

Student Guide to Health and Wellness



The staff of the Health Services and Counseling Services Offices welcome you, and hope that you find this year successful and rewarding. We know that to be at your best academically, you need to be feeling good, both physically and emotionally.

This guide was prepared in order to provide you information designed to keep you healthy during your time at Fitchburg State, and, in the event you do develop a medical or mental health problem, to offer suggestions and referral information to help you get back on track.

We want you well; so please, if you have any questions about a health or mental health concern you're having, don't hesitate to call us:

HEALTH SERVICES OFFICE—978-665-3216
Russell Towers, Ground Floor

COUNSELING SERVICES OFFICE—978-665-3152
Hammond Building, 3rd Floor

An Ounce of Prevention...

The most common reasons for visits to the Health Services Office are for “typical” illnesses: a cold, the flu, a “bug,” etc. Whereas these illnesses are considered “minor” in the grand scheme of things, many students find that life gets much more difficult when having to battle one or more of these concerns during the semester. The good news, however, is that the likelihood of contracting many of these typical illnesses can be dramatically reduced by some good hygiene and self-care practices. Consider:

- Frequent, thorough handwashing is the most effective activity for disease prevention. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and before you eat. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are a reasonable substitute, as necessary, at those times when soap and water may be unavailable.
- Practice good “cough and sneeze etiquette.” Cover up all coughs and sneezes, preferably into your elbow (not your hand).
- Your hands can carry viruses, so avoid touching your hands to your face, eyes and nose.
- Don’t share food, drinks, or cigarettes with anyone. Don’t share a bed with anyone when you are ill as you can more easily spread your germs this way.
- Get plenty of sleep (6-8 hours a night is typical) and avoid pulling “all-nighters.” College students, unfortunately, are not known for very good sleep hygiene; appropriate rest, however, is necessary for optimal functioning of the body, brain, and immune system. If you are having difficulty with sleep, consider the following:
 - Don’t go to bed unless you are sleepy.
 - If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed and find something to do that will help you relax. You can return to bed when you feel sleepy.
 - Avoid taking naps if you can.
 - Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, including weekends. An erratic sleep schedule is often responsible for difficulties with insomnia.
 - Limit your caffeine intake including coffee, cola, tea, and energy drinks. Avoid drinks with caffeine after lunch and late in the day.
 - Exercise daily, and try to do it earlier in the day.
 - Get organized and keep up with your studies so they are not keeping you awake.
 - Meeting with the Health Services Office to discuss the problem.
- Consider getting a flu vaccine. Flu vaccines are typically available on campus in early October, and announcements will be made regarding how to obtain one. Students are strongly advised to get immunized. College life puts you in close proximity with a lot of people (e.g., residence hall living, team athletics, classes), so good immunization practices protect both you and those around you.

The “Freshman Fifteen”

The term “Freshman Fifteen” refers to the excess weight that freshman may put on during their first year of college. “All you can eat” cafeteria style dining halls, excess portions, and insufficient exercise tend to be the contributing factors. Also implicated are fat-laden late-night snacks, or the excess (empty) calories in alcohol.

The good news is that you can take control of your situation, and successfully manage your weight in college, by making sure that you eat a healthy, balanced diet and obtain adequate exercise to burn off the calories that you have consumed to maintain a healthy weight.

What constitutes a healthy meal plan? It is recommended that you take in a balance of protein, carbohydrates, vegetables, fruits and milk at every meal. If you need assistance in creating a personalized approach to healthy eating and physical activity, check out this free government website: www.MyPyramid.gov.

Many of us don’t know what a serving size looks like because portions have been “super sized” over the years. Visual cues can help you remember the size for each food group portion.

- **GRAINS:** Two servings of spaghetti is the size of a baseball. Men and women should have between 6-8 servings of grains a day. One serving is equal to 1 slice of bread, ½ English muffin, ½ cup of rice or spaghetti or 1 pancake. A big plate of spaghetti is probably equal to 3 cups of pasta and this is equal to a full days serving of grains.
- **VEGETABLES:** One serving of cooked vegetables is the size of your fist. On average you should have a minimum of 2 ½ servings a day of green leafy and/or orange colored vegetables like a big salad, sweet potatoes, or winter squash. In general, students eat too many fried potatoes and not enough of the green leafy and orange vegetables.
- **MEAT:** One serving of meat, fish or nuts equals one ounce. For example: one slice of turkey lunchmeat, one tablespoon of peanut butter the size of a golf ball, or one egg is a serving size of protein. Men and women should only have between 5 to 6 ½ ounces per day. People usually eat more than 1 serving of meat at a time. A serving of meat should be no larger than the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand, equaling 4 ounces (such as a small chicken breast or a 4-ounce hamburger). A “supersized” 12-ounce steak is equal to 2 days worth of protein; eaten on a regular basis, this can lead to heart disease and obesity.
- **DAIRY:** One serving is 8 ounces of milk, equal to half of a 16-ounce Holmes Dining Hall glass. Three servings a day, of preferably nonfat or 1% milk, yogurt or cheese, is recommended. Women need the equivalent of 4 glasses of milk a day to build strong bones and avoid osteoporosis in their old age.

Some Guidance Regarding Sexual Activity

Consider the following for choosing healthy dining options on campus:

- Check out all of the available options first, before deciding on what to eat
- The “Balanced Choices” area in Holmes Dining Hall tends to offer healthier selections
- Makes your plate as colorful as you can (typically, this ensures a variety of the right food groups)
- Drink water or milk, not soda, which is loaded with high fructose corn syrup
- Avoid using a tray in the dining hall; this will help you to appropriately limit the food you can take (and thus eat)
- Limit your intake of fried chicken patties, hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza, and french fries to once a week
- Choose turkey or chicken over bologna and salami
- Salad bars are great for fresh vegetables, but limit the croutons, crumbled bacon, egg, and cheese. Choose oil and vinegar or a low fat salad dressing. Cottage cheese or turkey make for excellent protein choices.

And when snacking, consider the following healthier choices:

- Unbuttered popcorn
- Pretzels
- Low fat yogurt with fruit
- Almonds in small amounts
- Raisins
- Fresh fruit

Of course, a healthy diet is part of the weight management picture; ensuring you get sufficient exercise is the other. The Fitchburg State University Recreation Center has a variety of individual and group exercise options, intramural choices, and fitness classes. Check out these resources at www.fitchburgstate.edu/recreation. During those times you can't get down to the Rec, consider:

- Walk to class when you can... yes... even McKay.
- Take the stairs when able; avoid the elevator
- Some vigorous dancing to your favorite tunes... for 20 minutes or so... works nicely for both exercise and stress relief. Enjoy.

Certainly, not all college students are sexually active, but some are. It is hoped that if you do choose to engage in sexual activity, you do so safely, knowledgeably and respectfully.

- Abstinence (not having vaginal, anal or oral sex) is the best method of preventing a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or an unplanned pregnancy. You can choose not to have sex now, even if you've had sex before.
- Talking can keep you safe. While it's not always a comfortable conversation, try to ask your partner (including “friends with benefits,” etc.) if they have any known history of infections or drug use. It is better to have these conversations before you become involved, before anything happens. Check out your partner's skin for any signs of an infection such as a rash, bumps or sores. If you notice anything that worries you, don't have sex.
- If you choose to have sex, you are encouraged to keep a supply of condoms with you and be comfortable using them. Remember, if you or your partner has a problem initially unrolling it, do not flip it over and reuse (there is the possibility of sperm, viruses, and bacteria on the outside, that can easily be passed to your partner). Free supplies of condoms are generally available in Health Services or the Office of Housing and Residential Services.
- Alcohol and sex are a lousy mix. If you have been drinking, it can make it more difficult to set sexual limits, and an intoxicated person cannot legally give consent to sexual activity. Sex after drinking also decreases the likelihood of taking appropriate precautions against STIs and pregnancy.
- If concerned about the possibility of an STI, the Office of Health Services offers confidential testing. Testing tends to be nonintrusive and painless. Call (x3216) to make an appointment, and don't urinate for 2 hours prior to your appointment so that a specimen can be obtained. Certainly, if symptoms such as pain or burning when urinating, genital itching, unusual discharge, or sores, bumps or blisters appear, contact Health Services immediately.
- Pregnancy is an added, and often unwanted challenge. There are a variety of methods of contraception available, many of which are offered by the Health Services Office. Please contact the office to have a discussion regarding what method may be right for you.
- Birth control and STI prevention are men's issues, too. The Office of Health Services encourages all sexually-active men to take responsibility for their own health and the health of their partner. Men should know that the Office is equipped to provide (non-invasive) testing and counseling for men in the area of reproductive health.

If You Do Get Sick: Guidelines for Getting Well Again

THE COMMON COLD

SYMPTOMS: runny nose, nasal and chest congestion, sore throat, possible low grade fever

TREATMENT: Antibiotics will not be helpful since “colds” are caused by a virus, not by bacteria. Get plenty of sleep, and drink lots of fluids (herbal and regular tea with honey can help soothe your throat). The variety of available “over the counter” treatments may help manage the symptoms, but won’t necessarily shorten the 7-10 day typical course of a cold. Be very careful with such medications; you need to read the labels. Many of these drugs contain Tylenol and recent recommendations are to take no more than 650 milligrams of Tylenol every 4-6 hours to avoid overdosing and liver damage. Avoiding smoking (and considering quitting for good) will help manage a cold, as well.

SEASONAL INFLUENZA

SYMPTOMS (not an exhaustive list): muscle aches, weakness, extreme tiredness, high fever, chills, headache, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea).

Symptoms of the flu can appear similar to the common cold, however they tend to be worse in severity. If you develop these symptoms and you have a pre-existing medical condition like asthma, diabetes, Crohn’s Disease, or are pregnant, please schedule an appointment for an evaluation at Health Services.

TREATMENT: Similar to the common cold (see above). If you have a preexisting condition, an anti-viral medication may be an option. If you are developing any shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or your fever has persisted for more than 3-4 days, you too should schedule an appointment in Health Services for an evaluation.

NAUSEA AND VOMITING

There is a wide range of things that cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Some of the more common ones are the stomach “bug” (usually viral), food poisoning (usually bacterial), drinking too much alcohol, some medications, and emotional upset.

The main concerns when it comes to nausea, or persistent vomiting and diarrhea are dehydration and electrolyte imbalance.

SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION/ELECTROLYTE IMBALANCE: Thirst, dry mouth, dark or decreased amount of urine, increased pulse rate, irregular heartbeat, fatigue, headache, dizziness, muscle weakness or twitching

TREATMENT: For the first 3-4 hours after vomiting ends, you need to give your stomach a rest, which means do not eat solid foods. An hour or so after vomiting has ceased, you can begin with one small sip of water every 10 minutes. You can also try one sip of flat soda (stir to release the carbonation), diluted Gatorade, or tea with sugar. Don’t try to drink in your normal manner because you will restart the vomiting. Continue with sips of clear fluids for the next 24 hours. If the vomiting returns, stop drinking to see if you can control the vomiting. Once the vomiting has slowed, you can restart with small sips of clear fluids.

On day 2 of your recovery, you can slowly add small amounts of easily digested foods such as dry toast, dry cereal, crackers, or chicken soup. On day 3, you can slowly advance to eating “regular” bland foods.

Chartwells Food Services offers “Sick Trays.” If you are too sick to go to the Holmes Dining Hall, a tray can be brought to your room by a friend. You need to send your friend with your One Card and a note you have obtained from Health Services or your Resident Assistant, and a tray will be provided for you.

Visit the Health Services Office for an evaluation if you develop symptoms of dehydration, or if the gastrointestinal symptoms persist for more than 2 days.

URINARY TRACT INFECTION

Urinary tract infections are a common medical problem, occurring more frequently among women than men. If you develop symptoms, you should schedule a visit at Health Services to be evaluated.

SYMPTOMS: Frequent urination in small amounts, pain with urination, back pain, fever, or visible blood on toilet tissue.

TREATMENT: A visit to Health Services will include a simple urinary analysis (at no charge to the student). If the test is positive for an infection, Health Services staff will prescribe antibiotics. Drinking lots of water and cranberry juice can help to flush your kidneys. Refraining from sexual activity is also a good idea, until you have been examined and treated.

Your Mental Health: Feeling Good and Functioning Well

It is common for people to talk about their college years as “the best years of your life.” For many of us, that was and is true. However, as well-intentioned as such a sentiment may be, it may inadvertently serve to add to feelings of isolation and “abnormality” when a student experiences struggles during their time at college.

Please know this: most students, at some point during their time at college, will experience some difficulties with mood, stress, anxiety, interpersonal relationships, grief, or a variety of other mental health concerns. Creating and maintaining good habits in the area of “self-care”, recognizing the early signs of a “problem,” and using the support available here at Fitchburg State University will minimize the negative impact such concerns will have on your ability to be successful.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE: THE BASICS

Much like the relationship between self-care and physical illness, there is a strong relationship between how well students care for themselves psychologically, and the likelihood of experiencing a serious episode of emotional difficulty. Consider the following:

- Time management. Often, our failure to effectively manage the limited time and resources that we have leads to a variety of “other” problems... stress, frustration, and anger all come to mind. Though there’s more to it, two “quick tips” in this area would be to get and use a planner, and to consciously recognize that being a full-time student is exactly that.
- Stress management. Though we all respond to it differently, research indicates that we all have the capacity to experience “stress.” Simply put, stress is a (usually) unpleasant feeling that the demands upon us exceed our ability and resources to live up to them. Acute or chronic stress can lead to a host of difficulties, including physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties), behavioral symptoms (e.g., avoidance, sleep disturbance), cognitive symptoms (e.g., concentration impairment) and emotional symptoms (e.g., irritability, anxiety). Managing stress is far too large a topic to undertake here, but consider the following: exercise, eating right, managing time effectively, and working “enjoyable” activities (i.e., appropriately “rewarding” yourself) into a busy schedule.
- Healthy interpersonal relationships. The vast majority of us function better when we can give and receive support from people we care about. Do not take good interpersonal relationships for granted; make every effort to surround yourself with people whom you care about, and who care about you. Nurture these relationships with time and energy.

- Exercise. As discussed above, working good exercise habits into your life while at college serves multiple purposes, including maintaining overall physical health, maintaining mental health and emotional well-being, and improving self-esteem, energy, and concentration. Work to find an exercise program that you can commit to, stick with, and get some benefit from.
- Mindfulness and reflection. Increasingly, our world has become “busy.” The pace of life seems faster and faster each year, and “immediacy” is all around us (e.g., cell phones). Many mental health professionals suggest that for optimal emotional well-being, we need to “take down time” to slow down, and consciously pay attention to what is going on inside, and outside of us. Practices vary, but “mindfulness” can be as little as a few moments to breathe and take note of your surroundings, or as much as a regular program of meditation or yoga. Experiment with what might work for you.
- Using the support around you. One of the advantages of a residential campus like Fitchburg State University is the fact that there are a lot of people and programs around to provide company, companionship, and support when needed. Please don’t hesitate to use the resources that have been put in place for you. Typically, people report that “taking the first step” is the hardest; things get easier after that.

Common Mental Health Concerns of College Students

DEPRESSION AND MOOD PROBLEMS

Changes in mood are a normal part of life. Having a range of emotional experiences (including unpleasant ones, such as sadness) should be considered important, if not essential, for psychological well-being. Sometimes, however, feelings of sadness, disappointment, and frustration “cross the line” into depression, a more problematic (and potentially debilitating) condition that can affect college students and others.

Some symptoms of depression include:

- Overwhelming sadness
- Mood swings
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Withdrawal from other people and new situations
- Loss of interest in activities which were once of interest
- Feelings of being a failure
- Being pessimistic about the future
- Thoughts of suicide

Take depression seriously. Seek help if you should begin to notice any of the above symptoms. The College’s Counseling Services Office is a good place to start. Be on the lookout for others around you that may be suffering, but have not sought help as yet.

Particularly if symptoms include thoughts of suicide, get help for yourself or somebody else immediately. Contact the Housing staff, the Counseling Services staff, or the Campus Police. Call the following hotline if needed: 1-800-273-TALK.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

Anxiety, like other emotional states, is a normal, commonly-experienced part of life. In reality, we would not be as effective as we are as human beings were it not for the “mobilizing” effects of anxiety. For some, however, anxiety becomes a limiting (as opposed to useful) component of one’s functioning. Problematic anxiety may take the form of:

- Unpleasant physical symptoms (e.g., headache, gastrointestinal problems)
- Sleep difficulty
- Irritability
- Panic attacks (strong, overwhelming feelings of fear)
- Avoidance of certain situations or activities

If symptoms associated with anxiety have become unpleasant or intolerable, or if anxiety has you “limiting” your life in certain ways (e.g., avoiding social situations, struggling to complete tasks), there is help available. Again, the Counseling Services Office would be a good place to have a conversation about how to take your life back from anxiety symptoms.

SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

College is an incredibly social place. For some, “fitting in,” and developing meaningful relationships is a challenge, while for others, occasionally finding time to be away from so many people becomes the goal. Either way, your success at Fitchburg State will, to some degree, be dependent on the quality of the relationships you create with others here.

Particularly if you’re new to the College, feelings of being “lost” socially are not uncommon. Fortunately, for the vast majority of students, such feelings are very much temporary. If the struggle continues for some time, by all means seek some help (e.g., the Counseling Services Office), but some general tips include:

- Sticking with it; try not to become overly discouraged if your social life doesn’t immediately become what you would hope
- Being visible; it’s incredibly difficult for people to get to know you if you’re hidden away in your residence hall room most of the time
- Try getting to know smaller groups of people first. Suitemates, intramural teams, clubs, and study groups, for example, all tend to be less overwhelming than say, Holmes Dining Hall during lunch.

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE USE

Unfortunately, the perception of the strong relationship between a residential college experience and heavy alcohol use is neither accurate nor particularly helpful. Over recent decades, the media has fueled an image of being “away at school” as one where binge drinking is expected, tolerated, and “what goes on.” The consequence of this misperception, sadly, is profoundly negative for some students. Students at Fitchburg State University should know the following:

- The College and community will not “look the other way” with respect to alcohol and/or substance abuse. Students are routinely held to account for their behavior, including behavior which violates College policy and law with respect to alcohol.
- Binge drinking has reliably been shown to be associated with, among other things:
 - Decreased academic performance
 - Increased risk of victimization, and
 - Problems with intimate and other relationships.
- For some, alcohol and/or substance abuse becomes a serious health issue. There is help available. Consider reaching out, for you or someone you care about, to the Counseling Services Office for a private and confidential discussion about your concerns.

TAKING CARE OF ONE ANOTHER

We are a community of learners at Fitchburg State University. This means a number of things, among them that we care about and respect one another enough to notice if there’s something not right, and that we find the courage to reach out and help if we can. Please, recognize and embrace your role in our community, and put yourself in a position to help a fellow student. If you have concerns about someone’s well-being, have a conversation with them, or have a conversation with one of the professionals here at the University. Your assistance in this regard is very much appreciated. Thanks.



Offices of Health Services and Counseling Services