



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* ADELAIDE

# **STARTING WELL DOING BETTER**

**Student Life - Counselling Support**

## **Want to get off to a Good Start?**

The tricks for improving and maintaining academic performance are no different from the tricks that athletes use. Athletes are practical, they like to keep it simple. Think of yourself as an intellectual athlete. You are going to run a marathon this year but there will probably be a few sprints involved as well. What are the useful tricks for getting off to a good start?

### **Eat right**

- Eat for energy
- Eat to maximise concentration
- Eat to minimise mood swings
- Eat little and often.

Small meals of the right amount of proteins, vitamins and slow release sugars (wholegrain breads and cereals, fruit and veg) tend to increase your metabolic rate, speed up your body, improve your concentration and reduce moodiness.

### **Exercise right**

Increase your metabolic rate by getting organised exercise a couple of times a week and by getting incidental exercise each day.

Incidental exercise is available at zero cost – climbing stairs, parking the car at a distance from the lecture theatre, riding your bike to uni etc.

Exercise right up to and during the exam period as a physical outlet and an aid to concentration.

Exercise is proven to be a good stress release and mood moderator.

### **Balance right**

Recreation, making friends, having fun will also improve your concentration, reduce stress and provide a very necessary balance in your life. Marking in "Time Out" on your timetable is another of your essential motivational techniques. Your time out can be spent simply or by pursuing a different form of mental challenge from your area of study. Variety is the spice of life.

## **Sleep right**

A reasonable night's sleep is essential for keeping on top on things. Sure you will have a big night out occasionally or sometimes need to study later than usual from time to time. You're OK if your sleep patterns are usually regular and you get 7-8 hours sleep on most nights. There are some individual differences in this so get to know your own sleep needs really well.

If getting to sleep is a problem follow some or all of these suggestions:-

Use an athletic slow down technique for 20 minutes before going to sleep. Move your body slowly while getting ready for bed, get into bed very slowly, using the slowness of you body to let your mind know that there is minimal energy required. Focus your mind on simple information like the contact between your head and the pillow, the contact between your body and the mattress, focus on the rhythm of your outward breath. You can control slowing down and getting really comfortable and then just let the point at which you drift into sleep take care of itself. You are never consciously aware of that exact point any way - so let it take care of itself. Enjoy being comfortable and relaxed.

- Avoid vigorous exercise closer than 4 hours before sleep time – if this is not possible then make sure you give yourself the 20 minutes slow down before you go to sleep.
- Cut out caffeine after mid-afternoon (coffee, tea, cola, chocolate).
- Think about cutting down your nicotine, especially after you eat tea.
- Regular meals and increased fitness will improve your sleep.
- Refer to the Counselling Service pamphlet "Sleep Improve It" for further information.

## **Goal setting**

Athletes usually have an idea of where they want to go, especially if they are running a marathon, otherwise they are likely to take a wrong turn! It's not always possible to know the pathway ahead in detail so set small goals – a day, a week a few weeks at a time.

Use a whiteboard, a hand written chart or a PC to record your progress. Athletes' bedroom walls tend to be covered with progress charts, graphs and timelines. Keep track of your progress and pat yourself on the back for your progress and achievements. Positive steps, even small ones, must be acknowledged. Remember the athletes only do this because it works; because it really improves motivation.

### **Positive mental rehearsal**

Athletes know how to prepare themselves to run their race as they want to run it. No athlete who wants to do well will be in the starting position and thinking about past failures or doubting their ability. They are not thinking: " I don't think this is going to go too well" or " I may get a stitch and throw up half-way down the track!" It can be useful to think of times in the past when you may have 'pushed through' a difficult task or challenge.

Why rehearse for disaster? Practise the performance you want.

So if you want to get off to a good start

Want to do better

Want to stay on top

Take control of your training and do as well as you can on the day!

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

**Counselling Support**

**Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building**

**The University of Adelaide**

**Ph: +61 8 8313 5663**

**After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197**

This pamphlet was written by Flinders University Health and Counselling Services and has been reprinted as part of a collaborative project between the counselling services at Flinders and Adelaide University. Modified by Student Life Counselling Support.

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