



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING GUIDE

We hope this guide provides direction to prioritizing mental health and wellbeing throughout your journey in med school:)



**PRESENTED BY UNSW MEDICAL
SOCIETY AND PSYCHIATRY SOCIETY**





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

2023 Updates:

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2022 Updates:

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2021 Updates:

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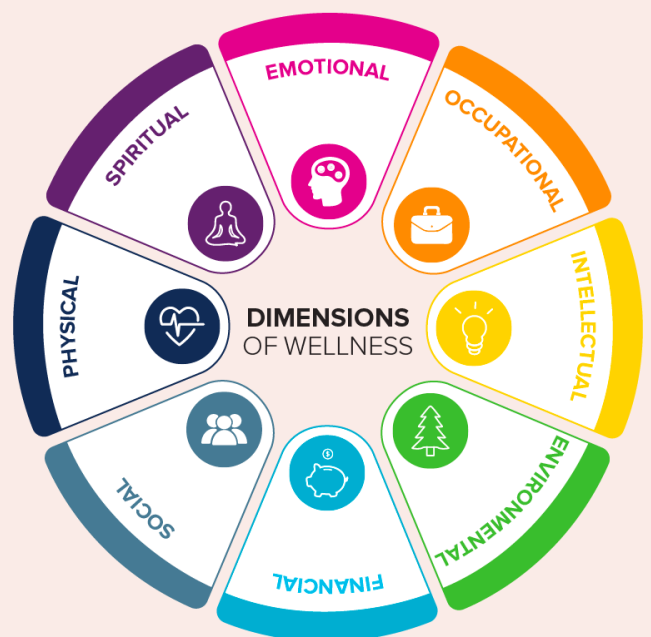
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A Word From The Wellbeing Officer

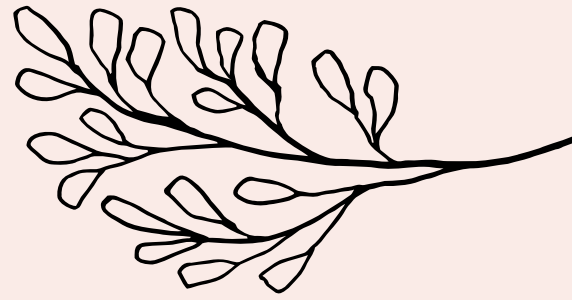
Wellbeing is more than mental health. It is a complex combination of many factors that are strongly linked to our happiness and overall life satisfaction.

Struggling in one or more of these areas over a period of time can impact our mental health so it's important to seek support early. This can be daunting as it's not always easy to ask for help, and sometimes it's hard to know where to start!



Source: UC Davis Student Health and Counselling Services

This often begins with talking to someone you trust like a close friend, significant person, or family member.



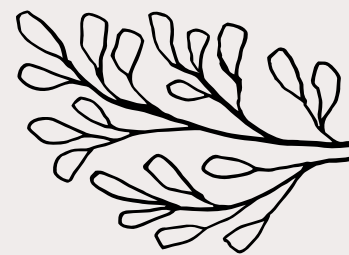
There are a number of ways in which you can seek support for your wellbeing which will be discussed throughout this guide - ranging from academic supports such as tutoring, social supports such as Medical Society groups and activities and mental health supports such as online self-help or counselling.

Catherine's Top Tips!

1. Seeking support early is key.
2. Every student should prioritize finding a GP they trust.
3. It's normal experience difficulties and it's ok to ask for help and support.

Contact Catherine Marley at [<MedFWO@unsw.edu.au>](mailto:MedFWO@unsw.edu.au). she is here to support you and very happy to have a chat with you about anything!





General Advice

BY: Rachel Yang, Nadisha Jayasinghe, Cassie Dow; EDITED BY: Jane Liu

Although your six years within Medicine can be a stressful experience, maintaining proper mental and physical health is important, and can help you achieve stability not only in your studies, but other aspects of your life as well.



Self Care is Important

- Maintain a balanced diet. This might include reducing coffee/alcohol intake.
- Practice mindfulness to reduce rumination and worry, and to maintain a focus on your goals and intentions.
- Physical activity for just 30 minutes a day can bring about great benefits! You can exercise alone, with a buddy or in a team - whatever keeps you motivated.
- Keep up your sleep hygiene both quality and quantity-wise





This means:

- Going to sleep and waking up at regular times, even on the weekends.
- Finding a relaxing bedtime ritual like journalling or reading.
- Sleeping in the optimal environment - quiet, dark, and cool.

Burnout? Do I Have It?

BY: Catriona Shen and Saad Shaheen; EDITED BY: Jane Liu

Stress is a normal human reaction. In fact, small amounts of it can optimize performance and motivation, but when we are exposed to it for an extended amount of time, we end up damaging our physical and emotional wellbeing.

In other words, we become burnt out.

It is important we learn to differentiate between normal stress levels and being burnt out, so we can take the appropriate steps to healing and recovery. Here are some signs to watch out for:

Emotional



- Being unable to perform basic tasks.
- Losing motivation in multiple aspects of life
- Feeling empty inside, irritable, cynical
- Low mood, typified by feeling useless
- Loss of concentration and passion
- Experiencing increased conflict with others
- Withdrawing from activities and friends/family



- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Getting sick more often
- Abdominal and muscle pain
- Changes in appetite, indigestion

Physical

If you notice these signs cropping up in your life, it is likely your body is telling you it's struggling to cope with your lifestyle demands.

Thankfully, these feelings of burn-out can be alleviated through lifestyle changes, which can be achieved with the help of support services and your support network.



Managing Individual Stressors

Medicine can be a difficult course to study and work in. Hence why it is so important to be able to recognize your own limits, and find a sense of balance amongst the various aspects of your life. Some tips you can try out include: (continued next page).



- Blocking out study time based on your habits.
 - Do you work better independently or in a group? Do you work better at home or in a public space (e.g.: library, café)? Do you study in short “bursts” or prefer to sit down for an extended period of time?
- Setting out time during the week that is MED-FREE!
 - It's healthy to have a life outside of medicine which may include activities and hobbies like socialization, sports, music and volunteering.
- Knowing your own stressors and triggers, which may help you prioritize time and attention for different activities
- Developing a personalized "self-care plan".
 - It doesn't have to be multi-stepped and elaborate, but you at least have some ideas about what to do whenever you are struggling. Some ideas could be about having:
 - Rejuvenating and/or relaxing activities to do!
 - Make sure you have thought about both alone time and socialising activities.
 - Our Apps section might help you out!
 - People to talk to.
 - And sometimes, when we need more guidance, we can turn to the services outlined in the Contacts section.





Support Network

All individuals should have a group of people who can be relied on when times become difficult. In particular, it may be useful to develop and maintain friendships both within Medicine and outside the course, to help you maintain perspective in all aspects of your life.

Additionally, during more socially-isolating aspects of the course (e.g. 4th year), it may also be useful to check in regularly with these friends. We do recognize that each person's support network will vary in size, depending on your own level of comfort.

That's completely ok – a successful support network does not have to be a large one, but one that can bring you happiness through engagement, mutual understanding and time spent together :)

phase-specific advice

FROM OUR 2018 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEY, COMPILED BY NADISHA JAYASINGHE & RACHEL YANG

all phases

Students surveyed were also asked to provide suggestions regarding how to approach the medical course itself. Aside from Phase-specific advice, we believe that this information is relevant to all students:

- Assignments and exams – **consistency is key**. Rather than producing a rushed piece of work right before the deadline, break up the work into smaller sections and set spaced-out, reasonable goals. Not only does this avoid increased stress, but you may also be more pleased with the quality of your work at the end.
 - Similarly, **begin your revision early**, so that as exams approach, you won't need to sacrifice time that you would usually spend on hobbies and relationships.
- Keep an eye on your functioning (physical and social as well as academic) and take time off for recovery and self-care, if you begin recognising signs of decline. Also look out for your friends – remember that each person's stressors are different, and raise your concerns with them if you think they are struggling.
- **Seek help from older students** (or former students), who can give advice based on their own experiences regarding how to manage your lifestyle in the context of the course.
- **Resources** – thanks to the student culture within Medicine, there are lots available! Make sure to join your cohort's Facebook group to keep up to date!



phase one

- This stage of the course is a good time to **develop a routine** that you can stick to not only for the year, but (with small modifications) will also accommodate you in later years.
 - **Prioritise sleep and seeing friends** – it is likely that you won't be given as much time and freedom to do these over the next few years. This may also help ease your transition from high school/gap year/other degrees into Medicine.
 - Similarly, get involved in a **diverse set of activities** outside of the course. If you don't have a hobby, find one now. If the stress increases in later Phases, you will have **something you genuinely enjoy to fall back on** and take your mind off Medicine.

Foundies – please don't be too overwhelmed! The change in expectations when entering a new environment and course is always sudden, and will take time to get used to. Remember that **everyone is in the same boat**, and use this course to figure out what study habits are most suited to you.

- Course content – there is **a lot of rote-learning in Phase 1**, which can sometimes feel tedious. It can help to think more broadly (e.g.: in patient scenarios instead of individual disciplines) and **identify the bigger concepts** each lecture/tutorial tries to address. This may then make the rote-learning feel more rewarding in terms of increasing understanding and becoming a good practitioner.

Study – now is a good time to **start finding study buddies**

- Working with others within the course can **reduce the workload**, and you may also appreciate the various ways people interpret or “solve” difficult concepts and clinical cases.
- If you prefer not to study with your peers, finding a friend outside the course may be useful in terms of **assignment review and clinical practice**. Additionally, even if you are working on separate subjects, sitting down with a friend to study can **make you feel more socially-connected** during periods that may otherwise be isolating.





phase two

Phase 2 is when people may begin to feel increasingly separated from their peers, due to students being spread out across hospitals and ILP locations. If you haven't already done so, it is important to **start thinking about the personal connections in your "mental health plan"** – see the **Managing Individual Stressors** section of this guide – and to continue including them in **your interests and activities**.

ICE can cause a lot of stress for students, but it is important to remember that these are just two exams that you encounter in your six years of Medicine. It is definitely helpful to **accumulate knowledge gradually**, and **practise through the year**, both on the wards and outside of hospital. This can be done with friends, who can act as patients for histories/exams, provide insight into difficult cases, and lighten the mood during study breaks!

Co-curriculars and interests – **continue those hobbies from Phase 1!** Alternatively, now is also a good time to **pursue new interests and accumulate a variety of "life experiences"**. Some students have also recommended that you keep a casual job, so that it gives you perspective and purpose during the middle years of Medicine, which may sometimes feel pointless and never-ending

NOTE: as we develop more concrete ideas about medical specialties and our careers, it may be tempting to just switch to activities and hobbies that help with "CV building". Aside from this, we also encourage you to think about how these align with your personal qualities and goals – **pick something you genuinely love** and look forward to doing every week, not something you will later come to view as an obligation



phase three

- This can be a tough period, but please know that **you are almost there!** Sometimes Medicine may feel like the only important thing in your life, but try to **maintain a routine** (including regular meal times, regular break times, and setting specific times for sleep). It is also important to accept that **some uncertainties and insecurities that arise during these two years are out of your control**, and not to allow them to overtake your life. If you haven't already done so, make sure you **have a “mental health plan”** in place, as well as both a **personal and external support network** – see the Support Network, Seeking Help and Contacts section of this guide. Seek external help early if the need arises.
- Study – many students reported that **being organised and sticking to a study plan** is extremely useful during Phase 3. Having a regular study group and working outside of your own home may also help you **maintain your social connections** during this time.
 - Note – this works for many people, but at the same time, it is important to **recognise your own signs of burnout**, and when you need to push back deadlines and/or adjust your expectations. **Don't feel guilty about taking time off**, and speak to your friends and study group. Discussing your progress, and your concerns, with others allows them to provide you with support.
- Exercise – is one lifestyle aspect that has been brought up multiple times by students surveyed. Along with other interests/hobbies that can help maintain mental health, **regular exercise is especially important** during Phase 3, when other priorities often take precedence. Try to exercise for **at least 30 minutes every day**, even if it is as simple as running in the mornings, or going for a walk after hospital ends. Exercise and sports may also provide you with **opportunities to catch up with friends and family!**





Self Care Days

Also! Self-Care days are available to students! These are days you can elect to take off, and focus on replenishing yourself by doing something that helps you relax and recover. There are some basic things to keep in mind about using them:

- You can take them **WITHOUT** explicit reason, for up to 8 times per year (2 per term)
- They should be planned 24 hours in advance
- Make sure to send your Course Convenor and tutor/supervisor an email about taking the day off, and also log the day on eMed (Portfolio > click SUBMIT self-care days)
- Make sure to catch up on what you missed!

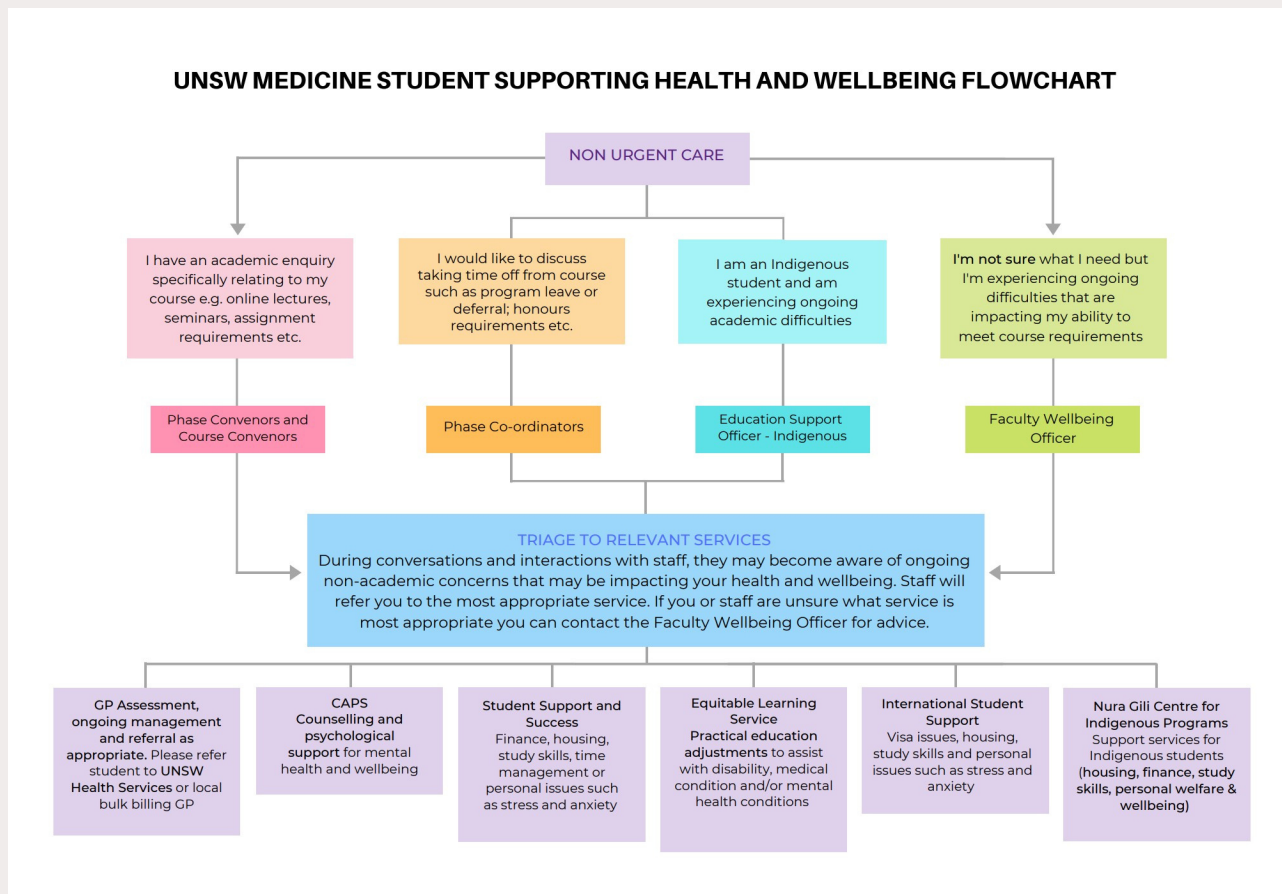
SELF-CARE FOR TOUGH DAYS



@SELFCARESPOTLIGHT

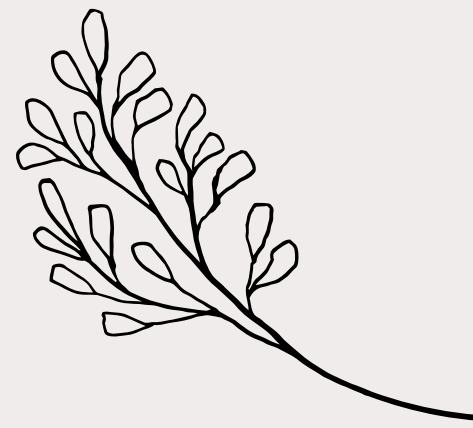


On Campus Contacts



Catherine Marley is the faculty wellbeing officer for Medicine and offers free and confidential advice to students in both undergrad and postgrad programs. If you are experiencing difficulties that are impacting your ability to meet course requirements and are unsure of what support you need, please email for an appointment.

Contact: MedFWO@unsw.edu.au



UNSW Psychology and Wellness (formerly CAPS) provides free and confidential services to all UNSW students. They offer individual counselling and specific workshops to develop self-care skills (stress management, motivational support...etc.) and self-help resources and information to improve wellbeing.

Contact: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/counselling>



Off Campus Contacts

The Australian Medical Association



Get in contact with these GPs who have expressed a keenness in taking on medical students as patients.

Contact:

<https://www.amansw.com.au/member-benefits/gps-for-doctors-in-training/>

Drs4Drs Support Service



Access THREE FREE telehealth counselling sessions. Funded by the AMA, the Medical Board of Australia and the Federal Department of Health.

Call: 1300 374 377 (1300 DR4 DRS)

Contact: Drs4Drs.com.au.

Other Services

@ **Headspace** <https://headspace.org.au/>

Information and resources on mental health, as well as online, phone, or in-person services

@ **Beyond Blue** <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

- Chat, email or phone call a qualified professional for FREE
- 2. Chat with other youth in similar situations
- 3. Read resources on different topics!

@ **Black Dog Institute** <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

Resources and support for managing burnout and mental health

@ **ReachOut** <https://au.reachout.com/>

Awesome forums, extensive articles and helpful digital tools.

@ **Headspace centres**

Free in-person counselling sessions for 12-25 year olds



Off Campus Hospital Contacts

NSW Health: NSW Health requires all hospitals to provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is also open to medical students. If you would like more guidance please talk to your clinical school.

SWSLHD (Liverpool, Bankstown, Fairfield): You can access FREE and CONFIDENTIAL services at ANY facility in the SWSLHD during business hours. They can help with managing acute, cumulative or traumatic stress reactions, personal relationship challenges, bullying, alcohol, personal or professional grief and, anxiety and depression. They also provide services promoting self-care, stress management, and relaxation/mindfulness strategies and techniques.

Contact Liverpool: 8738 4552 or **Bankstown:** 9722 8230 or **Fairfield:** 8738 4552

Emergency

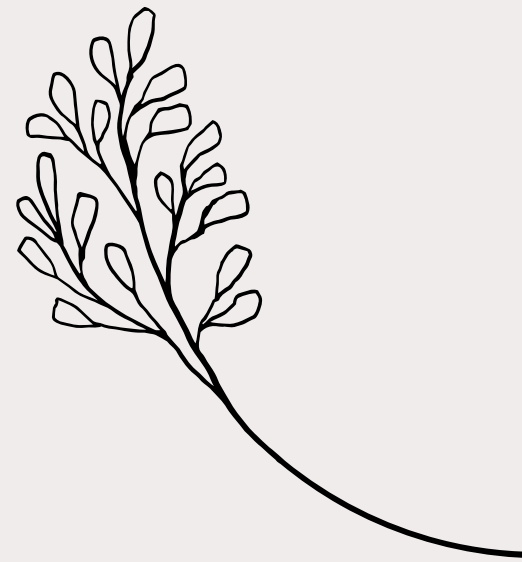
Suicide Call-back Service:

1300 659 467

Lifeline: 13 11 14

The NSW Mental Health Access Line:

1800 011 511



SESLHD (POWH, St George + Sutherland): SESLHD partners with Converge International to provide their EAP. They provide free and confidential help with not only personal and environmental wellbeing matters but can also provide career, financial and lifestyle counselling as well.

You may access up to 4 sessions of EACH of the 'Assist' programs per year. There is also an EAP portal on the Converge International Website, which is an online hub of resources designed to provide you with information on work-related and personal issues such as newsletter inserts on various topics, research papers and tip sheets.

This can aid with employee assists, money assists, lifestyle assists and career assists.

Contact: 1300 687 327 or

Make a booking: via <https://www.convergeinternational.com.au/> where you click Client Portal Login then EAP Portal login. Username and password: SESLHD

Rural Contacts

The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program has local coordinators who can provide you with local referral options and **Crana Plus** offers unlimited 24/7 Bush Support Telehealth Counselling 1800 805 391

UNSW: The head of campus will be able to arrange for appropriate help and can give you advice or guidance.

Port Macquarie: A/Prof Ray Hodgson -
r.hodgson@unsw.edu.au / 02 6580 7544

Wagga Wagga: A/Prof John Preddy -
j.preddy@unsw.edu.au / 02 6933 5111

Albury: Dr Mark Norden -
m.norden@unsw.edu.au / 02 6042 1311

Coffs Harbour: Dr Alison Seccull -
a.seccull@unsw.edu.au / 02 6652 0444

Griffith: Dr Damien Limberger -
d.limberger@unsw.edu.au / 02 6964 4823

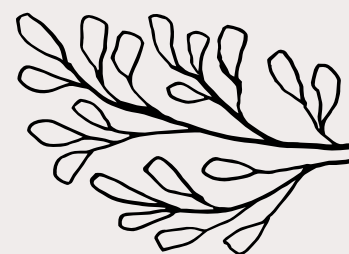
International Contacts

Medibank Help Line (International student support):

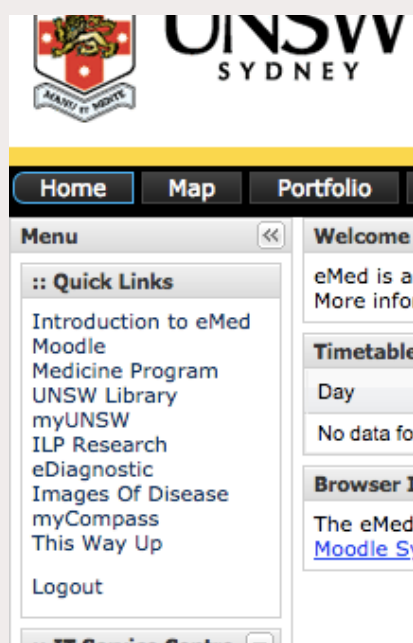
Call: +61 (2) 8905 0307

Medibank 24/7 Student Health and Support number for
Medibank OSHC members: 1800 887 283

International students with comprehensive OSHC can access **unlimited psychology/counselling** via a GP referral. ~85% is covered. Students should contact their individual providers for more information.



Online Modules and Resources



Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be accessed from your homepage of eMed. On the left-hand panel, there is a panel of 'Quick Links' and you can access two completely free programs. CBT is an evidence-based method to improve your way of thinking to de-stress, change perspectives and equip yourself with the tools to overcome difficult situations or mindsets. These resources are a great first step if you are struggling to talk to someone or want to do self-help in the privacy of your own home.



This Way Up

This Way Up is an online CBT program. It contains scenarios which show how changing your pattern of thinking or daily activities can help improve your mental health and wellbeing, as well as giving some helpful lesson summaries.

<https://med.thiswayupclinic.com/users/login>

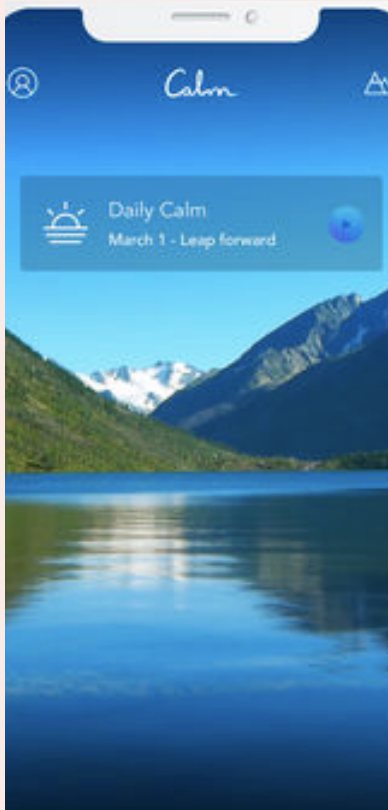


MyCompass

myCompass is an online program created by the Black Dog Institute. It contains interactive learning activities, a toolkit of resources, a self-assessment tool and a tracker to track your mood and lifestyle.

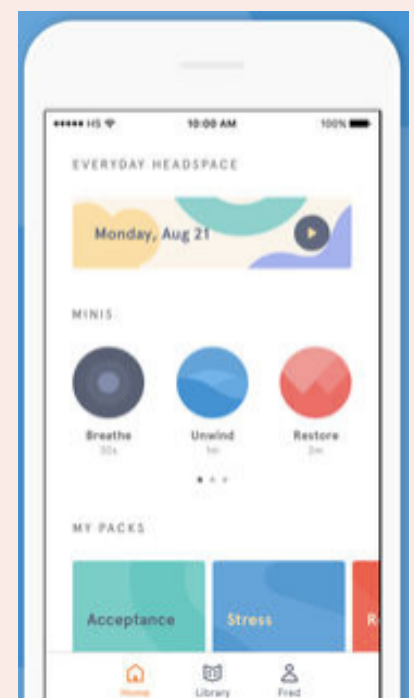
<https://unswmed.mycompass.org.au/>

Applications



- Daily Calm: a new 10-minute program added daily to help ease you into the day or unwind with before bed
- Sleep Stories: adult bedtime stories guaranteed to lull you to sleep
- 7 day and 21 programs for both beginner and advanced users
- Breathing exercises to relax
- 25+ soothing nature sounds and scenes to use during meditation, yoga or to help you sleep
- www.calm.com

- Everyday Headspace: daily meditations on a new topic each day
- “Mindful Moments” to keep you present throughout the day
- 2-3 minute “mini meditations” for a quick mental reset
- “SOS” sessions for moments of panic, anxiety and stress
- www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app





Acknowledgements

Thank you to all writers, contributors, and editors to this guide:)

You can do
anything, but not
everything needs
to be faced alone

