Staying healthy is important for everybody. Looking after your body by exercising regularly, eating well, getting regular sleep and reducing stress can really improve the way you feel and think. This can be especially important if you are going through a tough time – or recovering from one.

KEEPING ACTIVE
Being physically active improves your strength, fitness, and confidence, which can help you to achieve what you want in life. It gives you more energy and increases your flexibility and mobility. Being active can help you to handle stress, manage anger and sleep better.

Everyone has a different level of fitness, and you should always exercise at a pace that’s right for you. If you’re not used to being active, start gradually. Exercising with a friend makes it more fun and helps you to stay motivated.

EATING WELL
The type of food you eat can make a difference to your mental and physical health. Eating well means having a wide variety of healthy foods including plenty of vegetables, fruit and cereals (like bread, rice and pasta), some lean meat, chicken or fish, dairy products (milk, yoghurt, cheese) and lots of water. It’s a good idea to avoid fatty foods and foods with lots of sugar in them.

Eating well may mean making changes to your eating habits and lifestyle. This can take time, so try making small changes rather than changing everything at once – for example you could start by swapping a chocolate for a piece of fruit. Getting involved in planning and cooking meals can be a fun way of improving your eating habits. Eating regular healthy meals can keep your mood and blood sugar even so you don’t snack on junk food.
GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP
Sleep is important to help our bodies recover and recharge. But sometimes sleep patterns can be interrupted, say through sickness or stress. This can make it hard to get to sleep, to sleep well, or to sleep for as long as usual. When it comes down to it, it’s not the length of sleep that matters. It’s how good the sleep is for your body and whether you’re getting ‘deep sleep’.

If you’re not sleeping well and feeling tired in the day there are lots of things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep. When you wake up in the morning, get up, go outside and do something active. Don’t nap during the day and avoid drinks that contain caffeine after about 4pm. Try not to go to bed too early and give yourself time to wind down before you go to bed.

MANAGING STRESS
Stress is a normal part of daily life. It’s a natural physical and mental response needed to help you cope with emergencies and to perform at your best. But when stress is regular and doesn’t let up, it can damage your physical and mental health. Don’t wait for stress to get so bad that you start feeling depressed or helpless.

Try to work out what’s troubling you and then talk to someone who can help. Talking to a friend or family member is a good way to start. Or you may want to talk to a teacher or school counsellor, especially if you’re worried about exams or schoolwork. A doctor can help with a health concern that is causing you stress.

AVOIDING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL
Taking drugs or drinking alcohol may seem like fun and a good way to take your mind off things or spend time with friends. But, sooner or later, drug and alcohol use has negative effects on your mind as well as your body. They can contribute to, or trigger, mental health problems in some young people. And if you have an existing mental health problem and use alcohol or drugs, it can cause more problems than either issue on its own.

More Information and Support

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

- **Lifeline 13 11 14** (cost of a local call)
- **Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800** (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

- **beyondblue** www.youthbeyondblue.com
- **www.beyondblue.org.au**
- **headspace** www.headspace.org.au
- **www.reachout.com**
- **www.kidshelp.com.au**
- **www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder**

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- You don’t have to have a strict exercise routine or live on vegetables to be healthy. It’s all a matter of balance and finding a way of living well that suits you.
- Find a friend who wants to stay healthy and plan it together – this makes it more fun and you can also swap notes and motivate each other to keep going.
- Try not to leave assignments or exam study till the last minute – this usually means you get into a pattern of staying up too late and not eating properly or exercising.
- Changing habits can be hard, but there are lots of benefits – and not only to your health and wellbeing. Successfully making changes in your life can make you feel more in control and increase your self-confidence.

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Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

- **headspace** www.headspace.org.au
- **www.reachout.com**
- **www.kidshelp.com.au**
- **www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder**

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**SOURCES** This fact sheet is based on the following sources:

- www.youthbeyondblue.com and www.beyondblue.org.au
- ReachOut.com www.reachout.com