



reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

Planning Ahead for Wellness

We get it—students are busy people! Sometimes, it's hard enough to fit meals and breaks into your day when you've got classes, homework, maybe a job, maybe an org or two. That said, it can be smart to think about ways to prioritize your wellness and mental health now, when the quarter is just getting started, to prevent meltdowns, breakdowns, and crises later on.

What you need to be well may be different from what your friend,

roommate, or classmate needs to thrive—we are all individuals. However, there are some basics that all students (and really all people!) should think about.

Probably the most important (and most often ignored) is getting enough sleep. So many students skimp on sleep, whether it's because of staying up late to study, going out too much, or doing things that make it harder to get good sleep. If this is you, take a look at your current habits to see what could change:

Could you work on improving time management? Is using your phone or tablet before bed or drinking too much caffeine late in the day making it harder to fall asleep? Are you going out several nights a week, at the expense of sleep and schoolwork? While these habits may not be easy to change, change is possible. Even small tweaks can make a big difference.

In making a change to any habit, it can help to ask yourself a few questions. Continued on p. 2

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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!



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tions to get started:

1. What is my “big goal?” *Example: “Get more sleep.”*
2. What is a more *specific* goal that I can *measure*? (Vague goals can be harder to meet. *Example: “I want to sleep at least 8 hours every night.”*)
3. What gets in the way of my meeting the goal? What are ways I can work around these barriers? *Example: “I stay up later than I should looking at social media on my phone and then have a hard time falling asleep. I could put my phone*

away an hour before bed and listen to music instead.”

4. What are steps I can take toward my goal? *Example: “This week, I’ll go to bed 30 minutes earlier every night. Next week, I’ll go to bed an hour earlier, which gets me to 8 hours a night.”*

In addition to sleep, it’s helpful to take a step back and look at your diet and exercise habits. Are there ways your eating and activity habits could be healthier? You can use the same ideas listed above for sleep to make changes around eating and exercise, or anything you are trying to work on.

Another way to take care of yourself before things get to a crisis point is to ask for help when you need it. It can be good to talk to a friend, parent, mentor, or partner when you need support. You can also contact CAPS and set up an appointment with one of our counselors to learn about all the options CAPS offers students for support and wellness. Call us at (831) 459-2628 Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to schedule an appointment. Call the same number any time if you are in crisis and need urgent help.

Dear CAPS,

I have a lot of mood swings. Does that mean I am bipolar?

—Moody

Because awareness of bipolar disorder (which used to be called *manic depression*) has grown in the recent past, people often self-diagnose or diagnose others using material they find online or pop culture ideas about what bipolar disorder entails. There are certainly some trustworthy websites about mental health (the [Mayo Clinic site](#), for example), but there is also a lot of misinformation out there.

One of the most common misconceptions about bipolar disorder is that it means going from feeling really happy one minute to really sad the next. This is not exactly accurate. The word *bipolar* means “two poles” of mood. However,

“happy” is not necessarily one of the poles—the poles are “manic” and “depressed.” Mania does not always involve feeling happy (although it can). It is a state of increased energy, agitation, and sometimes mood that often involves racing thoughts, impulsive behavior, reduced (or absent) need for sleep, lower appetite, and sometimes a loss of touch with reality. In some people, mania shows up as increased irritability (rather than feeling good or happy). A person with bipolar disorder can also have *hypomania*, which is a milder version of the same manic symptoms.

Bipolar disorder also includes periods of depression. *Depression* does not equal *sad*, although people who are depressed often have a sad mood. Depression is diagnosed when a person experiences a period of at least a couple of weeks in

which they have almost continually had a low or flat mood, changes in appetite and sleep, fatigue or low energy, feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, and trouble concentrating. A person must have had at least one episode of mania (or hypomania) and at least one period of depression to be diagnosed as bipolar.

Even for mental health professionals, it can be hard to diagnose bipolar disorder at times, as things like drug or alcohol abuse can cause some of the same symptoms. However, a careful assessment by a mental health clinician is still the best way to find out if someone has bipolar. If you have concerns about any of the symptoms mentioned here, get in touch with CAPS to set up an appointment.

Wellness Tip: Science-Based Ways to Cope with Depression

Depression is unfortunately a very common problem, with almost 7 percent of people in the United States experiencing clinical depression in any given year. This figure is even higher in young adults ages 18 to 25, at 10 percent.

For anyone with moderate to severe depression, especially when suicidal thoughts are present, seeking professional help is very important. Fortunately, depression is treatable through therapy and medication, which are about equally effective. In severe depression, the combination of therapy and medication is most effective (rather than one or the other). There is also a strong placebo effect with depression medications—in studies, people on a placebo often do as well as those on medication. Lifestyle factors, such as exercise and social support, are also very important in preventing and treating depression. For many people, medication is a great tool for reducing symptoms and increasing energy, making therapy and

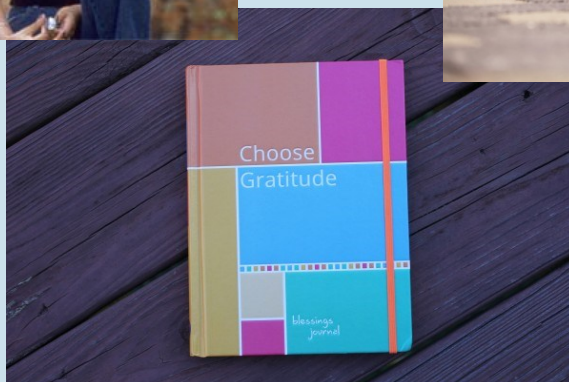
lifestyle changes more possible and more effective.

For those with mild depression, therapy and/or lifestyle changes can make a big difference. Countless studies show that exercise is a very effective way to reduce and sometimes eliminate depression, especially cardiovascular exercise. Diet is also important: According to research, a healthy diet low in processed foods, sugar, and alcohol can reduce depression. In fact, for people who are depressed, avoiding alcohol may be key, as alcohol has a depressant effect on the body and can thus make depression worse.

Something called “behavior activation” is a scientifically proven treatment for depression. Behavior activation is just a fancy name for increasing and regularly engaging in rewarding, positive activities. Things that increase a person’s sense of connection, pleasure, and accomplishment can be great tools for improving mood, such as time

with close friends, engaging in fun hobbies, doing volunteer work, going for walks on the beach, and learning a new skill. The specific helpful activities will, of course, vary from person to person.

Some other proven ways to battle depression include being outdoors, setting and reaching small goals, strengthening positive relationships, and engaging in a gratitude practice (spending time each day reflecting on something you feel grateful for). Things that do not help treat depression are using alcohol or other drugs to cope and zone out, watching TV as your only coping tool, and talking excessively about negative events and feelings (however, some acknowledgement of and talking about your feelings can be helpful—just as long as it’s in balance with talking and thinking about positives as well).



Upcoming Events

See our [website calendar](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more upcoming events.

CAPS GROUPS: CAPS is offering a variety of therapy and support groups this quarter! Most of our weekly groups are still accepting new members, and we also have a few drop-in groups, to which you can come any week you want rather than having to sign up. Check out our [Groups web page](#) or call us at (831) 459-2628 for more info.

LET'S TALK: Let's Talk is a drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential, chat with a professional CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! Let's Talk is held four afternoons a week at different, convenient locations around campus when classes are in session (not held during finals week or summer). All registered undergraduate and graduate UCSC students are welcome to any location of Let's Talk. Read more and see the current schedule on our [website](#).

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS offers a different wellness workshop every Wednesday, 3 to 4 pm when classes are in session (not during finals week or summer), at the Student Health Center Mural Room. These

hour-long workshops provide info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thought patterns, how positive psychology relates to academic success, and improving academic focus. Read more on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

ANXIETY TOOLBOX: This is a three-part workshop series that provides research-proven tools to help you better understand and cope with anxiety. Each of the three hour-long workshops provides info and experiential skills. Offered different days and times throughout winter quarter. Read more on our [website](#), and call us to get more information and sign up at (831) 459-2628.

MINDFUL LIVING: This is a three-part workshop series that uses mindfulness-based tools to increase insight and self-awareness and build coping. The skills learned apply to a range of issues, including managing stress and difficult emotions. Each of the three hour-long workshops provides info and experiential skills. Offered different days and times throughout winter quarter. Preliminary scheduled appointment at CAPS required before sign-up if you have not been seen at CAPS this academic year. Read more on our [website](#), or call us to get more info at (831) 459-2628.



"We found this in your brain."