



Center for Young Women's Health  
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Children's Hospital Boston

## College Health

Going to college is a very exciting time in your life! You will be meeting new people and learning new things. However, college can be a huge change from what you are used to. You may be on your own for the first time in your life, having to make decisions about many issues including your health. This may seem overwhelming at first. It will take time to learn how to handle both the freedom and responsibilities of college life. This guide will help prepare you for some situations that you may face during college, and help you make smart decisions so you can make the most out of your college experience.

### Knowing About My Health Before I Go to College

#### What's important for me to know about before I go to college?

##### Filling Out your College Enrollment Health Form

After you have sent in your acceptance to the college or university that you will be attending, you will be required to mail back a completed health form with a record of all of your immunizations (*vaccines/shots/boosters*). You should receive this health form in the information packet that you get in the mail. You will need to call your health care provider's (*HCP's*) office and arrange to have this form filled out. If you haven't had a recent physical, you will probably need one. It's also important to know if you have any allergies and to include this information on your health form. Your HCP's office may be able to send or fax the health form directly to the student health center at your college.

##### Getting Information from your HCP's Office

Along with a copy of your immunization record, you should get a list of all of the medications that you are taking, including the strength (*how powerful it is*) and the dosage (*how much of it you should take*). On your record you should also list your allergies, any past medical problems (*surgeries, hospital stays*), and special needs (*chronic health problems and disabilities*). A record of any mental health problems and your family medical history should be included too.

It's a good idea to make a copy of all of your medical records for yourself as well. Keep this information with other important papers when you go to college.

### Your Immunizations Must Be Up-To-Date

Your HCP will make sure that your immunizations (*shots and boosters*) are current. You should talk with your HCP about getting the meningococcal vaccine to reduce your chances of getting the very serious infection meningitis (*inflammation of the brain tissue*). The vaccine will help to protect you against getting it if an outbreak happens in your dorm.

*Depending on what state you live in (or the state you will be moving to for college), you may be required to get the meningococcal vaccine before you go, unless you sign a waiver or obtain a physician's written consent. Check out your state's requirements regarding the vaccine.*

### Health Insurance

You'll need to make sure that you have health insurance while you are at college. Talk with your parent(s)/guardian(s) to see if you will still be covered under their health plan, and to discuss any questions that you have.

#### You should find out:

- What type of plan you are on (*HMO, PPO, etc.*)
- What the policy covers (*including whether or not it covers care at your college's student health center*)
- How to file claims
- What to do in the case of an emergency

Don't forget to take a copy of your health insurance card with you. You should always keep it in your wallet, because you may be asked to show it if you ever need urgent health care. You should remember that your parent(s)/guardian(s) will likely be notified every time that the insurance

company is billed if you are on their policy. If you aren't covered under their insurance plan, you will probably be able to sign up for your own health insurance through your college.

### **Prescription Medicine**

It's important to get your prescription(s) filled before you leave for college. If you'll be far from home, it is a good idea to ask your HCP if you can get an extra prescription for medicine that you use on a regular basis, such as an inhaler. You should also find out the name and phone number of a pharmacy near your school and figure out how to get refills when you need them. If you can't get refills on your own, your parent(s)/guardian(s) may need to mail your refills to you.

### **First Aid Supplies**

#### **What should I take with me to college in case I get sick or have a small emergency?**

Most college and university campus have a student health center where you can go if you are sick with a cold, flu, need first aid, etc. However, most student health centers are not open 24 hours a day, and may not be open at all on the weekends. Therefore, it's a good idea to buy a few supplies and make a home-made first aid kit to keep in your dorm room. Chances are you won't need to use it, but if you do, you will be relieved that you have the supplies on hand.

#### **Your kit should include:**

- Digital thermometer
- Adhesive bandages for small cuts and scrapes
- Gauze and adhesive tape
- Antibacterial/antibiotic ointment (*Bacitracin, Neosporin®*)
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- An ice pack or chemical cold pack
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen for aches and fevers
- Medicine for menstrual cramps (*ibuprofen, naproxen sodium*)
- Allergy medicine (*especially if you have itchy eyes and tend to sneeze from pollen/dust*)
- Cough and cold medicine
- Sore throat lozenges
- Calamine lotion

*While it is great to be able to treat minor cuts, scrapes, and colds on your own, if you have symptoms that don't improve, it's important to seek medical care at the student health center or at the closest emergency room.*

### **Health Services and Healthcare Providers**

#### **What are student health services?**

The student health services (*sometimes called the student health center, or clinic*) at your college is probably the first place you should go when you have health care needs. The amount of care you can get at your student health center depends on the college that you attend. At many colleges, you can get medical care, medications, STI and pregnancy testing, advice, information, and/or counseling. There are usually medical, nursing, health education staff, and counselors available. All of these professionals are familiar with the issues that college students often face, such as stress, chronic health conditions, learning disabilities, nutrition issues or eating disorders, relationship problems, sexual health issues, alcohol or drug problems, or sports injuries. At most student health centers, you can also get a gynecologic exam. The staff will work with you to keep you healthy and respond to your questions and concerns. If you need medical care that cannot be provided to you at your student health center, ask the staff where you can go.

#### **When should I go to the student health center?**

##### **You should call or visit the health center if you:**

- Have any medical or mental health issue that you are concerned about
- Have a high fever (*101 degrees fahrenheit or higher*) – take your temperature before you call, because they will probably ask what your temperature is
- Have pain when you pee
- Have a new discharge from your vagina, particularly if it has a color and/or odor
- Have too few or too many menstrual periods
- Have pain in your stomach or lower abdomen
- Have chest pain, trouble breathing, or a cough that won't go away
- Have symptoms that make you concerned or that last for more than a week, such as vomiting or diarrhea

- Need birth control or a test for a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Think you might be pregnant
- Think you may have a sprain or a broken bone
- Have an emergency such as a lab spill
- Are assaulted
- Are sad, depressed, anxious, or unable to sleep

Your provider should be patient and should be willing to explain things to you.

*You should receive good care at your student health center, but if you don't, be assertive and ask to see another provider. The most important thing is for you to be happy with the care that you get.*

### **How can I get seen at the health center at my college?**

You can either call or go online to see when the center is open and to find out whether you need an appointment in advance or if you can just walk-in when you need to. If you do make an appointment, make sure you schedule it so that you have enough time to get there before or after class without rushing. Also make sure you have enough time afterwards in case the visit runs longer than you expected.

### **Should I prepare for my appointment?**

Yes. Think of any questions that you want to ask any concerns that you have beforehand, and write them down. If you are taking any medications, you might just want to put them in a bag and bring them with you to your appointment, because you will likely be asked if you take any medication(s) on a regular basis, and what dose you take. Also, bring a list of any other health care providers that you are currently seeing, including general providers and/or specialists (*providers that work in one area of medicine, such as an allergist, who deals with only allergies*). Also, if you have ongoing problems, such as chronic headaches, keep track of your symptoms and how often you are taking pain medicine. (*Bring this with you to your appointment.*)

### **Other tips on how to prepare for your appointment:**

- Arrive early so you give yourself time to settle down, collect your thoughts, and fill out any forms.
- You may want to ask a friend or significant other to come with you to make the visit less stressful, or to help you ask questions.

### **Things to remember while you're at your appointment:**

- Ask questions and voice your concerns. Don't leave before your provider answers all of your questions and talks to you about any concerns that you may have.
- If you don't understand something your provider says, ask him/her to say it again more clearly.

### **What do I do if the student health service cannot provide me with the services that I need?**

The staff at your student health center should know the names and contact information of physicians, specialists, gynecologists, and mental health clinicians in the community in case you need additional care not provided at the center. You can always ask them to help you find someone qualified to take care of your specific problem.

### **What if I have an emergency?**

Find out the name(s) and location(s) of the closed emergency room or urgent care center and how to get there before you need it! If you do have a problem or injury that needs attention right away, go straight to your student health center. If it's not open, go to the closest hospital emergency room. The campus police at your college should be able to take you if you have no way to get there, or you are unable to drive. **If the problem is very serious and you shouldn't waste any time, call 911 for an ambulance to come and get you.**

### **Should I continue to see my primary care provider (PCP) once I start college?**

You may still want to go to your PCP or nurse practitioner (NP) for your health care if you live nearby. However, if you are going to live on campus and you will be far away, it might be easier to go the student health center for your health care. If for some reason there your college doesn't have a student health service, an administrator at your school should be able to give you a list of health services in the surrounding area. You can always call your PCP if you have any questions. Some students make medical appointments to see their PCP when they come home during breaks. However, if you have a chronic medical condition such as asthma, IBS, endometriosis, etc. and attend school far away from your medical specialist(s), you may want to consider finding a local specialist who can manage your condition.

## How to Stay Healthy

### What can I do to stay healthy?

Eat healthfully, exercise, and get plenty of rest.

### What should I know about nutrition and eating well?

Eating well will keep your body strong, and help your immune system fight off germs that cause colds and other common illnesses.

#### Learn to:

- Eat a variety of healthy foods. Try to eat 5–7 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Choose foods that are baked, steamed, or grilled, rather than fried.
- Choose fresh foods such as steamed vegetables, fresh fruits, and grilled chicken instead of fast food or processed food.
- Limit the amount of salt that you use.
- Cut down on junk food (*candy, chips, soft drinks, etc.*).
- Snack on healthy foods such as popcorn, string cheese, fruits, and vegetables.
- Drink 8–10 glasses of water or non-caffeinated fluids every day.
- Remember dairy products. Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese are high in calcium, which keeps your bones healthy. Eat or drink 3–4 servings a day.
- Take a daily multivitamin (*with iron and 0.4 mg folic acid*)
- Get all the nutrients that you need if you are a vegetarian.

### What do I need to know about exercise?

Another important way to stay healthy, reduce stress, and manage your weight is to exercise. Try to include aerobic exercise, muscle strengthening, and stretching exercises into your daily routine. It is recommended that you exercise approximately 60 minutes each day.

- Aerobic exercises include biking, running, fast walking, swimming, dancing, soccer, step aerobics, etc. You can tell that you are doing aerobic exercise because your heart will speed up and you will start breathing faster. However, you should still be able to talk when you are doing aerobic exercise.

- Strengthening exercises (*such as sit-ups, push-ups, leg lifts, or weight training*) will build up your muscles and keep your bones healthy.
- Stretching exercises (*such as yoga*) will make you more flexible, so you will be less likely to strain a muscle.
- You can also get exercise by doing simple things, such as walking or riding a bike (*with a helmet, of course*), instead of driving or taking the bus.

### What do I need to know about getting enough rest?

You may realize that after you get to college, you don't get as much sleep as you were used to getting. This is typical for college students, however; your body needs 8–9 hours of sleep a night to be at the top of it's game.

#### Sleep deprivation (*not enough sleep*) can cause you to feel:

- Stressed, sad, or depressed
- Tired, and hard to stay awake in class
- Unfocused, or have a hard time concentrating
- Sick, or get lots of colds and other minor illnesses (*because your body cannot fight off germs as well*)

*Try to get enough sleep so you'll be able to get the most out of your classes and enjoy social activities too.*

## Common Health Problems at College

### Why am I more likely to get sick at college?

You are more likely to catch a cold or the flu or get a sore throat when you are in college than when you are at home, even if you get enough rest. These illnesses spread quickly because so many students live together in dorms and apartments, eat together in cafeterias, and sit close to each other in classrooms. You can get these illnesses through the air when someone is coughing or sneezing next to you, by rubbing your eyes or nose after having contact with someone who is sick, or by touching something held by someone who is sick. If you smoke cigarettes or you are exposed to second-hand smoke, you are more likely to catch a cold.

## How can I prevent catching a cold/flu or sore throat?

### To prevent getting these illnesses:

- **Wash your hands** often and try not to rub your hands on your nose or eyes.
- **Don't share** drinks, food, or cigarettes with other people.
- **Ask your PCP** or a healthcare provider at your student health center about getting a flu vaccine each fall especially if you have asthma, diabetes, or another chronic illness.

If you do get sick, be sure to take really good care of yourself so you can get better quickly.

## What do I do if I catch a cold or the flu?

How you treat an illness depends on whether it is caused by a virus or bacteria. Colds and the flu are caused by viruses, which you can't get rid of quickly. You will probably have a cough, possibly a fever, and feel achy and congested. You should get a lot of rest, drink plenty of fluids, and treat the symptoms with over-the-counter cold medications. Always read labels to make sure you are getting the right medicine for your symptoms. Newer prescription medications for the flu will be available soon. If you have an upset stomach, eat bland foods (*cereal, dry toast, rice, or bananas*) and drink clear liquids (*sports drinks, water, or diluted juice*).

Strep throat and most sinus and ear infections are caused by bacteria, and are treated with antibiotics. Go to the student health center if you have a very sore throat, pain in your ears or sinuses, a persistent fever, a cough, or difficulty breathing. The staff there can tell you what the problem is and give you antibiotics if you need them.

## What's the deal with "Mono"?

You have probably heard about "Mono" (*Mononucleosis*), which is sometimes called "the kissing disease". Mono got this nickname because people can pass the infection through germs in saliva when they kiss, but it can also be passed if someone who is infected shares a water bottle, toothbrush, fork or spoon, or lip gloss, etc. Some people might not have symptoms but may still carry the virus and infect other people. However, Mono doesn't occur as often as people think.

### People who have Mono may have a combination of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Sore throat

- Extreme tiredness
- Decreased appetite
- Headache
- Swollen glands
- Sore muscles
- Swollen liver or spleen (*in advanced conditions*)

*Other illnesses can mimic Mono. It is always best to see a healthcare provider and get checked out instead of diagnosing yourself.*

## If I think I might have Mono, how soon should I go to the student health center?

If you've had a sore throat for more than a week and are feeling very tired, you should go to the student health center. The only way to find out if you have Mono is to get a blood test called the "Mono spot". However, even if you do have Mono, there is nothing you can do except to get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, and drink plenty of fluids (*to prevent dehydration*). You can go to your classes after your fever is gone but you will likely feel tired for a few weeks. Most people get better within a month, but you may need to talk with your faculty advisor or dean if your Mono symptoms are severe and are causing you to miss many classes. Most healthcare providers will tell people who are recovering from Mono to avoid contact sports, or other sports such as jumping, cheerleading, etc. The good news is that you cannot get Mono again once you've had it.

## How do I prevent getting or giving Mono germs?

- Wash your hands often. This dramatically reduces the risk of getting sick or sharing germs.
- Don't drink from someone else's water bottle, and don't share drinks.
- Don't share forks, spoons or other eating utensils.

## Bruises, Sprains and Strains

### What should I do if I hurt myself and get a bruise, sprain, or strain?

These injuries are common and usually not very serious.

- Bruises are injuries to the skin that cause the surface of the skin to turn purple or red in color; over time the bruise turns yellow-green and then disappears.

- Sprains are injuries to the ligaments, which is tissue that connects the bones.
- Strains are injuries to the muscles and tendons that are caused by too much or sudden pulling of the tissues.

*If you have swelling, pain, or can't bear weight, you can make an appointment with your health care provider or go to the Student Health Services to be evaluated. Otherwise, rest and elevate the injured body part and apply ice as soon as possible.*

### **What is a Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)?**

A specific type of serious strain injury is called Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). Repetitive strain injury includes all kinds of injuries (caused by doing the same movement continuously) to the muscles, nerves, and tendons of your arms and shoulders. You may have heard of bursitis, tendonitis, or carpal tunnel syndrome. People that use computers a lot, for long periods of time without breaks, can get repetitive strain injury.

#### **To help prevent getting repetitive strain injury:**

- Use a lap desk or a table while using your computer to avoid putting pressure on certain muscles and nerves.
- Your laptop or desktop monitor should not be too high or too close to you.
- Type lightly on your keyboard.
- If you're using a desktop (or you have your laptop set up on a desk), sit up straight, and keep your wrists straight and level.
- If you're using a desktop, you should have an extender for your keyboard, so that your wrists rest lightly on it when you are typing.
- Your chair and keyboard should be set so that your forearms and thighs are parallel with the floor. If this position feels awkward, change it, but still try to sit up straight.
- Take breaks. Even being in a "perfect" position may cause problems if you stay in the same position for too long.

#### **If you have any of the following symptoms, go to the student health center and get checked out:**

- Tightness or soreness in your hands, wrists, fingers, forearms, or elbows
- Tingling or numbness in the hands
- Clumsiness, or loss of strength and coordination in the hands

## **Mental Health**

### **I'm homesick! Now what?**

Homesickness is very common among students who live away from home, especially during their freshman year. Don't think you should drop out of school. Feeling homesick is natural and doesn't mean you are not ready to be on your own. If you feel homesick, talk to your friends at school about it. They are probably feeling the same way. If your homesickness does not get better after a few months of school, try speaking with a counselor.

### **How can I develop a healthy social life at college?**

Definitely keep in touch with friends and family from home, but make sure you develop new friendships at school. You'll probably meet friends at orientation, in the first few days of school, in your classes, at social events, in the cafeteria, in clubs or sports, and through other friends. Don't worry if it takes a while to find friends—it will happen. Your roommate(s) may become a good friend(s), or you may not click with her/them. You should talk to your roommate(s) as soon as possible about issues such as cleaning, bedtimes, music, and visitors/guests (*boyfriends/girlfriends, etc.*) so that you avoid problems later on. If you're having problems getting along with your roommate(s), talk to your RA (*resident advisor*).

### **What if I'm under a lot of stress?**

Chances are you will probably feel stressed at some point while you are at college. College is a lot of fun, but it can also be a lot of work. You may be on your own for the first time in your life, and/or dealing with issues without your family and friends from home. This can be tough. If you're stressed, you may feel really tired, have a headache, have trouble sleeping, have trouble concentrating, and/or feel nervous, among many other symptoms.

### **Is there anything that I can do to deal with the stress?**

Yes. Some ways to deal with stress are to consume less caffeine, eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and get enough sleep. Also, make sure that you do something you enjoy every day. The key is to balance classes and schoolwork with friends and having fun. Try to have a positive view, and don't forget to have a sense of humor!

## What do I do if I'm feeling down?

There are days that you will feel down, especially when the demands of college get to you. These feelings are normal and will go away. At these times, you should take a break from the pressures of college and do something you enjoy. Spend time with friends, exercise, read a good book, listen to music, watch a movie, call a friend, talk to your family, or anything else that makes you feel good.

## What if it's more serious than feeling down — am I'm depressed?

Sometimes, feeling down can get more serious and you can become depressed. However, depression can be treated. If you've had thoughts of suicide, of harming others, or **if you have had any of the following symptoms for 2 weeks or more, see a counselor at your student health center right away:**

- Sad mood
- Not enjoying things that you normally enjoy
- Sleeping problems (*you sleep too much or too little*)
- Being really tired, not able to concentrate, having very little energy
- Eating problems (*you eat too much or too little*)
- Feeling that you are worthless and there's no hope
- Physical problems (*headaches, stomach aches, or body aches*) that don't get better even after you try to treat them

*Don't try to deal with depression on your own. See a counselor! Also, if you have any friends that you think may be depressed, suggest that they see a counselor as soon as possible.*

## Homesickness

If you're living away from home for the first time, you may find yourself wondering "How could I be homesick? I've wanted to get away from home for so long!" However, the truth is almost every college student will miss something about home during their years away at school. Whether it's something as small as missing your mom's cooking or something bigger such as wishing you lived closer to your friends, everyone feels it. Read on for tips to help you deal with homesickness and ways to get the most out of your college experience.

## Is it normal to feel homesick at college?

The first couple of weeks at college may seem great, but as the weeks continue and homework

begins to pick up the thrill of being away from home can get old. It's typical to ask yourself "Am I really happy here?" It's normal to have mixed feelings about college life and yes, it's perfectly normal to miss your family, friends, and home. Learning ways to cope with these feelings will help you move on so you can get the most out of your college experience.

## Getting Used to Roommates

You may or may not have had to share a room with a sibling while you were living at home, but having one or more roommates at college is a very different experience. Even if you become friends with your roommate(s), there still may be times where you feel like you have to constantly negotiate. If you've tried your best to communicate with your roommate and you're still feeling frustrated, don't hesitate to contact your Resident Director (RD) or Resident Advisor (RA) to schedule a private meeting. It's important to know that college campuses offer a wide variety of resources to help you solve even the smallest problem, such as mediation, or a room transfer. The environment at college should feel safe and comfortable, just like at home.

## Making New Friends

It's completely normal to miss your friends from home, especially the ones you've known since you were little! However, college is the perfect place to meet lots of new people and develop new and exciting relationships. If you're wondering how to meet people, college orientation is the perfect start, because everyone is new – just like you. During orientation you'll probably be encouraged to participate in ice breaker activities that will help you get to know your fellow classmates. Once you get settled, try joining a club, a team sport, volunteering, or getting involved on campus. Colleges and universities both big and small offer a wide range of activities and clubs similar to those in high school.

## Adjusting to Your New Surroundings

It's important to understand that by going home every weekend (if you live close), or as often as you can (if you live farther away) can make it even harder to overcome feeling homesick. Instead of making the trip home, try inviting a family member or friend up for a visit. Get to know the town you're living in and show off your new surroundings by taking your family or friends out for a shopping trip, a sporting event, or a day trip to a surrounding city.

Other things you can do to that will help you stop the urge to go home:

- Keep busy and fill your weekends with fun activities that are offered by your school.
- Look forward to long weekends or vacations when you can go home for an extended amount of time.
- Remember that in the scheme of things, spending time away will make you appreciate your home town and family more than you might imagine.

### **Making Your Dorm Feel Like Home**

Your home away from home should feel cozy and comfortable. Although you probably won't be able to paint your room, you can always decorate. Try putting up your favorite posters and pictures that remind you of friends and family. You'll probably be spending lots of time in your room, so also make sure the environment is clean, calm, and relaxing.

### **Cooking Your Own "Family" Meals**

You might be used to having your meals cooked for you, and you might miss the feeling of sitting down to dinner with your family every night. However, many dorms or resident halls have small kitchens for students to use. You can learn how to make some of your favorite home-cooked dinners and create a meal for your friends. You can invite a group of people and make a weekly or monthly tradition to have "family dinners". This is a great way to get out of the dining hall and enjoy a home cooked meal with others.

### **Staying In Touch With Friends and Family**

Since it's relatively easy to communicate, take comfort in knowing that your loved ones are only a phone call, e-mail, or text message away. Try to set aside at least one day a week to call home, or if your computer has the capability, you can even video chat. If you can't see your friends and family face-to-face, a simple "Thinking of you!", or "Let's catch up this week" message lets them know that you care, and that you'd love to talk with them.

*Take advantage of the resources your college or university offers. Don't feel embarrassed or ashamed that you're missing home because you're not alone! Find someone you can trust and feel comfortable talking to - whether it's a friend, RA, professor, or counselor. The feeling of missing home will pass with time. Don't be surprised if you find out that you miss college when you're home on school breaks!*

## **Eating Disorders**

### **What should I know about eating disorders?**

Some girls may have an eating disorder before they leave for college, and others may develop an eating disorder while at college. The two most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

### **What is anorexia nervosa?**

People who starve themselves and lose an extreme amount of weight suffer from anorexia nervosa. People with anorexia think they are overweight (*even though they may not be*) and continue to

think they are overweight even when they get to be very thin. Starvation can cause harm to vital organs such as the heart and brain. The nails, hair, and bones of a person with anorexia can become brittle, and the skin can become dry and sometimes becomes yellow or covered with soft hair. Menstrual periods can become irregular or stop completely.

### **What is bulimia nervosa?**

People with bulimia nervosa eat large amounts of food (*also called bingeing*) and then vomit (*also called purging*) or exercise compulsively. Because many people that "binge and purge" maintain their body weight, they may keep their problem a secret for years. Vomiting can cause loss of important minerals, life-threatening heart arrhythmia (*irregular heartbeat*), damage to the teeth, and swelling of the throat. Bulimia can also cause irregular menstrual periods.

### **What if I think my roommate, classmate, or friend might have an eating disorder?**

If you know someone with an eating disorder, the best thing you can do is give them support and encouragement. Urge the person to get help, and be persistent. Many colleges have treatment programs for these conditions and trained counselors who can relate to people with an eating disorder. They can help the person with an eating disorder understand her/his problem.

### **What if I think I might have an eating disorder?**

If you think you might have an eating disorder, you should go to the student health center or counseling center and get help! Talk with your family and close friends. Going for help and talking to others about your feelings and illness can be very difficult, but it's the only way that you're going to get better.

## Alcohol and Drugs

You will definitely encounter alcohol and drinking while you are at college, but there are many people at college who don't drink. Many people prefer doing activities that don't involve drinking, such as going to a movie or a play, going out to eat, or participating in athletic events. Before you make any decisions about drinking, you should know the risks.

### Some of the risks of drinking include:

- Physical illness (or even death) and drinking problems in the future can be caused by heavy drinking.
- Violent, and/or sexually aggressive behavior.
- Sexual harassment and date rape are more likely to occur when alcohol is involved.
- Alcohol can and does prevent people from thinking clearly and making good decisions. While drinking, a person is more apt to do something that they may regret later (for example, engaging in unsafe sexual behavior).
- Heavy drinking is also a cause of weight gain. Alcohol is high in calories and very low in nutrients.

### How do I make a decision about drinking at college?

You probably know that drinking under the age of 21 is illegal and you will get in legal trouble if you are caught. However, you will probably encounter alcohol at some point before you turn 21, which is the legal drinking age in the United States. Obviously, the best way to avoid drinking-related problems is to not drink at all.

If you decide to drink, it should be *your own* decision and *not* because other people want you to, or tell you to. Also, remember that if you drink more than one or two drinks, you may lose bodily control and may not be able to think clearly.

### If you do decide to drink, here are some tips to stay safe:

- Be in control of your beverage at all times. Never put your drink down and walk away. Date rape drugs such as "Roofies" (slang for Rohypnol®) can easily be put in a drink without you even noticing. Roofies cause drowsiness, dizziness, memory loss, and other dangerous symptoms.
- Don't drive if you have been drinking, and don't ride with someone else who has been drinking. Alcohol makes your judgment cloudy, slows your reflexes, and affects your vision.

- Don't play drinking games such as "beer pong", "flip cup", "power hour", etc. People tend to drink just to get drunk while playing these games, and end up consuming a lot more alcohol this way.
- If you feel that you have a drinking problem or if your friends are commenting on your drinking, see a counselor for help.

*Be smart when it comes to drinking, and try out different activities that don't include alcohol. You'll see that you don't need to drink to have a good time. If you feel that you need to drink to "fit in", you always have the choice to drink a beverage that does not contain alcohol. If you feel funny about not drinking an alcoholic beverage, you can order a drink that looks like it has alcohol in it, but doesn't, such as seltzer or club soda with ice.*

## Drugs

You may see people doing drugs at college, or someone may try to pressure you to try them. Try to remember that the majority of young adults don't use drugs.

### Some of the dangers of drugs include:

- Many drugs, including "weed" (Marijuana) contain many dangerous, toxic chemicals.
- Trying a drug "just once" may seem harmless, but you really never know exactly what's in it.
- Drugs are illegal. If you are caught, you will likely face a large fine or time in jail. A police record can limit your career choices. Even trying drugs just once can be something that you will regret later on.
- Car crashes, falls, and suicide are all linked to drug use.
- Continuous drug use can ruin your looks, cause you to do worse in school, make you depressed, and destroy your relationships with friends and family.

*If you have a friend with a drug problem, gather the support of other friends and do your best to get him or her to go for help. The same goes for you if you develop a drug problem. Remember that drugs won't make you happy or "cool". The way to be happy is to do activities that you like. You can join clubs, play sports or games, go out to dinner, to the movies, or do any number of other safe activities that you enjoy.*

## Sexual Health

People make lots of decisions about their sexuality during college, including whether to abstain from sexual intercourse or to become, or to continue being sexually active. Other sexuality issues that decisions are made about are the gender of partners, the type of contraception to use, and the intensity of the relationships. You should never let others pressure you into having sex if you don't want to. **It should always be your decision to have sex. This goes for the first time, and every time.**

### What do I need to know if I'm sexually active, or if I'm thinking about becoming sexually active?

- **Before you decide to have a sexual relationship, you should talk with your partner** and *then* decide if the decision is right for you.
- **Make sure to ask about your partner's sexual history**, including if he/she has been exposed to sexually transmitted infections (STI's).
- **Discuss whether you or your partner plans on having sex with other people.** Remember, the risk of getting an STI or a virus that can cause cancer or AIDS is increased if you or your partner have sexual intercourse with other people. The more partners, the greater the risk of getting an STI.
- **The only way to completely prevent getting an STI is to be abstinent** (*not have sex*).
- **If you are sexually active, the best way to avoid getting any STI's is to have sex with only one person** who has never been exposed to an STI.
- **Use a latex condom every time you have sex**, from start to finish.

### Talk to your partner about birth control

If you are in a heterosexual relationship (*you are dating a male*), talk about birth control options (*condoms, birth control pills, hormone injections*) and also talk about what you would do if it failed. If you feel that you can't talk to your partner about these issues, then you should rethink whether or not you should be having a sexual relationship with him!

### Go to your college's student health center

Find out about what methods of birth control the health center offers to students and what types of counseling and services are available for young women who have either a planned or unplanned pregnancy. Make sure you receive confidential, non-judgmental services.

## Here are some questions to ask at the health center:

- What happens to the bills from my visits here or to a gynecologist in the community?
- If I'm covered by my parents insurance, will they find out about examinations and tests I've had?
- What if I need birth control?
- Can you tell me what happens with my lab test results? Who gets the results?
- What if I want to be tested for STI's or HIV?
- What if you find out that I have an STI?
- What if you find out that I am pregnant?
- Is there any information that you are obligated to tell my parents?
- What happens if I have a big problem and need help telling my parents?

### Emergency Contraception

If your birth control method fails, (*for example; the condom broke, or you didn't use one*) you have an option called emergency contraception, also known as the "morning-after pill", or "EC".

### Emergency Contraception (EC):

- Can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex
- Is actually made up of multiple birth control pills, and needs to be taken in 2 doses. **The first dose should be taken within the 72 hours after unprotected sex. The second dose should be taken 12 hours later.** EC is most effective the earlier you take it.
- Is usually available from Planned Parenthood, other family planning clinics, or your college health center. Find out if it can be given to you in advance.

### Sexual Orientation

College can be a time when some people try to figure out their sexual orientation. It's also a time when some people decide to "come out". Many colleges have support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. There are also counselors available at your student health center if you wish to talk with someone confidentially.

## Sexual Assault/Rape

Sexual assault and rape can happen at college. You may have heard about date-rape drugs being used on college campuses. These are drugs that are dropped into your drink at a bar or at a party when you leave your drink unattended, or when you are distracted. Believe it or not, more than half of all rapes are committed by someone that the victim knows or goes on a date with. So when you are getting to know a person, be careful where you go and what situations you put yourself in.

### To protect yourself against date-rape drugs:

- Don't drink something that you didn't open yourself
- Don't share drinks with anyone
- Don't drink from a punch bowl
- Don't leave your drink some place and come back and drink from it later

### To protect yourself from being sexually assaulted:

- Walk in well-lit areas with a friend if you are out at night
- Use the campus security escorts available at your college. Most colleges will provide an escort if you have to walk back to your dorm late at night.
- Make sure that someone such as a friend or roommate knows where you are when you go out.

## How do I know if I was raped or sexually assaulted?

The definition of rape is **any penetration** into your vagina by a finger, a penis, or other object that happens **without your consent**. It is also illegal if someone touches your vagina with his or her mouth or penetrates you anally without your consent. Keeping silent does not equal consent. **Any of these things which are done without your consent are wrong and illegal!**

## What should I do if I am sexually assaulted or raped?

It's important to get medical help right away. **If you are sexually assaulted or raped, you should go right to the student health center or nearest hospital emergency or urgent care unit to get checked out.** Someone there will help you contact your campus or town police if you haven't already called them. Reporting a sexual assault or rape is important so that the person that did this to you will be caught and won't be able to do it to someone else. **You shouldn't shower or change**

**your clothes before you are examined, so that no evidence is destroyed.**

## Reporting a Rape or Assault

Many women have a hard time reporting rape or sexual assault because they are embarrassed, in denial of what happened, just want to forget what happened, or think they caused it. It's very important to talk about all these feelings and everything that you went through with an experienced counselor. Ask who you can talk to at your college counseling center or student health center. If you need something that your college doesn't offer, ask for some names and contact information for counselors or groups in the community. Some colleges also offer group sessions for victims of rape and sexual assault. Also, decide who in your family or among your friends can be supportive, and talk with them as well.

*If you want to speak with someone confidentially, over the phone, there are hotlines. There are resources available and people who can help you get through this traumatic experience. Always remember that the rape or assault was NOT your fault.*

## Violence/Abuse in Relationships

### Abuse in a relationship can be both physical and mental.

- Your partner should **never** threaten you or hurt you, and should **never** threaten to harm or harm any of your possessions or people that are important to you.
- You should **never** feel afraid of your partner or controlled by him or her.
- Your partner should **never** make you feel worthless or bad about yourself.

*If your partner does any of these things, get help and get out of the relationship. If your partner abuses you, he or she probably will never stop. You will be much better off without an abusive partner! You deserve to be treated with love and respect.*

## What should I do if I am in an abusive or violent relationship?

If you are in an abusive relationship, you should talk to an adult that you trust, someone from your college counseling service, or a domestic abuse hotline. These people can help you with your concerns. If you ever feel that you are in danger when you are with your partner, or after you have broken up with your partner, call 911 and explain your situation. If you break up with your partner and fear that he/she may come after you, stay at a safe place where he/she can't contact you. You can talk to the police about what you can do to legally protect yourself from abuse.

### Survival Tips

- Be confident! Set high standards! Freshman year is the foundation for college success.
- Buy your books as soon as you're sure which ones are required. You can usually get a good buy on used books if you shop early in the semester at your school bookstore. Another way to get a great deal on used books is to buy them online. Check out: amazon.com and textbooks.com.
- Buy a planner to keep track of homework assignments and tests. If you have a cell phone with a calendar, you can use that too. You can also set personal deadlines and reward yourself when you complete projects.
- Get to know your campus community. Find out where the closest grocery store, pharmacy, health clinic, and bank are located! You never know when you might need something.
- Safety first! Make sure you know where emergency telephones are located on campus and how to contact public safety officers should you need help or an escort home.
- Always tell someone where you are going. For example; use a whiteboard or a post-it note and let your roommate or someone else know where you are going and what time you expect to be back.
- Follow the buddy rule – When going out at night, go with a friend and never leave a party alone or with someone you don't know.
- Make it a policy with your roommate to KEEP YOUR DORM ROOM LOCKED at all times. Also, put away or lock up your personal belongings such as jewelry, extra cash, credit cards, and laptop because you never know who might be visiting your room.

- Set ground rules with your roommate. Discuss borrowing clothes, having guys or girls over, extended stays, and quiet hours.
- Avoid weekday parties. If you insist on partying, at least wait until your classes are done for the week.
- Stock your room with healthy snacks. You never know when you'll need to eat breakfast or lunch on the go because you're late for class.
- Fit in exercise every day. It's a great way to release stress. Try a new fitness class at school or a local fitness center.
- Join clubs and attend school social events.
- Make it a habit to go to your professors' office hours. It is a good idea to meet with them personally every so often to show that you are serious about learning.
- Call your parents at least once a week to check in. If you don't live too far from home, consider taking a weekend trip home every once in a while to rejuvenate.

### Resources

Here are some ways that you can get in touch with someone to talk to, and find out more information on some of your concerns.

#### Phone Numbers and Hotlines

- Domestic and Teen Abuse:  
1-800-992-2600
- RAINN (*Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network*):  
1-800-656-HOPE
- National STD Hotline:  
1-800-227-8922
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention:  
1-800-CDC-1311
- Planned Parenthood:  
1-800-829-7732
- Emergency Contraception:  
1-888-NOT-2-LATE

#### Books

- Dobkin, Rachel, and Shana Sippy. *The College Woman's Handbook*. 1995.
- Otis, Carol L., and Robert Goldingay. *Campus Health Guide: The College Student's Handbook for Healthy Living*. 1989.