

Navigating Doctoral Studies: Health and wellbeing

Maintaining a healthy physical and mental wellbeing is important for all in the often busy and hectic modern world that we live in. The highs and lows of completing doctoral studies can lead to neglecting one's own personal wellbeing and subsequently this may have a negative impact on both your physical and mental health. This leaflet provides a handy 'Top 10 Tips' to maintaining your Health and Wellbeing whilst undertaking doctoral studies.

Tip 1 – Mental Health and Wellbeing

Periods of low mental wellbeing is part of normal life. Completing doctoral studies brings additional pressures that may negatively impact on your mental wellbeing. Left unchecked for long periods this may develop into a mental health problem. Recognition of this and working to develop strategies is the first step to maintaining a healthy mental wellbeing.

Tip 2 – Seeking professional support

All universities should provide students with access to Counselling and Mental Health Services, to provide free, confidential and non-judgemental support.

The NHS provides a useful online guide (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>)

Access to formal therapy services can be sought via your GP or as a self-referral. This can be in the form of online, individual or group therapy.

Tip 3 – Peer support

Find likeminded individuals who are on a similar journey to share common experiences with and gain support from them. Connect online via networks such as such as the 'Healthcare Professionals in Research' (HPIR) group on Facebook. Make the most of opportunities to meet peers in person when you can to reduce feelings of isolation.

Tip 4 – Being Active

Activity will benefit both your physical and mental wellbeing. Travel on foot or bike for all or part of your journey from work or university. Utilise study breaks to get away from the computer or lab to take a walk or exercise class. Make the most of discounted student or NHS memberships at either your local gym or university.

Tip 5 – Mindfulness

Making a conscious effort to notice the present moment without dwelling on the past or worrying about the future can have a positive impact on how you view yourself and any problems. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>
Apps, podcasts and books can be used to find and learn different methods to suit your needs. <https://www.headspace.com/>.

Tip 6 – Self-care

Be kind to yourself. Celebrate success and make use of your strengths. Be aware of your limitations and when to seek support. Don't be afraid to say no when being pulled in multiple directions by peers, supervisors and managers. Make time for simple pleasures.

Tip 7 – Take a break

During the day, utilise strategies such as 'Pomodoro' or similar time management techniques to take regular breaks to avoid loss of focus, back pain and eye strain from working in the same seated position for long periods. Use evenings and weekends to have protected time with your family and friends. Take longer breaks utilising annual leave to rest and recuperate.

Tip 8 – Finding the right balance

Time management and priority setting will help to find the balance between work, study, family and personal life.

Where possible maintain passions and interests outside of your work and studies. There will be times when upcoming doctoral deadlines and projects require increased effort and time. Ensure you plan a break to rest following such periods of high intensity.

Tip 9 – Occupational Health

Ensure you are working in a safe and healthy environment and have adaptations made where necessary. Desks can now be flexible for sitting and standing work. Assess screen height and size. Maintain your back health by taking regular breaks from your desk when both sitting or standing still for long periods.

Tip 10 – Identity and Imposter Syndrome

Embarking on a doctoral journey can be daunting. This transition from clinic to academia can lead to a loss of identity. Imposter syndrome is common amongst doctoral students, where you fear you do not have the capability to undertake doctoral work. Gaining reassurance that you are on track through regular contact with your peers and supervisors can be very helpful.

For contact details about your local hub and for further information about **cahpr** please visit our website <https://cahpr.csp.org.uk>

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