

# Introduction to Student Health Parents and Families

## Welcome!

Seventy percent of students at UBC tell us parents are one of their main sources of health information! This brochure provides you with some basic information about student well being, common health challenges, and UBC resources for your students.

UBC offers monthly health information in an electronic newsletter: *UBC StudentHealth 101: the Parent Perspective*. Please sign up at [www.students.ubc.ca/parents/campus.cfm](http://www.students.ubc.ca/parents/campus.cfm).

## Student Wellbeing

UBC undergraduate students report their health to be excellent or very good only 54% of the time. University life is stressful and sometimes overwhelming. UBC offers may resources to help students improve and maintain their health, because research shows that wellbeing is essential for academic success.

## Common health conditions

- Mental health conditions such as stress sleep problems, depression and anxiety, concern for troubled family and friends and non-academic use of the internet or computer games are the biggest causes of academic difficulty.
- Cold, flu or sore throat also have a significant impact on a student's academic success.

## H1N1 and UBC

University of British Columbia is preparing for the fall term and, along with the rest of the world we are preparing for an epidemic of H1N1 influenza. Our campus is a gathering place for people from around the globe, so we are bound to experience some illness with H1N1. Any influenza, whether the H1N1 or our regular "seasonal flu", may temporarily incapacitate students. Student Health Service recommends that each of us take personal responsibility to avoid influenza and colds as much as possible by taking some simple hygiene measures: wash your hands with soap and water, use hand sanitizers if water is not available, avoid sharing objects like pens with each other, cough into your sleeve or a tissue that you immediately dispose of, and keep away from classes, work and other public places if you are ill with a fever and other cold and flu symptoms. Parents and students can keep up to date on the University's plan and practical advice on how to limit the likelihood of influenza infection by visiting: [www.ubc.ca](http://www.ubc.ca) and following the H1N1 links.

## Stress and concern for troubled family or friends

- Stress is ubiquitous; 84% of students experience stress.
- 45% of undergraduates report that stress has resulted in lower marks or failed courses.
- 78% report being overwhelmed by all they had to do three or more times since the last academic year.

Because stress is an inevitable part of student life, we encourage students to take proactive steps to reduce its impact and to seek help when it becomes overwhelming. We know that depression, anxiety and overwhelming stress reduce cognitive function and concentration, making it even more difficult to do well in academic work. A balanced life is key to keeping stress in check; adequate sleep, exercise and nutrition improve resilience. Prayer, meditation or quiet retreat restores well being. UBC offers opportunities for exercise, spiritual renewal and

places for quiet reflection. A common stressor for students is concern for close relationships, including family and friends. Being at UBC, sometimes far away from intimates, can foster worry or guilt about not being able to support others. Sometimes stress reaches a distressing level, and support from parents and room/floormates and other friends may not be enough. UBC offers counselling and therapy to help students clarify concerns and strengthen coping strategies through individual and group counselling services and programs.

<http://www.students.ubc.ca/counselling/>

<http://www.students.ubc.ca/health/>

<http://www.rec.ubc.ca/>

<http://chaplains.students.ubc.ca/>

## Sleep problems

65% of UBC undergraduates report that their sleep is inadequate and almost half of those say their sleep problems resulted in a lower mark or failed course. Sleep is a major restorative; without adequate sleep, students perform poorly academically, suffer lower moods and depression and are more prone to accidents and illness. Eighteen year olds usually need nine hours of sleep per night to be well rested. Regular exercise in the day and relaxation in the hour prior to bed are helpful sleep aids.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sleep/>

## Depression and Anxiety

- Depression is reported by 36% of undergraduates, and more than 60% of those report lower marks or a failed course as a result of depression.
- Depression is one of the primary causes of suicidal intentions, about 10% of undergraduates report seriously considering suicide in the past year.

Early detection and resolution of depression is extremely important in reducing the impact of depression. Anxiety, a closely related condition, was diagnosed for 7% of UBC undergraduates. Anxiety can reduce concentration and focus and impair a student's ability to complete assignments, write exams, or even attend classes. Lack of sleep, caffeine and other stimulants and a large academic load only worsen the effects of anxiety. Frequently students who have been diagnosed as depressed or anxious stop their treatment as they start university, hoping for a "fresh start." Typically, the stresses of adjustment to university and the academic workload are very stressful in the first term and often result in relapse. It is wise to remain in treatment for at least the first term of university. UBC offers counselling, medical and psychiatric assessment treatment for students; our goal is to help the students learn to successfully manage depression before it has serious health and academic impacts.

<http://www.students.ubc.ca/counselling/>

<http://www.students.ubc.ca/health/>

<http://www.carmha.ca/publications>

## Internet and computer games

- Overuse of the internet for non-academic communications or games has been reported by 65% of undergraduates with between 60-75% of those reporting lower marks, dropped or failed courses as a result.

Clearly it is important to connect with family and friends, and internet games are often used as a relaxing interlude. However, many students appear to have trouble limiting their use or crave the excitement of online gambling and suffer as a result. We recommend setting limits to non-academic use of the computer and using other, healthier ways to relax—socializing with room mates, kicking a ball or enjoying other physical activities.

<http://www.netaddiction.com/resources/iaindex.htm>

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