



WELLBEING

Sensory Coping

Being in a post-secondary environment can present a number of challenges for students on the spectrum, one of the biggest being sensory overload.

Specifically, this can include:

- The flicker and brightness of fluorescent lighting
- The large flow of people coming and going and having to be in crowded places
- The noise in certain environments on campus including lost of people talking, music and other sounds
- The scents generated in various environments such as the cafeteria

Of course, there are ways you can cope and deal with these situations, some of which involve self-advocacy.

These include:

- Sending a letter or speaking to your professor in person to request the lights to be dimmed down a bit so it is not problematic for you
- Requesting to be in a separate, smaller room for tests and exams
- Meeting virtually with classmates when you are tired or feeling overwhelmed
- Finding quiet places to study like the library where you can take a break from outside stresses and sensations
- Using noise-cancelling headphones or playing binaural beats/white noise in your earbuds while you study
- Finding work spaces that don't have problematic scents, if possible
- Considering attending a smaller institution or community college in your first year

Nutrition

It is important to maintain good nutrition, even though you may love the newfound freedom to eat whatever you want! The fact that there typically are fast-food places all over campus or nearby may make it hard to make healthy food choices and to eat a balanced diet with foods from all the food groups, including fruits and vegetables.

Maintaining good nutrition helps students maintain a healthy weight, but doing so also helps students sleep more restfully at night, improves a student's mood, improves a student's ability to manage stress, decreases anxiety improves academic performance.

These ways include the following:

- Combine eating well with exercise, which - paired together - help to maintain a healthy weight, improve mood, improve overall health, and contribute to a restful sleep. This can be accomplished through the school's recreational centres
- Pay attention to the colours of food; and put more red, orange, and green fruits and vegetables than processed foods, grains, and starchy vegetables on your plate
- Try to eat at least five servings of fruit and vegetables every day



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- Write a healthy meal plan that includes healthy food options such as fresh (and colourful!) fruits and vegetables, healthy dining centre meals, lunches that you can take with you, filling breakfasts, and snacks that are low in carbohydrates, as well as designated times to eat. And stick to it!
- Make water your drink of choice and avoid drinks with high sugar and caffeine content
- Avoid fast food when possible and if you cannot try to choose healthier options, such as ordering a small burger instead of a large one or ordering a side salad instead of fries
- If you cannot order smaller portions, try saving some for later or sharing with a friend
- Do not be surprised or disappointed with yourself if, after following all these suggestions, you do end up gaining a few pounds - even as much as 10 or 15
- "The Freshman 15" is common but by following some of the suggestions listed here, you will have a much easier time managing and limiting the weight gain; and even losing those extra pounds later on

Some people on the spectrum may have rigid food preferences or aversions. This can affect their ability to practice good nutrition while in post-secondary school. Fortunately, there are ways to work around this, try some of these tips:

- Taking gradual steps towards trying new foods
- Paying attention to the textures of foods, realizing that it can be simply the texture of a food that causes a food aversion
- Making use of the choices and control that they have in eating away from home, within healthful limits
- Learning to adapt to the foods that are available at the post-secondary school that they are attending.

Recreation

While studying and learning are the focal point of any post-secondary experience, you should not let them be the only thing you do either. Without some kind of balance, especially in the form of physical activity, school will become more difficult and your lifestyle more unhealthy. Thankfully, post-secondary institutions offer a number of outlets for recreation so you do not burn out.

These include:

- Getting a membership at your campus gym (if you have one) and working out, doing fitness or dance classes, swimming or running
- Joining a recreational sports group or intermural team in the sport of your choice
- Taking a walk outside between classes, on or off campus



Stress Management



There are inevitable points in one's post-secondary education where schoolwork starts to pile up and with it comes stress. Dealing with stress is an issue for all students so it's important to learn to recognize and manage it before it has a negative impact on your schoolwork, your overall mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression) and reduces your performance in other areas of your life (e.g., finances, relationships).

There are a number ways to cope with stress, try the following tips and see which one works best for you.

Try:

- **FIRST** - learn to recognize when you are actually stressed so you can identify the signs and act on them
- Going for a walk or engaging in other types of recreational exercise when you're stressed
- Asking for extensions on certain assignments if other, bigger ones are making it difficult to finish them on time
- Scheduling your assignments, tests or exams in a planner or calendar to help you organize your workload and see what should be prioritized
- Studying in a quiet space or playing relaxing music (binaural beats, white noise) through your headphones
- Consider participating in a yoga or pilates club if they have one on campus or in your community

Mental Health

Mental health has become a big issue in recent years for young people, especially students with the complicating factors of student loans, balancing work and learning, financial management and overwhelming volumes of schoolwork.

Therefore, it's very important that your mental health is taken into consideration so you can have a successful, happy, healthy post-secondary experience. Talk to counsellors on campus when you need some extra help, they will also be able to direct you to supportive programs on campus.

Physical Health



Just as maintaining good nutrition is important for young people who are in post-secondary school, it is also important that all young people - both those who are on the spectrum and those who are not - maintain good physical and sexual health while they are students in post-secondary school.

Maintaining good physical and sexual health can be accomplished in the following ways:

- Find out where your school's health services centre is located on campus, and what services the centre offers. Even if you never end up using the centre and its



services while you are a student - it is still good to be aware of its existence and what the people working there provide for students

- Make sure you receive all the vaccinations you need as a post-secondary school student - both required and recommended
- Receive the flu vaccine each year. Influenza, or the flu, can be more serious than you may think!
- Wash your hands regularly and well, and use sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizers, or antibacterial hand lotion if you are going to be touching services that are touched by large numbers of students, such as desks and computer lab terminals
- If your roommate is sick, do not handle used tissues, and wipe down commonly used items such as door handles, telephone receivers, and bathroom fixtures

There are services and people both on and off campus who can help you with any physical and sexual health matters.

These services and kinds of people include the following:

Services:

- The school's health services centre (Of course!)
- The school's counselling centre
- The school's chaplains' centre
- The school's security department
- Hospital emergency departments
- Walk-in clinics

People:

- Physicians,
- Pharmacists
- Dentists
- Psychiatrists
- Chiropractors
- Massage therapists
- Nutritionists and dieticians

Sexual Health

In addition to issues with regard to sexual health that are important to all students in post-secondary school, there are issues that are unique to post-secondary school students who are on the spectrum. One of the most important issues is concerning sexual assault.

While one in sixteen men and one in five women overall are sexually assaulted while they are in post-secondary school, post-secondary school students who are on the autism spectrum are actually four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than post-secondary school students who are not on the spectrum.

Therefore, it is important for post-secondary school students who are on the spectrum to know what an example of a healthy sexual relationship is like versus that of an unhealthy sexual relationship.

Features of a healthy sexual relationship include the following:

- Both partners play a role in choosing whether or not they want to be sexually active. If they do choose to be sexually active, they are respectful of each other's wishes, and practice safe sex by using contraception, such as condoms and the birth control pill
- Both partners feel safe and comfortable
- Consent is freely given, without any pressure or coercion (physical, emotional, or psychological); is affirmative; and can be withdrawn at any time



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- Both partners know the signs that consent has not been given; and they know how to practice good consent, and indeed do so
- They understand what sexual assault is, the actions that are considered sexual assault, and who it can happen with

In addition to sexual assault, other issues concerning sexual health that young people - whether they are on the spectrum or not - need to be aware of including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unplanned pregnancy.

With regards to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unplanned pregnancy, you need to know:

- Need to know what sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are
- How STDs are spread, how they can be prevented and the signs and symptoms of various types of STDs
- How important it is to talk to their partners about condoms, STDs, and if they have been diagnosed with an STD

Concerning unplanned pregnancy, you need to know:

- How an unplanned pregnancy can occur and be prevented
- What the signs of pregnancy are and what to do if they experience these signs
- What their options are with regards to whether or not they will continue the pregnancy

The school's health services centre can provide young people with answers and advice regarding all the important information to know about STDs and unplanned pregnancy mentioned above.

Mental Health Supports

Mental health supports on campus can include:

- Mental health counsellors
- Disability Centre staff
- Learning centre staff
- Psychologists and Psychiatrists
- Physicians and school nurses
- Friends
- Faith-based groups (e.g., pastors, rabbis)
- Peer Mentors
- Resident Advisors (RAs)

For example, they can provide counselling (of course!); they can help you with management of:

- Time
- Stress
- Sleep
- Test anxiety
- Procrastination
- Educational & career decisions
- Educational success strategies

People who are in post-secondary school and experiencing mental health issues can work with the people mentioned above who can provide mental health supports by talking and helping them implement the suggestions and strategies.

Building a Support Network

A crucial component to your success in post-secondary education is creating a support network for yourself. This can consist of academic counsellors, disability services representatives, academic advisors, family and even friends; whatever you choose it is best that you have this assembled either before you start classes at your respective institution or immediately after. You may not find that you need that much assistance, but in certain circumstances, it is wise for you to make sure such supports are available.

My support network

- Academic counsellors
- Disability service representatives
- Academic advisors
- Family
- Friends

You can start assembling your network by getting in touch with friends and family, searching the web and combing through the website of your respective institution to find what resources and people are available.

