

Overcoming Homesickness

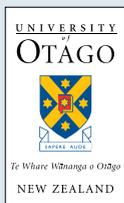
Settling into Tertiary Life

A resource provided by the Otago Tertiary Chaplaincy Team
otago.ac.nz/chaplain

See also:

University of Otago Healthy Campus website
otago.ac.nz/healthy-campus/index.html

Chaplain's guide to study otago.ac.nz/chaplain/resources/chaplainsstudyguide.html



Welcome

Whether you've moved from a different country, a different island or even just from across the street, living away from your family and friends for the first time can be scary. It is a very big deal. Experiencing homesickness isn't pleasant, especially when it is linked with actual sickness, but there are things you can do about it. Homesickness doesn't last forever, but if you let it get to you, it can last a very long time. Getting homesick is nothing to be ashamed of and there are many ways to deal with it.

No matter whether we have moved here on our own or with our families, whether we are an undergraduate, a post-graduate student or a staff member, whatever our age, culture or faith, all of us may experience homesickness and suffer from its symptoms. We may feel that we are lost and totally separated from home, like a plant which has been uprooted from our home soil. However, these feelings do not mean that we will be stuck in 'homesickness' forever. We can deal with homesickness.

Homesickness is the feeling of sadness or discomfort after leaving home. This can be triggered by a combination of many things including being away from your parents, sleeping in a different bed, and even having a new doctor. Everyone experiences homesickness in different ways, some feeling sad for apparently no reason or not wanting to associate with other people. Homesickness is very common, affecting around 70% of University students. It can be mild or very overwhelming. If feelings of homesickness are affecting your ability to enjoy life then you should consider talking to someone, or trying some ideas to help you feel better. There is no one right way to deal with homesickness, but here are some ideas:

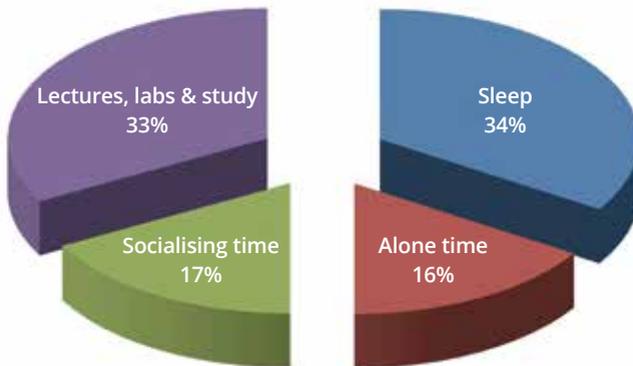
- Make the place you are living in feel more like home
- Bring your duvet cover from home, or get it sent to you
- Put up posters and photos to remind you of home
- Keep some comfort food in your room (soup, biscuits etc)
- Make new friends
- Get out there and see your new city
- Join an OUSA club or society
- Schedule some specifically recreational time alone
- Talk to someone about how you are feeling
- Watch your favourite show on TV
- Write a (genuine) letter to your family and friends back home
- See page 9 for more survival tips!

Haere Mai

If a friend gets homesick:

- Tell your friend you are there for them
- Listen to them and respect their need to have some time alone
- Share with them things that helped you, or are helping you, deal with homesickness
- Help them decorate their room or join a club
- If it's serious, get them help

You may be feeling stressed from the move so keeping healthy is a must. Getting a good amount of sleep and eating healthy food can help to combat this. To succeed academically, try and keep a good balance in your life. Below, is a suggested “averaged out” way to allocate your time. Your schedule each week will not always allow this to happen. Everyone will have different priorities, and some times of year will require more hours for study. Nevertheless, it is important for everyone to have some “alone time” to reflect, relax and unwind.



Many people you meet will be quite different to the people you used to hang around with. This is a natural part of life. As long as these new people are not being mean or rude to you then you should try to accept them, and accept that there are other ways of doing things.

While homesickness can be hard, it shouldn't affect your everyday life. If you aren't able to leave your room or your workload is becoming far too much you should talk to someone who can help. Be careful that the symptoms you are attributing to homesickness aren't something worse, like depression. Moving out of home and going to university are supposed to be positive experiences overall. If you are having more bad days than good days you need to change something, and drowning your sorrows in alcohol is not a healthy option. Remember why you are here.

Ākonga Māori Tēnā Koutou katoa

Nāu mai haere mai tauti mai

The difficulty of being away from whānau support networks can become overwhelming very quickly. The consequences of homesickness can sometimes affect your personal well-being, academic performance and your environment. WE CAN AWHI OR HELP YOU.

He pōkēkē Uenuku I tū ai
Supporting you to achieve your goals

If you feel homesick...

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

- ~ Call or visit the Counsellor at the Māori Centre at 515 & 519 Castle Street North, phone 479 8283 or email: Vicky Totoro vicky.totoro@otago.ac.nz or Ayla Hawkins ayla.hawkins@otago.ac.nz
- ~ Visit Te Roopū Māori (Māori Students' Association) at 523 Castle Street North, phone 479 8563.
- ~ Check out other support services for Māori on the website: otago.ac.nz/services/maori.html

POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS

Call *Kaiteretere* Richard Kerr-Bell 021 427 865 to arrange a chat or just to talk to there and then about where to next or email richardkb@op.ac.nz

It is important to know that homesickness is very normal and can be managed over time.

The experience of home sickness can be lessened by:

- ~ Setting and knowing you have a date to return home
- ~ Calling those you love
- ~ Calling, talking and mixing with your friends
- ~ Visiting a relative's home or family friend in the area
- ~ Getting involved in physical activity (sport, walking) or activity that directs your energy and focus somewhere else.
- ~ Having physical items from home that you can see such as a rock, pebbles, a piece of your home that represents your family and those things you value from home.

During this time, know that it will pass and get less over time, that it is normal and common. Talking to someone you trust, or a counsellor or other whanau support helps.

While it can be tempting to drink to excess or take substances that numb your emotions, this doesn't solve the issue and can lead to new ones. Most importantly, be gentle on yourself, take care. The Staff of Te Punaka Owheo are here for you!

See pages 15-18 for Student Support Services contact details.

International Students

A particular welcome if you have come from overseas. We thought of greeting each of you in your own language, but didn't want to leave anyone out. So (in English) WELCOME!

If you have come from far away, life may be extra challenging for you. Even these words may be in an unfamiliar language. Our ways of talking about things may not be your ways. You may have to adjust to strange food, a different climate, and an unfamiliar landscape. Home is so far away that you can't easily get a ride home on the weekend like Kiwi students who feel homesick.

We have an idea of what it may be like for you, and are here to help. Be patient with us if our attempts to help seem odd in terms of your culture.

The experience of moving into another culture can be both exciting and challenging. The difficult feelings that arise because of the challenges are sometimes described as culture shock. Many international students experience culture shock and there are many places on campus where you can talk with someone about your experiences. International University students can speak with an International Student Adviser in the International Office and International Polytechnic students can speak with an International Student Support Adviser at Student Success in H1, H Block. (see pages 15-18 for contact details).

There are also overseas student associations that can help you to settle into a new culture. You can find a list of these on the OUSA website ousa.org.nz/recreation/clubs/



Home Sickness Is

- Missing the place and people you know so well
- Feeling nostalgic for familiar things like your family, friends, pets, house or neighbourhood
- Being miserable and not knowing why
- Feeling like a prisoner in your own room
- Being unable to get into a reassuring routine
- Not liking meals at the flat or the College because the atmosphere doesn't feel right
- Wondering what people at home are doing; feeling as if you are missing out
- Wanting to go straight back home after you have arrived
- Not liking coming back after the holidays
- Being conscious you are doing things out of character
- Thinking you are the only one on campus with homesick feelings
- Being unable to settle at anything
- Crying for no reason
- Getting anxious or upset over little things that didn't used to bother you
- Finding the values of people around you strange and vaguely threatening
- Getting fed up with new food, new smells, new scenery and wanting the familiar
- An experience, a state of feeling that will pass, sooner or later



Students who have lived away from home say ...

- I came from a quiet family. The lining up for showers, the queuing for meals and the noise nearly sent me up the wall.
- Because I didn't know the people who make the noise I found it difficult to say anything to them. I felt like a prisoner in my own room.
- Homesickness for me was like I was not myself. Anything others said in trying to help didn't touch that deep inner split.
- Homesickness began when I started missing the regular and routine things around home. Certain noises, smells, food, leave a lot of memories.
- I couldn't go into the dining room on Sunday because I missed so much the home Sunday dinner of big roasts and real family time.
- Homesickness began when I started to make comparisons between familiar home memories and the newly formed memory experiences of my new home.
- I missed my parents calling me in the morning.
- I found my normal sleep patterns were disturbed.
- Not knowing English very well made me long not only for home but for my homeland.
- I organise my timetable so I can be around to check the mail. When a letter doesn't come I get a real ache inside.
- I had to work hard at remembering other people's name, but it made a real difference in building friendships.
- Orientation Week activated my scaredness: it was horrible.
- I found Orientation Week a great way to draw me out. I had to mix. It helped to build up some real good memories.
- I was sick for a whole day no one knew. This would never have happened at home. It was very distressing.
- I've been tempted to find substitute solutions for the pain of homesickness. Drugs and sex have been two ways for me.
- I had thought that I had moved away from home and was my own person. But I couldn't move away from my parent's expectations.

- Homesickness is crying on your own.
- Little things can tip you into homesickness. Someone called me by another name and I felt cut off.
- Some students come with crazy TV-generated ideas of how good life here will be. The reality knocks them for six.



Helpful websites:

Student Learning Centre 'Effective Study Techniques'
slc.otago.ac.nz/find-online-resources/

Chaplain's guide to study
otago.ac.nz/chaplain/resources/chaplainsstudyguide.html

Survival tips

- Set your room up with something familiar from home.
- Make an effort to talk to someone new.
- Try to leave your door open sometimes when you are in your room; someone might pass by and say “hello”.
- Get into activities which build up a storehouse of good new memories for you – take up a new interest, sport or recreational pursuit where you can have fun and make new friends. Unipol Recreation Centre at the University Plaza Building One and OUSA Clubs and Societies Centre can help you make your choice (contact details on pages 15-18).
- Check out the Personal Plan on pages 11-12 in the booklet.
- Talk to someone else about how you feel – any new student will probably feel much the same as you do.
- Respond to the invitations of others to places or events where you will meet more people.
- Organise a toll-free arrangement with your home telephone provider so you can ring home for free; but be aware that ringing home too often in the first few weeks may prolong homesickness for you.
- Recognise that this is a grief experience. Have a good cry, it’s nothing to be ashamed of when you’re really feeling down to it and tears can be cleansing.
- Jot down thoughts, experiences and dreams in a journal or at the back of this booklet, and try to make some sense out of the different pieces.
- Be kind to yourself – it is OK to miss home and perfectly normal. After all, you have spent most of your life there until now.
- Prayer and/or meditation may help you feel more grounded and confident. The University provides a Prayer and meditation room, upstairs in the University Union Building. Contact Greg greg.hughson@otago.ac.nz to arrange access to the University Prayer & meditation room.
- Talk to a tutor, or someone in your department.
- Talk to the Chaplains, someone at the Counselling services or at the Student Support Centres (see the contact details on pages 15-18).
- Organise your next home visit in advance – to give you something to look forward to and to save money as booking in advance is cheaper – but try not to make your first home visit during your first few weeks on campus as you need time to settle in.

Two Homesickness Poems by University of Otago Language Centre Students

Different country, different time....
Different people, different food....
The only sameness is me.

I can take off my bag
I can take off my mood
I can take off my fear ...

But I can't take off my homesickness

I can get brave
I can get sense
I can get friends ...

But I can't get a hug from home

By Kuan Ting HUANG
Taiwan

Sometimes I feel homesick
I miss my family and friends
If I feel homesick at night
I'll not sleep

Sometimes I remember
my family's smile
my friend's smile

But I've to get over my homesickness
Because it's my destiny!!

By Hiroyasu Hanaki
Japan

A Personal Plan to deal with homesickness

modified from the University of Worcester's webpage

This work sheet may help you assess how you are feeling, will help you decide on whether or not you need to seek help or help you devise your own plan for getting through the next few weeks.

Symptoms

There are 19 possible symptoms of homesickness listed below. Tick any of the ones you are suffering from.

- 1. Tearfulness.
- 2. Feeling sad.
- 3. Feeling anxious or panicky.
- 4. Feeling overwhelmed.
- 5. Feeling lonely.
- 6. Feeling out of control.
- 7. Feeling more irritable than normal/ less tolerant of others.
- 8. Being angry with parents or family members.
- 9. Feelings of jealousy towards siblings at home.
- 10. Changes in sleeping patterns.
- 11. Not being able to sleep.
- 12. Sleeping too much and hiding away in bed.
- 13. Changes in eating patterns.
- 14. Not eating enough.
- 15. Overeating.
- 16. Feeling generally unwell or sick.
- 17. Feeling isolated and lonely.
- 18. Not being able to concentrate or focus.
- 19. Using drugs and alcohol to block things out.
- 20. Spending too much time in virtual reality/cyberspace



As you look down the list of symptoms you have ticked, are there any you can help yourself with? For example, if you are not eating or sleeping properly, are there simple things you could be doing that would help you feel better? If you are eating at irregular times then this can cause your moods to swing. Lack of sleep can also make problems seem more out of control than they are.

Are you doing enough to relax your body and mind?

Perhaps using some of the suggestions in the booklet, list here some practical steps you could take to improve your wellbeing:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

As you assess the symptoms in the list that you have ticked, are there any there that you have no idea how to tackle or that you feel are unconquerable on your own? If your general wellbeing is being compromised, then perhaps it would help to talk to someone else, a friend, your flatmates, your College Head, your RA or Welfare Officer, a Chaplain or a counsellor at Student Health, or any of the other contact people listed on pages 15-18. They will be able to give you advice on how to tackle these issues and provide the emotional support you may need at the moment.

Or you might want to consider this...

“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change”
(thanks to Wayne Dyer)

From the Lord of the Rings

By JRR Tolkien

The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.



MY HOME LIFE WAS LIKE...

Love
Open
Sheltering
Punishing
Chaotic
Criticizing
Peaceful
Touching
Humorous
Relaxing
Stressful
Violent
Dominating

BEING AWAY FROM HOME IS ...

Exciting
Scary
Choices
Can't cope
New
Independence
Demanding
Challenging
Difficult
Sad
Adventure
Fun
Exciting...
Empty
Lost...



Support Services – Contact Details

OTAGO UNIVERSITY

Tel 0800 80 80 98 Web otago.ac.nz/services
Emergency contact 24 hours 479 5000

Student Health. For all Health & Counselling Services **All enquiries**
Corner of Walsh and Albany Streets 479 8212 or 0800 479 821

Chaplaincy Team

The Upper Room, Mezzanine Floor, Union Building

Greg Hughson 479 8497 or 027 212 1048

Email greg.hughson@otago.ac.nz

Contact Greg to arrange access to the University Prayer & meditation room

Mark Chamberlain 479 0066 or 027 220 7685

Email machamberlain61@gmail.com

Mike Wright 479 6094 or 021 735 286

Email chaplain@op.ac.nz

Lyn Meinders 027 549 8478

Email lyn.meinders@otago.ac.nz

Web otago.ac.nz/chaplain

Academic and Course Enquiries – University Information Centre

Information Services Building 0800 80 80 98 or 479 7000
(Library Building)

Career Development Centre 479 8244
Information Services Building

Disability Information & Support 479 8235
West lane, ISB – 65 Albany Street

Fees 479 9006
Clocktower Building (basement)

Foundation Studies 479 5711/5253
University Plaza Building One, Anzac Avenue
Student Support Officers

International Student Support 479 5921/5777
International Student Advisers
Email international.support@otago.ac.nz

Māori Centre/Te Huka Mātauraka

515 & 519 Castle Street North

General enquiries 479 8305

OUSA

Main Office – Union Building 479 5332

Student Support Centre 5 Ethel Benjamin Place 479 5448

OUSA Clubs and Societies Centre

Albany Street 479 5960

Web ousa.org.nz

Pacific Islands Centre

1 & 3 Leithbank

Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai 479 8278

Proctor's Office

St David Lecture Theatre

479 4880

Student Accommodation Centre

109 St David Street

479 5100

Email accommodation@otago.ac.nz

Student Learning Centre

Information Services Building

479 5786

slc.otago.ac.nz/

Te Roopū Māori

523 Castle Street North, Office

479 8563

Unipol Recreation Centre

130 Anzac Avenue

University Plaza Building One

479 5888

OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

Tel 0800 762 786 Web otagopolytechnic.ac.nz

Chaplains

Mike Wright

021 735 286

H106, the Hub, H block

Email chaplain@op.ac.nz

Paul Armstrong

479 4921

Ground floor, Auditorium Building

University of Otago, College of Education, Union Street East

Email paul.armstrong@op.ac.nz

Web otago.ac.nz/chaplain



Customer Services/Programme Enquiries & Enrolments/Fees Advice

Level 1, F Block, Forth Street

Customer Services

0800 762 786 or 477 3014

OPSA (Students' Association)

Ground floor, F Block

Lesley Scoullar

477 6974

Web opsa.org.nz

Student Success

Ground floor, H block

Student Success Team Leader

Brayden Murray

03 479 3743

Student Health and Counselling

Level 1, Manaaki/Student Centre, Harbour Terrace

479 6082

Charlotte McLachlan

Anna Seiuli

Annie Beentjes

Daniel Larsen

Learning Advisors

Ground floor, H Block

0800 762 786

Jean Monk

Rose Stanton

Kristen Bracey

Ross Gilbertson

Student Advisory Team

Ground floor, H Block

479 3743

Career Success

Patricia Quensell

Disability Support Advisor/ Well Being Advisor

Danni Roberts

021 732 103

Homestay Advisor

Aya Garcia

021 735 338

International Student Support Advisors

Yvonne Fogarty

021 735 258

Sheena Roy

027 4972 452

Student Advisor

Celia Hepburn

021 735 363

International Student 24/7 Emergency contact phone 021 735 421

Kaiterekere

Richard Kerr-Bell 021 427 865

Pacific Island Support Advisor

Anna Seiuli 021 735 436

Student Support and Administration

Sharon Ward 479 3743

Unipol Recreation Centre

130 Anzac Avenue

University Plaza Building One 479 5888

OTHER CONTACTS

University of Otago Healthy Campus website

otago.ac.nz/healthy-campus/index.html

Otago Combined Christian Groups (CCG)

otagoccg.co.nz

Muslim University Students' Association (MUSA)

otagomusa.wordpress.com

Worship centres in Dunedin

otago.ac.nz/chaplain/worship

Youthline 0800 376 633 Free text 234

youthline.co.nz

Lifeline (24hrs)

0800 543 354

Suicide Crisis Support (24hrs)

0508 828 865



Photo: Paul Hughson

He iti hau marangai e tū te pāhokahoka
A little storm and then a rainbow appears

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For further information about services for students

Explore online at these websites:

Otago University
otago.ac.nz/services

Otago Polytechnic
otagopolytechnic.ac.nz

My Own Thoughts