

When you first arrived everything was very exciting. During the first week or so you probably felt good about your progress in English. You have found your new friends to be fun and interesting. You like your host family. In all you have been enjoying being an exchange student. But recently you have been feeling rather uncomfortable. Several days in a row you have woken feeling depressed for no particular reason. Sometimes you feel like bursting into tears and sometimes you have difficulties eating properly.

You probably consider yourself to be reasonably self-assured, competent, interested in other cultures, sociable, adaptable and friendly but recently you have had some doubts about this.

This is culture shock. It happens to most exchange students once they have settled in after their arrival. You have become mentally exhausted coping constantly with behaviours that are different and ideas that are difficult to understand, trying to absorb all the new information you have been getting, responding in new and different ways to the people around you and to how things are done in this foreign society. This takes a lot of effort and you are doing everything in a foreign language. Put simply your brain has decided that you have been working it too hard recently and it is telling you it doesn't like this game and doesn't want to play.

Culture shock is not a constant depression but it can take a while to work through it.

*So what can you do?*

*Avoid Blaming Yourself or Others for the Way you Feel.*

It is simply a natural result of trying to live in an unfamiliar culture.

*Don't Expect Too Much of Yourself.*

Instead, find ways to reward yourself for small achievements. Try not to take on any additional commitments that would burden your life at this point.

*Try to Get More Rest.*

This is not always easy when your time is being managed by someone else but it is remarkable how helpful it is to take a brief nap of an hour or so, or to go to bed a little earlier each night while you are feeling the effects of culture shock. With adequate rest, your chances of succeeding in what you do are greater.

*Eat Well*

Eat nourishing foods in reasonable quantities even when you do not feel like it. Avoid the temptation to eat a lot of junk food, sweets, soft drinks, and salty snack foods.

*Don't be afraid to seek advice – it always helps!*

Start with your Counsellor or Club YEO Officer. They can provide you with guidance and professional help should you need it. Usually, the sooner you get help the easier it is to deal with the difficulties you are having.

Overcoming culture shock is not always easy. Your mind and emotions will work hard to make sense of the strange place in which you now find yourself. The success you have in eventually dealing with a difficult situation will help you be more confident and to eventually come through the whole experience a stronger person.