



Mental Fitness Workout: 5-Step Plan – Student Edition (V1.2)

1. Goals/vision

Spend some time thinking about what you are hoping to get out of your time here at Flinders.

What do you want to achieve in the next couple of months, in the next year, in the next couple of years?

What kind of person do you want to be?

Who are the people that you admire and want to be like? Why?

2. Feed your mind/brain

Give your mind/brain the best chance of success by providing the right conditions for it to succeed. This includes good quality regular sleep, high quality nutrition and regular physical activity. These three pillars of health are just as good for your mind as they are for your body.

Aim for 7-9 hours per night of **sleep** (only a small number of people can function on less).

Aim for regular sleep, that is, the same schedule each night if possible. Try to establish regular sleep and wake times. Get some sun exposure in the early morning (20 minutes is plenty). Establish a schedule that is consistent with your own rhythms (e.g. morning or evening person), assuming this fits with other things like work/family etc. Upon waking, focus on activities that set you up well for the day such as exercise, writing, study, self-reflection, reading, meditation.

In terms of sleep hygiene (which facilitates you falling asleep) try to create a good sleep environment: comfortable bed, low light levels, cool temperature, control noise and keep the bedroom for sleeping and intimacy only.

Create a consistent sleep routine: light meal, decreasing light levels, relaxing activities (e.g. bath, reading), avoid stimulants (e.g. coffee) and strenuous exercise (although for some people exercise helps them sleep).

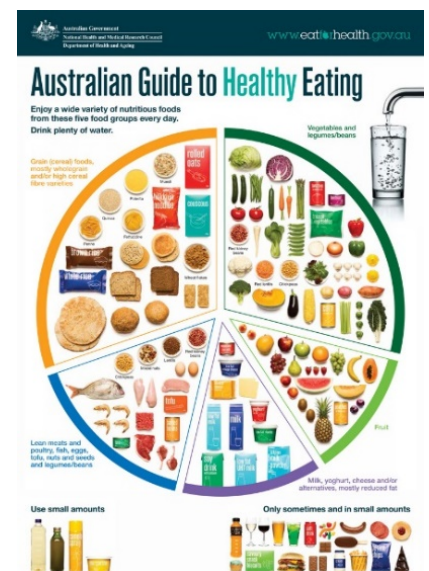
In terms of **nutrition**, eat regular small meals to ensure consistent blood sugar. Use the guidelines on <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/> in terms of types of food and quantities. If you had a healthy diet in your country of origin, look where possible to recreate that diet.

If you suspect you have different dietary needs (e.g. IBS) then you need to speak to a dietician. You can access one of these by speaking to your GP.

If you struggle with depression, consider looking into variants of the Mediterranean diet - <https://foodandmoodcentre.com.au/media/smiles-trial/>

To help save money and time when it comes to food, look into developing a core set of meals that you can prepare cheaply, quickly, and/or in bulk. For example, I make the same cheap lunch everyday of pasta, vegetables and cheese.

Whilst there is no 'safe' level of alcohol use, a couple of drinks in social situations is most likely to be a positive thing. Outside of that, minimise alcohol use.



Physical activity is the third basic pillar of health. You can find out more at <https://bit.ly/2L8LsPA>

There are three main goals when it comes to physical activity:

1. 150-300 minutes moderate physical activity per week (brisk walking, swimming, bike riding)
2. Break up sedentary behaviour during the day as much as possible, that is, every 30-45 minutes
3. Muscle strengthening exercises (e.g. weights, body weight exercises) twice a week

Speak to a GP if you think the requirements are different for you (e.g. illness, injury etc).

3. Develop your academic skills

Tertiary study is a whole new level of study. Even very good students will need to learn new study strategies.

Start by taking the time to understand how you currently study by reflecting on the following questions:

1. How do I study? What techniques or methods do I use?
2. Why do I study this way? Where did I learn to study this way?
3. Does it work? Are these methods working here at Uni?
4. What (if any) changes are you already trying to make. How are they going?

Having analysed your existing study strategies, it is then time to make positive changes to your study habits.

Scheduling (i.e. mapping out clearly what needs to be done when) is a good starting point. Use a diary or wall planner and mark out specific times during the week for study, work, leisure and all your lectures/tutorials. Mark clearly all the due dates for assignments and exams so there are no surprises. For a full-time study load, you should be studying (including lectures/tutorials) approximately 36-38 hours per week.

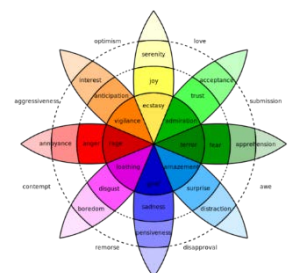
Learn and use evidence-based study strategies, the ones found by cognitive psychologists to help people learn quicker and more effectively. We track these in our evidence-based study tips guide – <https://bit.ly/2WQFOT1> . Also add sites like <http://www.learningscientists.org/> and <https://collegeinfo geek.com/> to your reading list.

Modify your environment to make study more rewarding. Set up a good study space - <https://blogs.flinders.edu.au/student-health-and-well-being/2018/07/11/create-study-space-makes-want-study/> and use the attention restoration benefits of nature (green-space, animal interaction) to take relaxing breaks. Try to minimise sedentary time by breaking up your study with regular movement – every 30 to 45 minutes.

Finally, add a bit of social to your study by starting a study group or getting a study buddy. Pick those in your course who appear confident and driven and ask them if they are interested in starting a study group. Be prepared for them to say no. If they say yes, there are multiple guides online for how to manage a study group. This one isn't too bad - <https://www.muhenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/about/arc/strategies/Guide%20to%20Effective%20Study%20Groups.pdf>

4. Manage your emotions

Emotions and feelings are powerful motivators and guides for behaviour. Hence it isn't feasible (or desirable) to experience only positive emotions/feelings. However, it is reasonable to get better at cultivating positive emotions and better at managing unpleasant emotions. Learn how to elicit positive emotions here <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/>. Do an online course to learn how to manage difficult emotions here- <https://thiswayup.org.au/>. Plan enjoyable activities every week and identify and implement activities into your schedule that genuinely help you unwind and relax. When you are pushing your brain hard, it needs rest time.



5. For more mental fitness content visit www.flinders.edu.au/mentalfitness