

HEALTH CARE...

So you have made it to the unfamiliar climes of Great Britain and you suddenly realise that the food is very different to that which you are used to, the water just doesn't taste like it does at home and the weather is making you sneeze!

Your health is very important but you don't need this guide to tell you that; 5 a day, regular exercise and drinking plenty of water are all very good for you but what happens when you DO get sick?

When you are settled into your accommodation, one of the first things you should do is Register with a doctor (GP/ General Practitioner) – this is vital as you never know when you may need to call on one.

In Britain we have the National Health Service (NHS), this offers individuals free healthcare and anyone that is studying here for six months or longer , including your spouse and dependant children.

For individuals who are here for less than six months, emergency medical care is provided free of charge but ongoing medical care will incur fees this is why it is paramount to have medical insurance.

Regardless of your length of stay there are costs attached to prescriptions please see below for further explanations regarding 'costs'.

DOCTORS

Unless you are in an emergency setting then, if you feel unwell you should visit your doctor. If you feel too unwell to attend the surgery, a doctor will come to you on a 'home visit'. Doctors, or GPs as they are known, are the first point of contact in Great Britain.

Your college may have its own health centre, otherwise, you should register with any doctor close to where you live. A list of local doctors is available from: www.nhs.uk under 'find services'.

You may also contact NHS Direct who are very helpful if you cannot gain immediate access to a doctor: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or **0845 46 47**.

EMERGENCIES

Treatment in the Accident & Emergency Department (A&E or 'Casualty') of a hospital is free and is available 24 hours a day. Most, but not all, hospitals have A&E departments. Please be aware that 'emergency' means any accident or illness that is life threatening, if you have broken bones or you have sustained serious and deep cuts or burns. If you feel your or someone else's life is in danger call **999** immediately.

For minor injuries and other illnesses you should consult a GP or attend your nearest walk-in centre, details of your nearest centre can be found through the NHS website.

COSTS

Although seeing a doctor is free, if you require any medication then there is a charge of £7.20 per item of medication, this is likely to rise to £7.30 in April 2010. Medications are free if you are pregnant or have had a baby within the last 12 months. Some medicines are available without a prescription and can cost less, so do check.

Also, although you will normally be able to see a doctor free of charge, some services do need to be paid for at the doctor's surgery, e.g. vaccinations for travel.

DENTAL TREATMENT

Sadly it is difficult to find an NHS Dentist nowadays but it is important that you register with one. To find local dentists search on www.bda-findadentist.org.uk. Dental treatment can be extremely expensive and unless it is an emergency your medical insurance will not cover it.

EYE TESTS

Eye tests and treatment are available at opticians, which can be found all over the major cities. A charge applies of approximately £20 however costs vary, so check with various opticians. The high street opticians often run deals or free eye tests so literally keep your eyes open!

CHEMISTS/PHARMACIES

Chemists and Pharmacies offer a dispensary service for prescriptions and an array of 'over the counter' products that do not require a visit to your GP first. Pharmacists are highly trained and are able to provide confidential advice on a wide number of complaints and ailments.

Remember that whether it is the Doctor or the Pharmacist any information that you give them must be kept confidential and thus you can be assured will not go any further.

Also remember the doctors have seen it and heard it all before so ALWAYS get things checked out that you are worried about.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Do not be afraid to disclose any disabilities before you arrive at your university or college, however small you might feel they are. Your institutions prefer to know in advance, so they can prepare to help you in the best way.

SOME HEALTH ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF...

COLDS

Sadly a relatively common feature of Great Britain is the miserable weather in winter which can lead to a cold – if you catch one then stay in bed, keep warm, drink plenty of water and fruit juice. You do not need to visit the doctor. Within five days or so you should be feeling much better.

Conversely during the summer you may suffer from hayfever which is similar to a cold but you do not feel quite so achy! There are plenty of products on the market to combat the symptom.

MENINGITIS

Bacterial Meningitis is a serious, but rare illness. Many students are now offered vaccination against one of the common strains of meningitis, when they start their course. Most doctors' surgeries provide information on symptoms, which you should read. Awareness of symptoms is extremely important as meningitis can very quickly become serious. If you have any concerns ring the free meningitis helpline below, which also offers interpretation services (in 120 languages). To be more aware of symptoms, have a look at: www.meningitis.org 24 hour helpline, **tel: 0800 028 18 28**.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Attitudes to sex vary greatly in different cultures, but the choice should always be a personal one and not influenced by the culture you are living in. You are free to live according to your own personal standards and beliefs and should not feel under pressure to adopt those of your fellow students.

If you do need contraceptive advice, you can get this from your doctor or a local Family Planning Clinic, which will also provide cervical smears and pregnancy tests.

The HIV virus and other sexually transmitted diseases can be protected against through the use of condoms, which can be bought in chemists, public toilets, supermarkets and petrol stations. It is advisable to use condoms during any sexual activity to avoid contracting a sexually transmitted disease thus putting your health at risk. Do not be pressured into not using them, especially with a new partner.