

Freshman Anxiety? Freshman Homesickness?

TIPS ON REDUCING FIRST-YEAR JITTERS

Anxiety is often triggered by a lack of predictability, feeling uncertain or unable to control a situation. The symptoms of anxiety can include being fearful, nervous or edgy and can cause heart palpitations, muscle tension, headaches, insomnia, loss of appetite, gastrointestinal problems, hyperventilating or light-headedness.

Starting college can also trigger symptoms of sadness or mild depression. New students may feel homesick, struggle with being separated from their family, friends or familiar surroundings. Symptoms of mild depression may include feeling down or sad, excessive worrying, changes in appetite, trouble sleeping, and difficulty making decisions.

Symptoms of anxiety and mild depression can last days or weeks, but in most cases will improve over time. Listed below are tips to make the first year of college more manageable:

BEAT HOMESICKNESS:

- Don't feel like you have to cut yourself off from family and friends to be independent or grown-up. Stay in touch with those you love; call, e-mail or visit but not to the exclusion of college activities.
- Develop a comfort zone by bringing things from home that are familiar or important to you like pictures, pillows, blankets, or a favorite object.
- Share your feelings with others: talking about them can normalize these feelings.
- Engage in pleasurable activities or treat yourself to something enjoyable at least once a day, such as a favorite magazine, and respect the fact that transitions are hard.

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION:

- Respect your body's need for food, rest and a normal routine. Greasy, sugary foods can trigger negative emotions and make you feel even more anxious or tired.
- Limit caffeine, whose effects can actually mimic panic attacks and anxiety, causing heart palpitations, dizziness or breathlessness.
- Sleep deprivation can cause feelings of fatigue, lethargy and difficulty concentrating, which can worsen the experience of feeling depressed.

GET PHYSICAL:

- Exercise is a great way to manage symptoms of anxiety or sadness. Aerobic activity naturally changes body chemistry making it more difficult for the body

to feel stress and feeling better physically can help you stay calm and rational. Exercising offers a chance to socialize and meet new people. Swim, bike, run, walk, play tennis or whatever you enjoy.

- Take a class for fun and exercise. See out classes on and off-campus in yoga, aerobics and strength training.
- Use the UWL campus recreation centers and workout facilities.

GET ORGANIZED & BE REALISTIC:

- It's easy to get overwhelmed, so try to keep things in perspective. Break down issues or concerns into manageable segments.
- Prioritize activities and allot a specific time for each one, whether it is studying, socializing or extracurricular activities.
- Keep a "to do" list of what you need to accomplish.
- Stay flexible. Time demands often change during the semester.
- Set smaller, more realistic goals.

PLAN AHEAD:

- Reduce uncertainties before school starts. Visit the campus to become familiar with the surroundings and local community.
- Speak to roommates before school starts to work out basic plans and details.
- Write down your concerns. This forces you to be specific about the issues and provides an opportunity to focus on ways to deal with them.
- Talk to upperclassmen about their experiences and successful survival techniques.

Experiencing a little anxiety may actually benefit students. Anxiety serves a function. It helps us to prepare and cope with changes and stressors, and it can even motivate us to perform at our best. Anxiety only becomes a problem when the symptoms don't subside or if they worsen. Normal symptoms should not interfere with a student's ability to attend classes, socialize or complete his or her work. Signs that students may need additional help include persistent sleeping problems, eating difficulties, chronic worry or panic attacks. If a student gets to this point, we recommend visiting the Counseling & Testing Center for assistance.

(Information: Rutgers University)



THE UWL COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER STAFF ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO ARE DEALING WITH HOMESICKNESS AND OTHER ACADEMIC ISSUES. CALL (608)785-8073 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TALK WITH A COUNSELOR.