

Mental Health Wellness Abroad

A Handbook for Gustavus Adolphus College Students Traveling Abroad



Wellness Abroad – Mental Health

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Overview

Welcome! This page is an overview to help you to think about mental health wellness while studying abroad. It is important for you to be able to experience the same level of learning that you receive at Gustavus Adolphus College while studying abroad. A successful study abroad experience requires preparation, which includes planning so your mental health needs are met while abroad. We want you to get the most out of your academic and cultural experience.

The stress of adjusting to an unfamiliar culture, a different academic environment, and a new system of support services may give rise to a wide array of unexpected and overwhelming reactions. To maintain your emotional health when you travel abroad, consider doing the following things before you travel:

- Familiarize yourself with cultural practices in your destination country by reading, watching videos, or talking to people familiar with the culture.
- Talk to members of your support system in the U.S. about mutual expectations regarding keeping in touch while you are away, so that you continue to have access to established support systems. Consider making a plan to meet with them on Zoom, Google Meet, or another platform. Seeing faces is a good thing!
- Identify and practice realistic self-care and stress management techniques that you will be able to use when you are abroad. The practices that you use in the U.S. may not be practical or safe when you are abroad, so be creative!
- Keep an open mind and try to be adaptive and flexible when things don't go as planned.
- If you think you have experienced or are currently experiencing a mental health issue, consider disclosing this information to the CICE office at Gustavus. Reach out to the campus Counseling Center or Health Services for support and guidance. **Disclosing mental health issues will not prevent you from participating in any program.**

How to Adjust to a New Cultural Experience

- **Have realistic expectations before you go.** Talk to other students who have been to your destination country. Read about other students' experiences adjusting to a new culture by searching "blog culture shock study abroad" online to read about student's real life experiences with culture shock.
- **Connect with others while you are away.** Do not isolate yourself! Share your feelings with a roommate, your host family, your professors, education abroad staff, or your friends or family back home. If you are talking with other American students abroad, be sure you don't get caught up in being negative together! Working through cultural adaptation can be a valuable growth experience—one that strengthens identity and intercultural competence.
- **Reach out and make friends with host country residents.** Connect with people from your host country. Ask about their customs and traditions! Be curious! Understanding more about why certain customs and traditions are important to residents can help broaden your understanding of their culture. They'll likely want to know about your family's customs and traditions as well!
- **Pay attention to good nutrition.** Try new foods! Be adventurous! Keep in mind that you want to maintain a healthy balance of food. Eat regular meals, have snacks on hand between meals, and keep yourself hydrated. If your body isn't nourished, you are going to have a more challenging time focusing in class and enjoying your travels abroad.
- **Exercise and move.** Exercise is usually the first thing people forget about while traveling abroad. However, exercise is calming and helps you re-energize and refocus. You may have to get creative if your host country doesn't have a gym or park nearby. Think about walking or jogging with a friend while you explore your new surroundings. Consider memorizing an exercise routine before you go that will be easy to practice in your room (ex: yoga, Pilates, stretching). Use ordinary objects as weights and do some lunges or arm lifts.
- **Journaling.** Reflective writing can serve as a productive "refuge" while you are abroad, allowing you to gather thoughts and feelings in one safe place. Journaling does not have to be reflective to be useful. You might prefer to write poetry, draw, or paint to express yourself creatively. You can write down the best experiences of the day. Writing down positive things will make you look for positive things each day!
- **Control how much you talk to people back home.** Keep in touch too little, and you will miss people back home due to lack of contact. Talk to them too much, and you will become dependent on them. Set up regular times to talk so they know

when to expect your call (Make sure you consider the time difference when you do this). Also, when internet access is available, consider e-mail or video calling as a way to connect. Start your own blog as a way to share your experiences with friends and family!

- **Explore your host country.** Get out and see the sights safely and with a friend. Don't be afraid to ask questions about where to go and things to do from your host family, professors, or students who are from your destination country.
- **Get out of your room.** Go have a cup of coffee with some friends. Feel free to talk about your feelings; remember it is normal to be homesick. Keep in mind this is an once-in-a-lifetime experience, and the time you spend in your room is time you will never get back. Studying abroad is a great opportunity if you take advantage of it.
- **Make sure you are getting a healthy amount of sleep.** You may have trouble adjusting to time changes and jet lag. Your sleep cycle should start to look like your regular sleep cycle back home after a few days. Be careful about time differences when communicating via the internet – you need regular sleep to function the next day!
- **Don't abuse alcohol or other drugs.** You may be tempted to use drugs or alcohol as a way to cope with your stress or as a way to reduce anxiety in new social situations. This could result in legal problems and may be a threat to your physical and emotional health.
- **Expect to feel depressed sometimes.** Homesickness is natural, especially if you have never been away from home. Don't let thoughts of home occupy you to the point that you are incapable of enjoying the exciting new culture that surrounds you. Try imagining that your thoughts of missing home can be in a container in your mind that you can put away from time to time and revisit when you want to.
- **Expect to feel frustrated and angry at times.** You are bound to have communication problems when you are not using your native language or dialect. Even if they speak English in your host country, communication may be difficult! Moreover, people will do things differently in your new home, and you may have some difficulty adjusting to someone else's habits.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment (a.k.a. “Culture Shock”)

Culture shock is not a psychological disorder, but in fact is a *developmental phase* that is both common and expected when one adjusts in a cross-cultural context. Culture shock is perfectly natural.

Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes. When a person struggles through such a challenge and is able to adjust, the person grows and matures.

Culture shock can result from differences related to:

- Food
- Health
- Relationships
- Finances
- Transport
- Communication
- Worldviews or values
- Academic Demands

Many students are unprepared for the intense feelings that accompany studying in a different culture. These intense feelings can affect your emotional well-being, including:

- Mood
- Stress Level
- Behavior
- Identity Development

In addition, the process of adjusting to a new culture can aggravate preexisting concerns or challenges you may have been managing quite well at home.

Most students expect to quickly adapt to the new culture—and they need to adjust rapidly if they are to effectively meet the academic demands placed upon them. However, the many cultural differences that seem exciting to them at first, can also be distressing and quickly lead to feelings of misunderstanding, loneliness, and culture shock.

Symptoms of Culture Shock

Possible symptoms of culture shock are listed below. If you continue to experience these symptoms for a long period of time, and/or these symptoms begin to impact your functioning (school, work, family), please consider seeking help.

- Chronic physical symptoms (e.g., headache, stomach ache)
- Sadness
- Difficulty studying or working
- Frequent crying
- Nervousness
- Relationship stress
- Feeling sick often
- Irritability/anger/frustration
- Withdrawal from others
- Extreme homesickness
- Intense feelings of loyalty to native culture
- Over- or under-eating
- Boredom
- Excessive sleep
- Poor academic performance

Such reactions are normal responses to unfamiliar situations and are to be expected under the circumstances. They are usually transitory—lasting a couple of days or weeks—and do not imply mental illness or an inability to cope. Nevertheless, there are occasions when the experience of culture shock can stir up deeper emotional issues.

Working Through Culture Shock and Homesickness

Going abroad requires that you adjust to the same sorts of things as if you would move to another part of the United States, such as being away from family and friends, living in an unfamiliar environment, meeting new people, adjusting to a different climate, and so on. These changes alone could cause high stress levels, but you will also be going through cultural adjustments and you may experience “culture shock.” Your host country’s unspoken rules of social interaction are going to be different from what you know in the United States. The attitudes and behavior that characterize life in the United States are not necessarily appropriate in the host country. These “rules” concern not only language differences, but also wide-ranging matters such as family structure, faculty-student relationships, friendships, gender, and personal relations.

One way to handle these social and personal changes is to understand the cycle of adjustment that occurs.

Stages of Culture Shock

- **Excitement/Honeymoon Phase.** You can expect to go through an initial period of euphoria and excitement as you are overwhelmed by the thrill of being in a totally new and unusual environment. This initial period is filled with details of getting settled into housing, scheduling classes, and meeting new friends. You might experience a tendency to spend a great deal of time with other U.S. students, both during orientation activities and free time.
- **Withdrawal Phase.** As this initial sense of “adventure” wears off, you may gradually become aware that your old habits and routine ways of doing things are no longer relevant. A bit of frustration can be expected, and you may find yourself becoming unusually irritable, resentful and even angry. Minor problems suddenly assume the proportions of major crises and you may grow somewhat depressed. Your stress and sense of isolation may affect your eating and sleeping habits. You may write letters, send e-mails, or call home criticizing the new environment and indicating that you are having a terrible time adjusting to the new country. Symptoms include anxiety, sadness and homesickness.
- **Adjustment Phase.** The human psyche is extremely flexible. Most students weather this initial period by making personal and academic adjustments as the months pass. They may begin to spend less time with Americans and more time forming friendships with local people. They often forget to communicate with friends and family at home.
- **Enthusiasm Phase.** Finally, when the adjustment is complete, most students begin to feel enthusiastic, and that they are finally in tune with their surroundings, neither praising nor criticizing the culture, but becoming, to some extent, part of it.

There is value in culture shock

Culture shock is a way of sensitizing you to another culture at a level that goes beyond the intellectual and the rational. Just as an athlete cannot get in shape without going through the uncomfortable conditioning stage, so you cannot fully appreciate the cultural differences that exist without first going through the uncomfortable stages of psychological adjustment. Keep in mind that everyone will go through these phases at different rates of time. If you feel you are taking longer to adjust, that does not mean there is something wrong, but you can always reach out for additional support.

Should I Disclose My Mental Health History with CICE?

Many students struggle with disclosing their mental health concerns with the CICE office. Some students fear the stigma associated with mental illness, or feel that they will be able to handle their symptoms on their own. There are a number of things to consider before you to decide to disclose any mental health concerns. Remember, when you have been diagnosed with a mental health-related concern, your medical information is confidential. This information can only be shared with your written permission or in the case of an emergency.

Disclosing mental health issues will NOT prevent your acceptance into a program

When should I disclose? Individuals can choose to disclose any time during the process of applying for, enrolling in, or attending a program or international exchange experience. You can also choose to not disclose at all. However, keep in mind that self-advocacy and communicating your needs are important tools for success. According to U.S. non-discrimination law, programs cannot ask about nor consider disability status during the application process.

You can disclose before the application process. You may wish to contact program administrators or advisors to find out whether or not a program is fully accessible and how straightforward or complex it might be to arrange and fund necessary accommodations. If you are concerned about potential discrimination, wait until after you are accepted or ask general questions about mental health concerns that are not directly connected to you.

You can disclose your disability during the application process. Students are encouraged to think about what programs would suit their personal and educational goals, as well as what program they will thrive in best. Consider disclosing during the application process so the CICE office can help you find the placement where you can have the most success.

You can disclose after you have been accepted for a program but before you go. If you choose not to disclose during the application process but plan to request accommodations, this is the best time to disclose your mental health concerns. By disclosing before you leave, you have time to coordinate care with your mental health provider(s) and your education abroad program.

You can wait until you start your program or classes to disclose your mental health concerns. By this time, it may be too late to arrange accommodations, especially complex ones. This method may work if you plan to informally ask program administrators, your host family, or professors for accommodation or support.

Experienced travelers with mental health-related disabilities suggest setting up a support system in advance, even if you think you won't need it. All individuals traveling to new countries and unfamiliar cultures experience some level of stress related to this transition.

- Prepare to expect additional stress on a study abroad program, at least initially.
- Understand that proactive planning is a way to make the experience more successful.
- Bring your treatment with you whether it is medication, personal strategies, or a support network through remote telecommunications.

Initially, you may want to share your history with specific individuals on a strict need-to-know basis. You may decide (as you develop relationships) if there are others with whom you want to share your mental health history.

If you decide to disclose to the education abroad advisors at Gustavus or to your overseas hosts, they may be able to provide you with information on how mental health emergencies are handled in the host country (and help to plan to evacuate you from the country if the conditions are not up to par).

When disclosing, you might want to:

- Provide a plan for arrangements if your symptoms were to worsen overseas. You may choose a legal route with an advance directive, for example, which is a document to clearly establish who can make treatment decisions for you in the case of declining health.
- Ensure that the program keeps this information in their confidential files. Ask what procedures they have in place for protecting confidential information.

In the event that you do not disclose to education abroad advisors at home or abroad, you may want to:

- Write down your plans of what should be arranged if something were to happen, or leave an advance directive with a good friend or family member who has your program's information (such as the CICE office number).
- Try to request accommodations or services that are needed without revealing your condition. For example, you could just say, "Because I'm not a morning person, I need to arrange my schedule such that my courses don't begin before 10 a.m."
- Bring up with education abroad staff the discussion of emergency or contingency plans in event of a physical or emotional crisis without divulging your history. After all, this is something all travelers need to think about ahead of time.

When deciding to disclose, remember that providing education abroad advisors with information about your mental health can help future study abroad program participants. Education abroad advisors who have firsthand experience working with students with known mental health concerns become better informed about the diversity amongst their students. The program is better able to assist students in planning for a successful experience abroad with more information. This awareness can help to break

down preconceived notions, and encourage more forethought to ensure resources and support is available on education abroad programs for you and all students.

Making Preparations to Participate in Education Abroad

- Students managing chronic medical, psychiatric, or psychological conditions need to continue treatment while studying abroad.
- Discuss with your healthcare provider whether traveling abroad is appropriate at this time.
- It is important to discuss the potential stresses of traveling abroad with your therapist. Work with a mental health care provider to create a mental health plan for your study abroad. Be sure to identify how you will access social support, engage in self-care behaviors, and cope with emergencies while you are abroad.
- If you are currently being prescribed medication, find out whether your medication will be available in your destination country and information about carrying prescription medication abroad. Check out www.embassy.org/embassies to make sure your prescriptions and over-the-counter medications are permissible in the countries you expect to visit. Most U.S. embassies list reliable local pharmacies.
- Do not plan on sending medications abroad since it will require customs paperwork and may be delayed in delivery. Be aware that your medications may not be available in your host country. They may have a different name or have a different strength. (see the following section on Questions to Ask...)
- Investigate mental health services in your destination country, and consider purchasing insurance that will cover these services, should you have an emergency. Mental health providers may be available locally. You may want to pre-identify an English-speaking provider: www.goodtherapy.org/therapy-international.html
- Consider confiding in a “travel buddy” about your health condition. In case of an emergency, provide that person with emergency contact information for your health care provider in the U.S. so that they can assist you if you become overwhelmed. Gustavus recommends that this is someone in an administrative role, such as a teacher in your program.

Tips from Travelers with Mental Health-Related Conditions

- Recognize that some of what you may experience overseas as part of the intercultural adjustment cycle (sometimes called “culture shock”) is common to all study abroad participants. The low points are not necessarily attributable to a mental health-related diagnosis (e.g. homesickness, anxiety about understanding/speaking a foreign language, loneliness, fear of being robbed or getting sick from the food, etc.). You may also feel very good or elated on the high point of the cycle. Feeling good may make you think that you no longer need medications (if you use them). Keep taking your medication and consult with a doctor if you think you could stop taking your medication.
- Learn the vocabulary associated with your condition before leaving the United States if you are going to a non-English speaking country. Bring a translated copy of needed medical records and release forms.
- Connect with international mental health-related groups to learn about what types of situations and attitudes exist in the host country. Connect with peer/support groups you can contact while there.
- If you are comfortable disclosing your condition to others, ask for a few minutes to talk about your condition during orientation. Some individuals find that self-disclosure to others on a group trip can reduce anxiety and creates opportunities for others to better understand his/her/their needs.
- Be clear and direct with clinical specialists, friends and family at home, if staying in contact (receiving letters, emails, etc.) is important and necessary support for you while abroad.
- Plan in advance for contingencies. For example, arrange to talk with a familiar therapist in the United States, plan for more privacy or down time, and consult with other students with similar mental health concerns who have studied abroad.
- Anyone can feel fear or trepidation before traveling abroad. Plan ahead when you can. Self-knowledge about what strategies work at home can help once you are abroad. You may want to communicate honestly with your host family about your needs before you arrive (if the program can provide this overseas contact information before your arrival).
- Read about a young woman who studied abroad in Africa after disclosing she was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder:
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113846968>

Identifying When another Student is in Crisis

Be on the lookout for the following symptoms of a student in crisis:

- Depressed mood most of the day.
- Markedly diminished interest in almost all activities.
- Significant weight loss when not dieting, weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite.
- Insomnia or increased sleeping.
- Restlessness or slowing down of body movements.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt.
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness.
- Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent thoughts of suicide, or a suicide attempt.
- Substance abuse (alcohol or drug or both) can also be a sign of an underlying condition as students try to alter or mask symptoms they have detected but have not addressed with a counselor.

If you decide to help, then do it with H.E.A.R.T. ALWAYS speak to a person in charge if you are concerned about a student.

Hear

- Stop what you're doing and really listen to what the student is saying.
- Reflect back what the person is saying and try using their own words.
- Validate their experience and avoid the temptation to problem solve.

Empathize

- Acknowledge what you have heard and let the student know you understand.
- Express concern and interest.
- Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- Remember, even if the problem does not seem real to you, it may be very important to the student.

Assess

- Ask the student, "What have you thought about doing?"
- Discuss the pros and cons of different courses of action.
- Don't expect to have all the answers.

Refer

- Be honest about your concerns and limitations.
- The student may need professional help.

- Do not agree to be secretive about his or her problem.
- Help the student find appropriate resources.
- Offer to go with him or her to talk with a professional.

Tell

- Do not ignore comments about suicide, violence, or harm to others.
- Seek professional assistance.

Taking Care of Yourself

There Really are Limits of What You Can and Can't Do

Your safety and wellbeing are just as important as that of the person in distress. It is important to recognize the limits of what can be done to help someone in distress.

What can be helpful:

- Be genuinely concerned and supportive
- Be honest about the time and effort you can afford to spend in helping
- Be aware of personal needs and limitations
- Maintain and respect healthy boundaries

What isn't helpful:

- Trying to control how another person is going to respond
- Attempting to force another person to change
- Forcing someone to take action to help themselves

[*Adapted from USF Students of Concern Assistance Team]

Self-Help Tips for Depressed Mood

It is estimated that 5% of Americans – some 15 million people – suffer from depression at a given time. Below are some do's and don'ts for combating a depressed mood:

- DON'T over do the caffeine.
- DON'T overindulge in comfort foods.
- DON'T turn to alcohol and other drugs.
- DON'T hibernate.
- DON'T procrastinate/avoid.
- DON'T isolate yourself.
- DON'T blame others or take out your bad mood on them.
- DO get a reasonable amount of rest.
- DO eat well (protein and carbs to boost energy without a “crash.”)
- DO exercise. Physical activity (even a 10 minute walk) will boost mood. A longer workout will stimulate a release of endorphins.
- DO take action. If you're feeling lazy/worthless, prove yourself wrong. Remember past successes. Set small goals; break big tasks into smaller ones and give yourself credit for accomplishing each one.
- DO eliminate negatives where you can (e.g., avoid bad news or pessimistic people for a while).
- DO add small pleasures. Savoring a cup of tea, listening to music, taking a walk, calling an old friend...Plan them into your schedule.
- DO stimulate the senses. Eat spicy food, listen to powerful music, dance energetically, wear bright colors, take a very long hot bath, or a cold shower.
- DO something for someone else. Call your grandma, iron your roommate's shirt, smile and say “hi” to people you don't know.
- DO throw yourself into activities with gusto!

Depression is likely to color our view of the world so that our successes seem minor and our failures seem major. A person who is depressed often feels unable to focus on the positive, to put failures in the context of other successes, and to accurately assess their own strengths and weaknesses. Some depressed people say things like, “Even though I know the world is full of color, to me everything looks gray.”

As depression becomes more serious, a person may experience physical symptoms such as: restlessness, the inability to sleep or sleeping excessively, fatigue, appetite changes, crying spells, the inability to enjoy normally pleasurable activities, feelings of worthlessness, inability to concentrate, indecisiveness, or thoughts of suicide.

Many professionals believe that depression is really anger turned in on ourselves. Instead of getting angry at people or events in our lives that are negative, we blame ourselves for what has happened—even if we have no control over it. Often, people who are overly responsible or self-blaming are more likely to experience depression.

Here are some things that we know about the causes of depression. Some people are predisposed to experience depression. If there is a history of depression in your family, you may be more likely to become depressed. For some people, depression is a reaction to excessive stress. Burning the candle at both ends, not sleeping, etc., may trigger depression. Finally, some people seem to get “stuck” when dealing with a difficult negative experience and move from sadness to depression.

Is there some good news about all of this? There is. For many people, depression runs its course and they start to feel well again. Some people seek counseling and it is clear that counseling can help them manage depression. Finally, almost every few months a new anti-depressant comes on the market. For people with more serious depression, these products can be very helpful. If you believe that you are experiencing depression while abroad, tell someone, ask for help, and reach out to others.

Five Techniques to Reduce Your Stress While Abroad

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Progressive relaxation of your muscles reduces pulse rate and blood pressure, as well as decreasing perspiration and respiration rates. The body responds to anxiety producing thoughts and events with muscle tension, which in turn increases the anxiety. Muscle relaxation reduces tension and is incompatible with anxiety. Typically, it involves tensing individual muscle groups for several seconds and releasing the tension allowing the muscles to relax gradually. Look up videos for guided progressive muscle relaxation before you leave to allow for practice.

Deep Breathing: Proper breathing is essential for good mental and physical health. The next time you feel a surge of stress, try a few moments of deep breathing. Sit in a comfortable position and take deep, measured breaths (e.g., inhaling while counting from 1 to 4; exhaling while counting down from 4 to 1). Do this 20-30 times and you are sure to feel refreshed. Deep breathing assists in relaxation by increasing the amount of oxygen in the body.

Visualization: If you think anxious thoughts, you become tense. In order to overcome negative feelings, you can use the power of your imagination to refocus your mind on positive, healing images. Get into a comfortable position, close your eyes, and visualize a scene or place that you associate with safety and relaxation. It does not matter what you visualize, as long as it is calming to you. As you relax your mind, your body also relaxes.

Thought Stopping: Thought stopping helps you overcome excessive worry, repetitive thoughts, and negative thinking, which may take the form of self-doubt, fear, and avoidance of stressful situations. Thought stopping involves concentrating on the unwanted thoughts. After a short time, suddenly stop and empty your mind, by using the mental command “stop” or an image in your mind of “dumping out” the thoughts. This will interrupt negative thinking. Then, you may use thought substitution to focus on positive thoughts and outcomes. Controlling negative thoughts significantly decreases stress levels.

Assertive Skills: Being assertive can reduce stress as you express personal thoughts and feelings. You are behaving assertively when you express your true feelings and do not let others take advantage of you. Be specific and clear about what you want, think, and feel. Deliver your message in a clear and non-blaming manner. Make personal statements such as, “I want ..., I think ..., I feel ...” etc. Ask for feedback and cooperation. Being assertive means being able to express yourself openly, honestly, and directly, while being considerate of others’ feelings.

Sleep Health - Getting a Good Night's Rest While Abroad

“I’LL SLEEP WHEN I’M DEAD!”

“I don’t have time to sleep!”

“I don’t need sleep. That’s what coffee is for!”

“My mind won’t quiet down enough for me to fall asleep at night!”

“I have to take in every second that I can while I’m here!”

Does that sound familiar? Sleep is highly undervalued, even more so in our world with 24/7 internet access. Yet, it is one of the most important actions you can take to keep yourself performing at a high level. In fact, many people in highly competitive skilled fields - from professional athletes to concert violinists - have cited sleep, after regular practice, as being the most important element in their success. Yet, college students are one of the most sleep deprived groups in this country.

Why should I make sleep a priority over something else?

Sleep deprivation affects your mind.

- When studying for a test or practicing a skill, the rest periods are just as important as the practice periods. When you sleep, your brain keeps working on the material, synthesizing the information.
- Sleep is also a requirement for mental and emotional resilience. When you are sleep deprived, it is much easier to fall into negative thinking patterns and moodiness, both of which then make it harder to get good sleep at night.
- Inadequate sleep can set the stage for depression, and makes it much more difficult for someone dealing with depression or anxiety to recover.
- Sleep deprivation can make it much more difficult to concentrate, learn new information, and remember what you are studying.

Sleep deprivation affects your body.

- Sleep deprivation can lower your immune functioning, making it harder for you to fight off a cold or the flu.
- Sleep deprivation has been linked with unhealthy weight gain.
- Sleep deprivation can affect your reaction time, motor skills, and coordination. For example, driving when you are sleep deprived can be just as dangerous as drunk driving.
- Other possible effects of sleep deprivation include hand tremors, headaches, and increased blood pressure.

How Much Sleep Do We Need?

For most adults, 7 - 9 hours a night appears to be the best amount of sleep, although some people may need as few as 5 hours or as many as 10 hours of sleep each day.

The amount of sleep a person needs also increases if he or she has been deprived of sleep in previous days. While we may get used to a sleep-deprived schedule, our judgment, reaction time, and other functions are still impaired. Experts say that if you feel drowsy during the day, even during boring activities, you have not had enough sleep. If you routinely fall asleep within 5 minutes of lying down, you probably have sleep deprivation.

How do I get myself a good night's sleep?

- 1. Set a schedule:** Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Disrupting this schedule might lead to insomnia. Sleeping in on weekends also makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it resets your sleep cycle for a late awakening.
- 2. Exercise:** Try to exercise 20 to 30 minutes a day. Daily exercise often helps people sleep, although a workout soon before bedtime may interfere with sleep. For maximum benefit, try to get your exercise about 5 to 6 hours before going to bed.
- 3. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol:** Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, which acts as a stimulant and can keep people awake. Sources of caffeine include coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, non-herbal teas, diet drugs, and some pain relievers. Smokers tend to sleep very lightly and often wake up in the early morning due to nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol use can interfere with deep sleep.
- 4. Relax before bed:** A warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine can make it easier to fall asleep. You can train yourself to associate certain restful activities with sleep and make them a part of your bedtime ritual.
- 5. Don't lie in bed awake:** If you cannot get to sleep, do not just lie in bed. Do something else, like reading, watching television, or listening to music, until you feel tired. The anxiety of being unable to fall asleep can actually contribute to insomnia.

Control your room temperature: Maintain a comfortable temperature in the bedroom. Extreme temperatures may disrupt sleep or prevent you from falling asleep.

Questions to Ask Education Abroad and Your Health Care Providers

(Suggestions from the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange)

Here are some suggested questions you can ask when preparing for education abroad. You can ask your:

- Clinical specialists (therapist, psychiatrist, physician, etc.)
- Academic Support Center (Students With Disabilities Services)
- Education abroad advisors (CICE)

Cultural and Educational Setting Differences

- How is the classroom setting and physical environment (e.g. noise level, crowded desks, etc.) in the host country different from Gustavus?
- What are the cultural attitudes toward people with mental health-related concerns in the host country?
- Are there general cultural differences that I should be aware of that affect my condition?

Health and Medical Services

- Are the same student health center and hospital services available in the host country as in the United States? If not, what kind of health services can I count on? Is there a local crisis telephone hotline?
- Will my insurance cover my medications, therapy or other related needs while overseas?
 - If so, what is the payment/reimbursement process?
 - If not, what alternative accommodations and services can be provided that still fulfill my needs? (e.g. Are there other free or low-cost counselors or support groups in the host community? Will I have access to my home clinical specialist?)
- Will my insurance pay for me to bring enough medication with me for the entire time I am abroad?
 - If not, how will I obtain the medication that I need abroad? What is the payment/reimbursement process?
- If I am not fluent in the language of the host country, are these services available in my native language? If not, who can provide simultaneous translation should I be in need of medical care or be hospitalized?
- Whom will I ask to provide a translated psychiatrist/psychologist letter to inform “professional to professional” the seriousness of my condition?

Questions for Students Who Take Medications

- Are there pharmacies close to where I will be living?
- How do I find out what overseas equivalent of my medications are available? How can I get medication from home if the local medication isn't effective or if my usual medication needs to be changed or is lost?

- What if I feel my condition has improved overseas and I stop taking medication that I'm typically on? What effects could this have? Who will I consult for medical advice about discontinuing or decreasing my medication?
- How soon do I need to consult with my clinical specialist about availability of medications abroad and the possibility of taking enough medication abroad with me to cover my entire time abroad?
- What happens if I am taking medications that are still under strict patent in the United States or may not be legal overseas?
- If I cannot find the same medications, how much time will my doctor need to change the prescription and make sure my condition is stable before traveling abroad? (Note that education abroad advisors often can provide information about transporting and obtaining medications abroad).
- Are there any medications that I will need to take while abroad (e.g., anti-malarial medication) that could interfere with my current medication? If so, what is the best way to manage this?
- How do I adjust my medication regimen when crossing time zones? (Some travelers start to adjust their schedules gradually while in transit, while others change to a new schedule after adjusting to the new time zone. Your clinical specialist can provide guidance on making adjustments.)

Legal Issues

- Will there be a contact person overseas for me to work with who is familiar with U.S. legislation regarding the provision of accommodations and services to people with disabilities and/or who has experience with my type of disability/concern?
- What is the policy for overseas staff regarding confidentiality about my disability?
- Will specific information regarding my disability be shared only on a “need-to-know” basis or when it is strictly medically necessary?
- Who will be able to access my disability information and why?
- What privacy protections apply abroad?
- What grievance-related systems can I make use of if I run into resistance regarding the provision of appropriate accommodations and services?
- What are the laws or procedures in the host country regarding hospitalizations for psychiatric disabilities? What are my rights in the host country?
- What policies or contingency plans does my education abroad program have in place regarding emergency return to the United States?
- If I am under 21, do my parents need to sign a mental health release for inpatient care, and/or my attending mental health provider?
- How do I write about how I want things to be handled if my condition were to become unstable while abroad? If I decide to write an advance directive, who will be responsible for seeing that it is properly carried out? (see “Disclosure and Making Advance Arrangements” section).
If I encounter barriers after disclosure of my mental health-related condition to education abroad advisors regarding my acceptance into the program, what recourse do I have? (TIP: Read the free online publication “Rights and Responsibilities,” <http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/rr>)

Emergency Mental Health Care Abroad

Inpatient or outpatient treatment for a *disabling* mental health condition may be covered through your health insurance (see your current plan for coverage and restrictions).

In the event that you require urgent mental health care while abroad:

1. Report any illness to your local host coordinator, roommate, Gustavus, or local faculty, and ask for assistance.
2. Keep receipts for any medical care, prescriptions, or medical costs. You might need these in order to file a claim when you return to the U.S. If you are staying longer than two months, you may wish to mail these receipts to your parents, family, or other trusted caregivers in the U.S. so they can file a claim for you.
3. Make sure that you familiarize yourself with the host institution's support infrastructure on arrival. It will be something you do not want to worry about if you do have a mental health emergency.
4. More information about what your insurance covers while you are abroad should be asked to the CICE office and your insurance company.

Resources

Gustavus Adolphus College Counseling Center

Location: Johnson Student Union, room 204

Hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday (Open for appointments while academic classes are in session)

Phone: 507-933-7027

Fax: 507-933-6207

**The Counseling Center is here to support students prior to their departure and upon return. Unfortunately, due to licensing laws, we are unable to provide support during study away. If you are struggling while in your host country, please utilize resources on our webpage: <https://gustavus.edu/counseling/RESOURCES/InternationalStudents.php>
**

<https://gustavus.edu/counseling/>

Center for International and Cultural Education

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

507-933-7545

Location: [International Center](#)

Phone: (+1)

<https://gustavus.edu/cice/>

Academic Support Center

Gustavus Adolphus College

Hours: 8 a.m.- 4:45 p.m. M-F

Phone: (507) 933-7227

Fax: (507) 933-7207

<https://gustavus.edu/asc/>

Find an English-speaking therapist abroad (also see page 11):

www.goodtherapy.org/therapy-international.html

<https://internationaltherapistdirectory.com/all-locations/>

<https://truman-group.com/> (fee for service)

Find out if you can take your medications to the country you are visiting (you can contact the embassy):

www.embassy.org/embassies