workers of all disciplines, consumers/users of mental health services, family members and concerned citizens.