

Computing - Student Wellbeing Newsletter

Third Edition

December 2019

Welcome to the Student Wellbeing Newsletter

We hope you have had a good term at University so far– not long left now until the Christmas break!

For those who are new to the newsletter, it always contains a different topic each month around student wellbeing.

Every edition highlights a useful app in 'App of the Month', whilst 'Mental Health in the Media', includes links to interesting articles on mental health and wellbeing.

This edition also has an article on the science of wellbeing, information of events in London this month and also information to services which can help if needed whilst the University is closed for holidays which is on page 4.

App of the Month: Student Health App

The **Student Health App** provides easy access to more than 900 pages of reliable health information all in one place. The content has been created for university students by NHS doctors and is regularly updated. Use the app to reduce your worries, feel more confident and get the support you need at what can be a challenging time for any student.



Mental Health in the Media

The top tip for Mental Health in the Media for this month is about how to stay healthy and well in the Winter. It is set to be pretty cold in the UK this year.

Changes in season can massively impact our health and wellbeing. 3 top tips to help combat this are below:

- Try and do as much physical activity as you can
- Make the most of natural light, take a walk in the daylight if you can as this can boost mood.
- Increase your vitamin D intake– the NHS recommends adults to take a vitamin D supplement every day during Winter which in the UK is from December-February.

Some people are especially affected, having a condition called seasonal affective disorder which is a form of depression. Please see your GP if you are feeling particularly affected.

Christmas in London

Click [here](#) for a full suggestion list from Visit London

There are lots of events on in London for those of you who will still be here for the festive period. Here is a list of some of what is on offer and also a few options which are not Christmas themed!

Just across the road in Hyde Park is the Winter Wonderland—this is free to enter and look around. They also have student discounts on some of the attractions

It is important to take regular breaks from studying, so why not check out something new!

- * Christmas at Kew Gardens
- * Hogwarts in the Snow at Warner Bros Studios
- * Visit Kensington Palace
- * Visit the Christmas tree at Windsor Castle
- * Visit Enchanted Woodland at Syon Park
- * Go ice skating— there are a number of ice rinks up in London for the season
- * Visit Trafalgar Square's Tree
- * Go to a traditional carol service at St Paul's Cathedral or join in with carols at the Royal Albert Hall
- * Visit Southbank markets
- * Watch teams in fabulous fancy dress run through Covent Garden in The Great Christmas Pudding Race
- * Join Professor Brian Cox and Robin Ince at the Hammersmith Apollo for their annual Christmas mash-up of science, comedy and music.
- * Re-enact festive scenes from the hit TV show and visit the holiday armadillo's grotto at FriendsFestive
- * Go green and join in festive workshops at the Zero Waste Christmas Market.
- * Wrap up warm to browse the glitzy market stalls at Christmas in Leicester Square
- * See the beautiful Oxford Street Christmas lights shimmer
- * Celebrate 250 years since Beethoven's birth during Classical Season at Southbank Centre
- * See a giant menorah light up Trafalgar Square for Chanukah.
- * Visit the V&A museum

If you are not in London— why not check out events in your local area



The Science of Wellbeing

As you are all interested in science, I thought you'd like to hear more about research happening in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience, and how this contributes to wellbeing. I've summarised papers to provide an introduction to some key ideas.



All brain activity depends on the neurons - cells that carry information from one place to another through a combination of electrical and chemical signals. Information is transferred between neurons at synapses, and is typically mediated by chemical signalling molecules, called neurotransmitters. For example, dopamine is a neurotransmitter which facilitates enjoyment of experiences and drives the desire to engage in activities.

The outer layer of the brain forms the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for many attributes that we consider inherently human, such as language, reasoning, and imagination. Below the cortex, in the centre of the brain, are the subcortical structures, containing the amygdala and parts of the prefrontal cortex. Neuroscientific evidence indicates that the subjective experience of happiness, pleasure, and general wellbeing depends on shared or overlapping networks of interacting subcortical and cortical regions. Disturbances in the structure and function of these regions can reduce the ability to experience positive emotions and pleasure; this is common with chronic stress, anxiety, and depression.

Wellbeing is determined by genetics, current circumstances, life events and internal state of mind. In other words, we have some control of our wellbeing. Our thoughts can greatly influence our outlook on life. Until recently, it was thought that our brains were hard-wired at birth; this is not the case. The brain is a dynamic system, which responds to environmental demands through actions; its anatomical structure and physiology continuously change throughout our life. This ability to physically change to adapt to circumstances is neuroplasticity. In other words, we have the power to change our brains for the better. We can "rewire" our brains to boost mood and overall wellbeing through different training and exercises. Research focuses on training via mindfulness and exercise. Mindfulness engages brain regions that are key for body awareness, memory, and emotion, leading to positive wellbeing. This was also covered in the last newsletter! Physical exercise changes the way the brain processes the information, and has a positive effect on the structure and function of a number of brain regions.

For anyone who wants to learn more, I would recommend the Science of Wellbeing course by Yale, which you can do for free online.

We hope you all have a good break when the University is closed.

If needed here at the contact details of some of the organisations or charities which are still open over the holidays if you need any support. This list is not exhaustive!

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15 to 35. Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight) Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Men's Health Forum 24/7 stress support for men by text, chat and email. Website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Mind Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems. Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm) Website: www.mind.org.uk

NHS call 111 for non-emergency medical helpline

Samaritans Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline) Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Alcoholics Anonymous Phone: 0845 769 7555 (24-hour helpline) Website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

National Gambling Helpline Phone: 0808 8020 133 (daily, 8am to midnight) Website: www.begambleaware.org

Happy Holidays!

Please note I have moved from room 454 in Huxley to room 304a

If you would like to see me please email m.langan@imperial.ac.uk