

College Health 101: How to stay healthy on campus

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

In the past week, did you order a pizza at 3 a.m.? Nuke ramen noodles more than three times? Go to bed at 6 a.m. two days in a row? Spend more time stressing over your homework than actually doing it?

If you answered “yes” to at least two of the above, chances are you’re a college student in need of a few pointers on staying healthy at school. Whether you live on campus or commute, college is filled with endless opportunities to learn new things, meet new people and explore new places. But with so much on your mind — exams, term papers, extracurricular activities, your social life, living on a budget and possibly even working a part-time job — something’s bound to fall through the cracks. Don’t let it be your health. Many students forget about their health until a nasty bug knocks them off their feet for a few days.

College brings more freedom, but also more responsibility, and maintaining your health is your responsibility. According to data from the American College Health Association, the top five threats to academic performance are stress; a cold, flu or sore throat; sleep difficulties; concerns for friends or family; and depression. In other words, your academic success is strongly linked to your health.

“College is a time of transition for students

and for their parents,” says Alan I. Glass, MD, director of Student Health Services at Washington University in St. Louis. “It’s a time when students transition from somebody else being directly involved with their care to the student being primarily responsible.”

Students should become familiar with the health resources offered by their college, he says, because on-site services can vary greatly by campus.

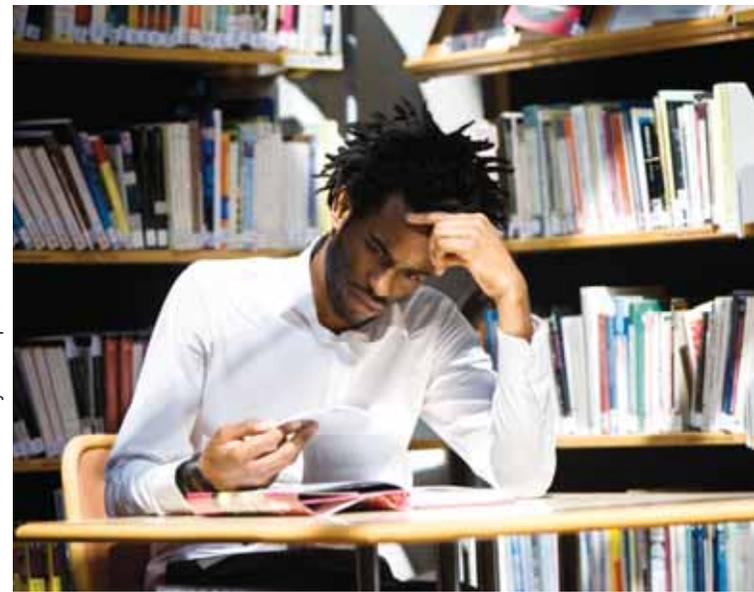
The best way to stay healthy on campus is to practice basic, health-enhancing behaviors, Glass says.

Avoiding freshman weight gain

You want to maintain a healthy diet in college, but how can you when most of the food in the dining hall resembles a recent project from Biology 101? So you’ve been scarfing down mac and cheese in your dorm room, eating lots of fast food, ordering tons of late-night pizzas and feeding your precious dollar bills into the campus vending machines.

By the time they finish their first year of college, many students have packed on some extra pounds. Don’t let it happen to you. Stock your dorm room with healthy snacks like granola bars, fresh fruits and cut-up veggies. When you are in the dining hall, choose fresh fruit and

salad options, whole-grain breads, lean proteins such as fish and chicken, and broiled rather than fried foods. Many colleges allow students to grab an extra piece of fruit for late-night snacking. Drink water or low-fat milk and avoid drinking alcohol. In addition to the other negative consequences of alcohol, it also makes you gain weight.



Photos and art courtesy iStockphoto

>> For more campus health tips, visit www.cdc.gov/family/college

Prevent the flu, watch for stress

Your roommate kept you up all night hacking, sneezing and blowing her nose, and now your throat is starting to feel scratchy.

Colleges are wonderful places, but also notorious breeding grounds for viruses and bacteria. Getting a flu shot in the fall is your best protection against the flu. To reduce your risk of infections, wash your hands often and avoid directly touching surfaces such as doorknobs and elevator buttons.

A combination of stress, insufficient rest, too little exercise and eating habits that would make your mother cringe can also leave you wide open to depression. If you start feeling blue, don’t hesitate to ask for help. Share your feelings with someone you can trust, such as a parent, friend or teacher, and take advantage of campus resources.

Lights out for a healthier life

You stayed up all night laughing and joking with friends. Now it’s 2 p.m. and you’re trying to get some sleep — in your philosophy class.

Too little sleep robs you of your ability to concentrate on exams and papers and can even make you more vulnerable to illness.

When possible, try to get eight or nine hours of sleep at night. Your body will thank you, and so will the folks in that philosophy lecture who’ve been listening to you snore all semester.



Today’s lesson: Get moving

Your 10 a.m. English class just ended, and now you have to hike clear across campus to get to an 11 a.m. chemistry lab. The walk would do you good, but instead you hop on a campus bus. Think again!

Exercise is an important part of staying healthy in college, but with so many demands placed on college students, it can be hard to find time. But you don’t have to be on the college rowing team to incorporate exercise into your daily routine.

“It doesn’t have to be a long time; 15 or 20 minutes every day is enough for most people,” Glass says. “It boils down to participating in an activity you enjoy, and being aware of the services and facilities that your college or university offers related to options for exercising.”

For study breaks, try going to the gym. If you don’t want to go alone, find a workout partner. Or consider joining an intramural team. In addition to getting healthier, you’ll have fun and meet new people.



American Public
Health Association