



Transition to school can be challenging, especially for students who are entering post-secondary studies for the first time. One of the biggest difficulties is learning how to find a good balance between work, family, social activities, exercise, class and homework. Unfortunately, as priorities shift more towards school as the term intensifies, students often find themselves neglecting their own wellness. The time they are used to having for self-care starts to evaporate which can quickly take a toll on a student's mental, emotional, social and physical well-being.

Self-care, such as the importance of a healthy diet, getting adequate rest, exercising and finding outlets to de-stress is essential. If a student is able to take care of these basic needs they will have more energy and focus to stay engaged and will better position themselves for success. Education is a privilege and is to be enjoyed. Therefore, taking good care of ourselves while we are busy is vital to making learning a positive and rewarding experience.

Here are a few of the most important tips I give to students:

- 1. Ensure family and close friends are on board:** this is particularly important for students with children and/or a significant other. As school begins and especially during exam periods the time a student would normally have to spend with their family and to dedicate to their responsibilities diminishes. This can lead to additional stress for the student and their family and often impacts how well a student does in their program. Before the program starts (ideally), the student should set aside time to speak to those people that will be most impacted by the student's shifting priorities. The student should talk about the importance of the program to them, the commitment, their schedule and work out a communication plan to manage especially busy times. If the student and their family and/or friends can reach a mutual understanding of how best to manage responsibilities and commitments then there is a decreased likelihood of disagreements, hurt feelings and stress.
- 2. Create time to do what is important to you:** while school will undoubtedly become one of a student's main priorities it is very important that the student does not get tunnel vision and neglect everything else that brings them joy

and excitement. All too often students choose to study for long, uninterrupted periods, only to emerge hours later tired, unhappy and in some cases, unclear on where the time went and not able to recall much of what they studied. The average person's attention span is quite short, roughly 15-20 minutes. I suggest that students try to take a quick break after 20-30 minutes of good study, such as to have some tea, a quick snack, a shower, or some short, vigorous exercise (10 minute break). After about an hour to an hour and a half of study students should take a longer break (30 to 45 minutes) to do something rewarding (or something they enjoy) such as go for a run, walk or bike ride, or watch a short TV show, chat or play a game with a friend or family member, or do something that is productive with their time (such as nap or prepare a meal). By splitting up study time whereby there is a 'reward' at the end, students will stay fresh, motivated, and healthier and will more likely enjoy the experience and retain what they have studied.

- 3. Plan out the term in advance:** students should have access to their course syllabi in advance and I encourage them to get a wall calendar that they can write on. A good strategy is to write down all the assignment due dates and quiz and exam dates (for all courses) on the calendar. Then, the student should fill in other activities (such as events, work, travel etc.) on the calendar. The student has now created a visual layout of their upcoming term and can see when things will be getting busy. The student can make adjustments to social events based off of how busy school looks to be. In addition, the student can work backwards in the calendar to put down start dates for assignments (and milestones, such as when to finish the first draft of an essay), so that they spread out workloads and stay on top of their busy schedules.
- 4. Plan the next day the evening before:** many of us think about what is coming the next day as we try to fall asleep. The result is unnecessary stress at the wrong time and a fitful night sleep. Instead, I encourage students to write out a rough plan (or schedule) for the next day about an hour before they go to bed. That way, they have a written plan and can instead focus on sleeping instead of planning (and worrying) when their head hits the pillow.

The transition to school can be stressful and overwhelming and I hope these tips provide some helpful ideas.