How to manage your stress when moving abroad

Moving to a new country and starting life as a student can be stressful. From lost luggage to trying to make new friends, your new life in your host country is bound to lead to at least a few stressful moments. Feeling stressed is completely normal when you make such a big change in your life. The problem arises when stress becomes overwhelming, making it difficult for you to enjoy life. Managing stress can help you feel better and more at-home in your new country. Here are three tips for managing stress while living abroad.

1. Understand your situation

Moving to a new country can be stressful. Not only will you experience stress related to adapting to a new culture, but you will also have to contend with normal day-to-day stress. Culture shock is very common among students studying abroad and can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression. Research has identified common and normal phases that people go through when they go to live in a new culture and environment. Each person goes through these phases in their own way and at their own time. To learn more about culture shock read this article.

Tips for coping with culture shock

- Recognize that culture shock is normal and temporary.
- Do not make any hurried or important decisions while you are experiencing culture shock: put off making decisions about going home until you have gotten through the culture shock phase.
- Allow time for grieving the loss of the home culture and the people when you arrive in your host country and the other way round when you go back home. Lessen some of the personal demands that you place upon yourself at this time.
- Take time out for lots of communication between family members.
- Guard your health: eat well, avoid excessive alcohol or substance use, drink plenty of water, exercise, get enough sleep.
- Find other expatriates or those that have lived/moved overseas to associate with – is there an international student club at your college or university?

2. Stay healthy

Physical and mental health are closely intertwined. If you are not feeling well physically, it can affect your mental health too. Exercising regularly is one of the best things you can do to reduce stress. Gyms are plentiful across the North America, including on-campus at your school, and it is easy to buy a membership. You can also consider activities that don't require a gym, like walking, jogging, cycling, or yoga. Set attainable goals for exercise and find an activity that suits your interest and your schedule. Similarly, eating healthy foods is important for, managing stress. While it can be tempting to indulge in fast food, limit your intake to once in awhile only. Actually cooking healthy meals for yourself will have you feeling less stressed and more energetic.

3. Stay social

It can become all too easy to isolate yourself when living in a new country and feeling stressed. Instead of meeting new people, you may feel more comfortable spending your days at home or in the library. While having your own personal space is important, it is also important that you build a social network in your new country. Join groups or clubs that interest you, such as sports teams or groups for different nationalities or ethnicities. Going to your place of worship on a regular basis can also help you meet new people, as well as help you maintain your sense of identity in your new country.

While moving to North America and starting life as a student are bound to present challenges, if you learn and practice good stress management habits it can help you stay happy and healthy while living abroad. By understanding that culture shock and stress is normal, staying healthy, and maintaining social support, you'll be able to help manage the stress of adapting to your new environment.