

Study with CONFIDENCE



The Cocktail for a pleasant student life – helping you graduate on time with your HBO or university degree, without overworking yourself



STUDIELAB



The handbook for a pleasant student life

Many students describe student life as overwhelming. Forty-five percent of young people in the Netherlands experience stress. Do you also feel like there's a lot expected of you? Know that it doesn't have to be that way. You can lead a pleasant student life – not a stressful life that has been thrust upon you, but a joyful life in every aspect that you've chosen for yourself.

In this e-book, we provide proven insights and practical tips on how you can consciously shape your student life for more success and more happiness. The Cocktail for Success. Let yourself be inspired, and take away what personally resonates with you. We'll guide you through this e-book and are confident you'll quickly notice how it positively changes your life. This way, you can study with confidence and earn your diploma.

This is the handbook for a pleasant student life that you – after reading it yourself – will want to recommend to every other student.



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01

Starting your studies:
what to expect

While studying, a lot will come your way – both enjoyable situations and less pleasant ones. You'll also encounter things that no one warned you about beforehand. Being a student simply means your entire life changes. And how. You could even say: drastically. In this chapter, let's take a quick look at a typical student life.

A quick overview of student life

Making your study choice.

It actually starts in high school. During your time in havo or vwo, you're expected to make a decision about your studies. At least, that's what people around you expect. You might take various quizzes, attend open days at college or universities, and do online research. You may also ask people in your circle to help you figure out which career would be a good fit for you in the future.

Where do you want to study?

If you're lucky, you may already know what kind of job you want to do later and which degree would be helpful for that. In that case, you can make your study choice. But then you still need to decide where you want to study. Is there a college or university nearby that offers this program? Or will you need to study further away?



Living at home or renting a room?

You might need to think about whether you want to travel back and forth or live in a student room, and whether that's financially feasible. Will you borrow from DUO? Do your parents give you an allowance? Or do you have a part-time job? Will you leave your friends behind in your hometown or village? Or do you think you'll still be able to see them on weekends? Are you someone who's good at making new friends? And what about after your studies? Do you want to stay where you studied, or is there more work available in your hometown or region?

Making the decision.

If you're lucky, you can make well-considered choices. Or you might shrug your shoulders, make a decision, and choose a program that seems interesting to you, figuring out the rest as you go.



Preparing?

You officially enrol in a program and receive all sorts of information before the academic year even begins. You might want to prepare as best as you can. You buy notebooks and make sure you have all the books from the reading list ready. Or maybe you put everything off for now and wait to hear what's expected of you during the first lectures.

The first year of studying comes at you.

You travel to school. You have breakfast on the train. You sit in lecture halls all day with a laptop in front of you, listening to a lecturer who drones on for an hour in the same tone. During breaks, you head out to grab the best coffee, and since you didn't have time to prepare lunch this morning, you buy a 'Frikandelbroodje' from the cafeteria. When classes are over, it's time for dinner, so you grab a meal to go on your way home or eat with your fellow students. Then, you catch the late train back home and crawl into bed much later.



You have to live up to a lot of expectations.

It often feels like an overwhelming amount is expected of you as a student. You need to attend all the lectures each week. You need to keep up with your study materials. You need to be independent. You need to collaborate with others. You need to read and conduct research. You need to make a schedule. Ideally, you also want to pass all your exams in one go. Get good grades. Avoid any delays. You need to make new friends. You need to keep your professors on good terms. You need to gain experience. You need to cram theory. You need to stay cheerful. You need to handle criticism well. You also need to travel. If you live in a student room, you need to vacuum once a week. Cook. Prepare your own lunch. Do your own groceries. And on top of all that, work 19 hours a week. You also want to see your family regularly, as well as your old friends. Exercising is important. Maybe you even want to pick up that hobby of yours again. But where are you supposed to find the time for all of this?

The weeks fly by.

Before you know it, the end of the year is just around the corner. You have no idea how, but somehow, you've earned enough credits to move on to the next academic year. Yes! At the end of the second year, again. Although, it feels like you're increasingly running on empty. How are you going to keep this up until graduation? You'll also need to do a full-time internship soon. And take minors... Maybe even start thinking about your thesis topic. Perhaps it really is all a bit too much after all.

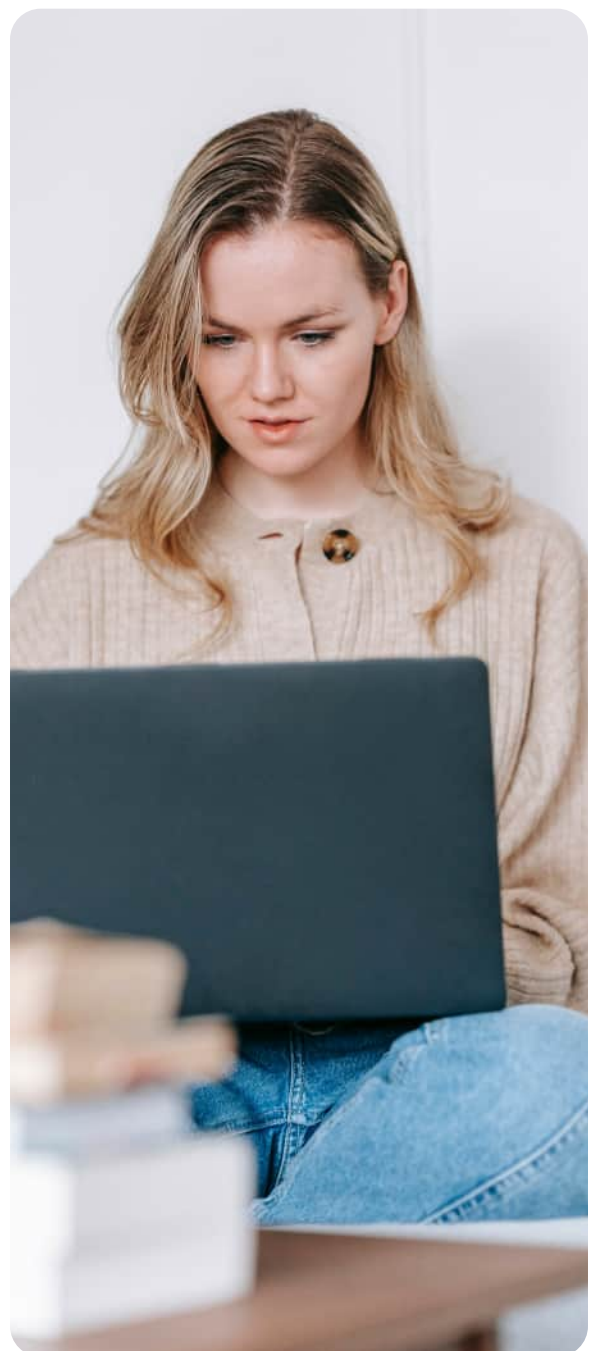
You feel stressed.

Research by the RIVM shows that 45% of young people experience stress. Many students also struggle with anxiety, depression, and burnout symptoms. When you realize everything a student faces during their studies and the changes that come with transitioning from high school to university life, it's not surprising that students experience stress. In fact, it's almost a miracle if they don't.

Now you understand why so many students don't graduate within the standard timeframe.

But if you're reading this, there is hope for you. Your student life doesn't have to be stressful. It can be different.

Maybe deep down, you're not the type of person who wants to hang out at the bar every night, but you're being dragged along by your classmates. Or maybe you don't want to spend your entire weekend working just to pay for a room you're rarely even at. Or perhaps you've spent hours working for nothing, only to realize you didn't even need half of the textbooks you bought. How can it be different?



Discover a student life you've chosen for yourself.

Do you want more control over your life? Stop letting your daily student life be dictated by what you think is expected of you, or by the stress of paying for it all? Maybe you no longer want a hectic student life that just happened to you, but one that you've intentionally chosen. A student life that makes you happy. So you can study with confidence and earn your diploma on time, without burning out. It's possible. In this e-book, we'll show you what you can do to make it happen.



Facts

- * **44%** of students live in student accommodation (down from 53% in 2015-2016, and steadily decreasing over the years as it becomes harder to find a room).
- * **76%** of all higher education students (HBO and university) have a part-time job (working an average of 19 hours per week).
- * **45%** of young people in the Netherlands experience stress.
- * **44%** of all young people feel lonely.
- * **85%** of all higher education students (HBO and university) feel safe to be themselves at school.
- * **74%** of all higher education students (HBO and university) rate the atmosphere at their program as positive.

Sources: RIVM, CBS, and National Centre for Study Choice, 2023-2024.

45% of young people in the Netherlands experience stress.

Young people experience stress due to:

26%

School

24%

Everything they
have to do

14%

Personal problems

16%

What others think

8%

Home situation

7%

COVID & restrictions

8%

Other factors

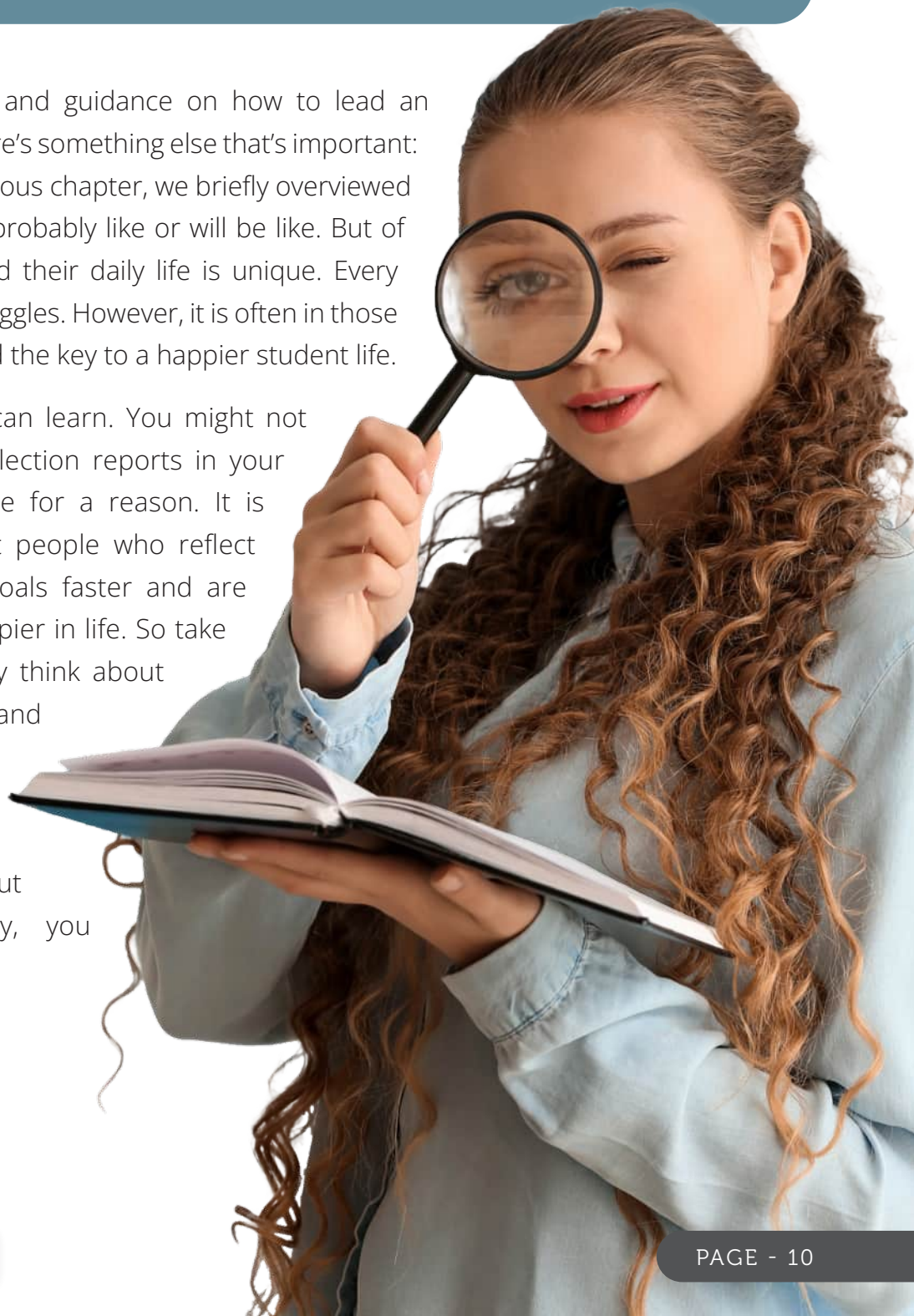


02

Your situation under
the **microscope**

Before we give you tips and guidance on how to lead an enjoyable student life, there's something else that's important: your situation. In the previous chapter, we briefly overviewed what your student life is probably like or will be like. But of course, every student and their daily life is unique. Every student has their own struggles. However, it is often in those struggles that you can find the key to a happier student life.

Reflection is a skill you can learn. You might not be a fan of all those reflection reports in your studies, but they're there for a reason. It is widely known today that people who reflect regularly achieve their goals faster and are more successful and happier in life. So take a moment to consciously think about the questions below and write down an answer for yourself. Even - or especially - if you're unsure or uncertain about something. Don't worry, you won't be graded on this.



Ask yourself these questions for a pleasant student life:

What study are you currently enrolled in or would you like to enrol?

Why are you studying or would you like to study this program? *Think about: future career, gaining more knowledge, 'because you don't know what else you'd want to do', and so on.*

Where are you studying or would you like to study? Why there?

Where do you live now?

Why would you like to live in a student house or stay at home?

How many hours are you currently spending on your studies each day?

What else do you do in your daily life besides studying?

What would you like to do more in your daily life besides studying?

What do you feel you struggle with in your daily student life: what causes you stress? *This can be anything, such as: difficulty with planning, fear of failure, unpleasant home situation, no time to exercise, perfectionism, concentration problems, feelings of loneliness, having to work a lot for money, long travel time, etc.*





We have one last question for you. You don't need to answer it now, but you can fill it out at the end of each following chapter in this e-book. We're going to provide you with a lot of inspiration, or you could call it a Cocktail of Success for a pleasant student life, but it's up to you to decide which knowledge and tips you want to apply to your life. Not every tip might resonate with you, and following every tip may be a bit much to ask of yourself. Don't make it too difficult. Just read through and note or highlight the ones you think: "I can do something with this."

Answer this question at the end of each following chapter in this e-book:



What can you change for a pleasant student life?

A smiling woman with curly brown hair, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, standing with her arms crossed against a white background. She is wearing large hoop earrings, a necklace with a small pendant, and rings on her fingers.

03

Make studying fun: the **Cocktail** of success.



The Cocktail for an enjoyable student life consists of various ingredients. You need all of these ingredients to confidently navigate life and earn your diploma on time. A lot of the information we share with you will probably not be completely new or surprising. However, we are confident that we have presented the information in such a way throughout the chapters that it will make you more aware of what you need. This e-book also offers interesting facts and practical tips that will really help you along the way.

Grab a pen and notebook. We encourage you to jot down the tips that resonate with you in each chapter. At the end of the e-book, we will provide you with a step-by-step plan. You can follow this plan to realistically integrate the tips into your student life. Keep in mind that you don't need to do everything at once. We even recommend taking things one step at a time. If you pick a few tips from this e-book to work on in the coming months, you're already doing great. You can also start with one specific chapter of this handbook and leave the rest of the information for now.



Answer this question at the end of each ingredient in the Cocktail for Success:

What can you change for a pleasant student life?

3.1 Create your ideal study space

The first ingredient for an enjoyable student life is: Create your ideal study space. A place where you can study effectively. A space where you can get your work done quickly and without too many distractions. This way, you'll have more time for other important things in your life.

Studying during the lectures...?

The chances are high that you're taking multiple courses for your studies, each with a different professor. The atmosphere in the classroom can vary from one lecture to the next. Similarly, the amount of time you're given during classes to work on assignments or review study material can differ. If you attend lectures where professors go through the material step by step, you might be in luck—especially if the professor forbids students from making noise. Make smart use of this precious time. Definitely avoid chatting non-stop with your neighbour during class, as your fellow students will find you boring and unengaging. It's about what works for you. This way, you'll save a lot of time.



Keep the presentation right in front of you. Take notes. It's scientifically proven that when a professor gives an oral explanation and you take notes, you retain the material better. Often, by the end of the semester, you might even have a complete summary! And no, you're not obligated to share it with your classmates. But if you do share, others might be willing to share theirs with you as well. Maybe there's something in theirs that you just missed. But pay extra attention when a professor gets particularly enthusiastic about a fact or specific topic. Put an exclamation mark next to it in your notes, as this could very well turn into a great exam question.

Find a nice study space in your in-between hours

Try to do as much of your study work as possible during classes. This way, you'll have less to do outside of class hours. But in practice, this won't always be possible. During your breaks, you might consider going to the media library if you're looking for a quiet place to study. If you find that you get a lot done there, try arriving at school a little earlier to work on assignments, so you can head home right after class. Or stay an extra hour after your classes if you're not a morning person. Do you need more stimuli to study? Then you might prefer sitting in the cafeteria or another place where people frequently pass by. Or study together with others for a more social environment.



Music helps you concentrate better

Many studies show that music can help improve concentration while studying, although there are also many students for whom music is distracting. Give it a try to see if music works for you. Experiment with different types of music to see if that makes a difference. For example, listen to cheerful, relaxing, or even instrumental music first, and then try something else.

If you need to study for longer hours but your motivation is dropping, take a break first and then put on completely different music for a fresh burst of inspiration. If you're feeling unmotivated to study or are already tired or hungover, music can still help improve your mood. Just open your laptop, play some music, and open the document you need to work on. Focus on the music first, and then shift your attention to the task at hand. Give it at least ten minutes before deciding you're having an off day—who knows, within those ten minutes, new inspiration might strike, and you could end up typing an entire page.



Studying away from home

A good study space is important, even outside of school. How can you create one for yourself? First, it helps to have an environment with as few distractions as possible. Think of a private room where you can shut yourself off from the outside world, or a library, or a quiet coffee shop. The advantage of studying at home is that everything you need is within reach. The downside, however, is that you might get distracted by the mess around you or by household chores that need to be done. In that case, a library might be a better option. If the weather is nice, you could also find a bench in the park. Nature is calming and inspiring for many people. Discover for yourself which study space works best for you, where you can focus most effectively.



“Clean your room!”

Your parents probably didn't say it often enough when you were younger, but they still have a point today: make sure your desk is tidy in your own room. Psychologists and organization experts say, “A tidy house is a tidy mind.” They also promise that tidying up doesn't have to take much time, as long as everything in your room has a designated place. Take some time to clean up thoroughly and get everything organized. Then, follow this rule every day: anything you can clean up in two minutes, do it right away. If you leave a coffee cup or empty plate on your desk at the end of the day, at least take it to the kitchen and wash it quickly. Do you find a tidy desk too bare and uninspiring? Consider adding (fake) plants or hanging a mood board with goals you want to achieve.

DARK AND 'FOCUS' MODE ON YOUR LAPTOP AND IN PROGRAMS



Did you know that on your laptop, you can often choose between a light or dark mode? This can help you focus better. Similarly, in software programs like Word, you can click on 'Focus' in the bottom right corner. This will hide all the buttons and options, allowing you to see only your document and text.



Stick to your routine

What you'll also be grateful for? Creating a study schedule at the start of each semester. Of course, this only works if you actually stick to it. Set fixed times in your calendar when you'll study. When you start your studies, feel free to experiment with different study times to discover what works best for you. Get to know your energy levels throughout the day, and use them wisely. Then stick to your routine. Research shows that your brain will start to adapt to these set times. It will subconsciously prepare itself, improving your concentration. This way, you'll feel motivated to get things done at these specific times.

Do you have a day when you feel a bit less energetic? Don't skip your study session. Sit at your desk and see what you still need to do. In this case, don't choose tasks that require your highest concentration. Think about what you **can** do right now. Maybe do some online research for information, jot down key terms, or make an outline for your reflection paper. Do that. You'll see that more gets done than you expected. It'll feel so good!

Take breaks: do something that gives you new energy

Don't be too hard on yourself. Stick to your study schedule and routine, but also remember to schedule breaks—they are just as important. Think of breaks as a reward for yourself. Rest moments allow you to refocus and become more productive. It's important not to take breaks that are too long, as that might lower your motivation to continue studying. Also, avoid things that might distract you too much, like scrolling through social media. Try taking a five to ten-minute break every hour and do something that re-energizes you. Sit on the couch with a cup of tea, get some fresh air outside, or do some exercises like jumping jacks to release dopamine—motivational happiness hormones.



Survival Tips

- * **Save your documents regularly.** Don't just save them in the documents folder on your laptop, but also on online platforms like Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox, or iCloud. This way, you can access your documents anytime, anywhere, and avoid losing them.
- * **Stuck on your study material or assignment?** Leave it for a moment. Work on something else first and return to it a few hours or days later with a fresh perspective. Or ask a professor or fellow student for help.
- * **Besides times when you really don't feel like studying,** you'll also encounter moments when you can focus so well that you want to keep going for hours on end. Don't do this. You'll eventually burn out. Instead, make good use of your energy during your break times and do something that makes you happy.

How will you set up your study space for a pleasant student life?



3.2 Surround yourself with motivating people

“Who you hang out with, you become infected by.” This is a saying that has become well-known for a reason. It’s true. If you want to eat healthily, but you’re constantly confronted with ready-made meals or snacks from the air fryer by your housemates, it’s incredibly difficult to stick to your goal. The same applies if you want to exercise regularly, party less, avoid study delays, and so on. Even your way of thinking and how positively you approach life can be influenced by your environment, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Who you associate with can have both a negative or positive influence on you. For example, as an introverted person, you can feel energized and come out of your shell when you’re surrounded by people who understand you. However, it can also be that you become quieter around your friends. Maybe you’re afraid of how they’ll react if you honestly express what matters to you in life. Even as an extrovert, you can consciously or unconsciously wear a mask and let your behaviour be influenced by the people you spend the most time with.

The second ingredient for a pleasant student life is: Surround yourself with people who motivate you. People who bring out the best in you. People who understand your ideals. People who give you energy. But who are those people for you?



“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

Who are the people you spend the most time with in your daily life? They likely have the greatest influence on you. The famous motivational speaker and entrepreneur Jim Rohn claims, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” These people influence your thoughts, behaviour, daily life, and even your success.

Energy Givers and Energy Drainers

According to many psychologists, everyone has two types of people in their life. You do too. First, there are the people who give you positive energy: the energy givers. These are the people who make you feel at ease, who inspire and encourage you, who support you and offer wise advice. They are people from whom you learn and who help you grow as a person.

On the other hand, there are the energy drainers. These are the people who can make you feel bad with a single comment. They give unsolicited advice, constantly nag, or don't respect your values and boundaries. They may go over your limits, not truly listen to you, and drain your energy.

Do you want to lead a pleasant student life? Then you've probably already guessed it – you need energy givers in your daily life and absolutely no energy drainers. Energy givers influence you in a positive way. Thanks to them, you feel better about yourself, supported, and motivated. This helps you achieve your goals more quickly. But who are your energy givers? And who drains your energy? If you want change in your life and wish to achieve more success, are you willing to spend less time with your energy drainers?



The right study partner

Some students get easily distracted and prefer to study alone. Do you recognize yourself in this? Then listen to yourself and study independently. Other students, however, struggle with discipline when studying alone. In that case, having a study buddy next to you can be incredibly helpful and motivating. You can create a study plan together with a classmate and study at set times during the week. Or plan times to review the material for an exam or quiz each other. Keep in mind: choose a study buddy who motivates you, an energy giver.

When you have to collaborate with an energy drainer...

Of course, it may happen that you have to collaborate with a classmate who doesn't sit well with you – an energy drainer. In such cases, remind yourself that this is temporary and that you don't have to let this person affect your life. Let that annoying comment or negative vibe pass you by. Don't let your precious energy be stolen from you. Focus on what you need to do and put your energy into that. Of course, you don't have to let people walk all over you. If someone says or does something that really bothers you, try to address it. Maybe the other person didn't mean it that way, and after a conversation, you both feel relieved. But if the other person reacts incomprehensibly, bring it up with a teacher. Let them know you feel uncomfortable with the collaboration – perhaps you can join another group or find a different solution.



You choose your own friends

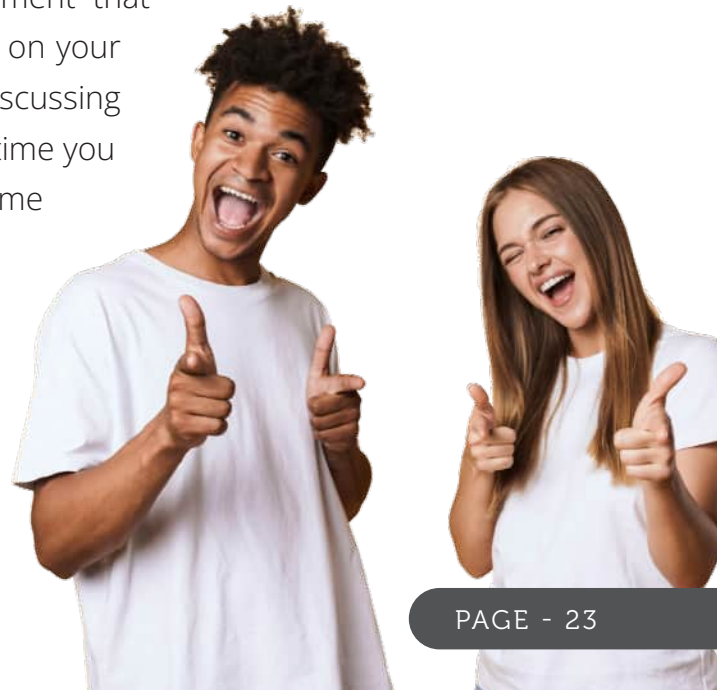
Who are your friends? Who do you spend the most time with? These friends will likely have the greatest influence on you. But take a moment to think: do they have a positive or negative influence on you? Are there energy givers among them, or mostly energy drainers? Do you dare to discuss your needs and ideals with them? How do they respond? Do they motivate you, or do they laugh you off? You are not obligated to consider people as friends who do not value you for who you are and what you want in life. You get to choose who your friends are!

Know that many friendships may no longer feel right as you enter a different stage in life. As a person, you change, and it's perfectly okay to let go of a friend and thank them for the phase in your life when they were valuable. Chances are, the other person feels the same way. Then it's time for both of you to move on to a new phase and new friendships. Or maybe you feel most understood and supported by your old friends because that friendship has been so long-lasting and deeply rooted. If that's the case, don't let that friendship fade. Make time for it, even if you're no longer in the same school or living far away. Cherish that valuable friendship.

You choose how much time you spend with family members

You have the freedom to decide how much time you spend with family members. Sometimes, it can be challenging to create some distance, especially if certain family members take a lot of your energy. Cutting ties completely is often not easy, and in many cases, not even desirable—especially if you still live at home. It might also feel uncomfortable because your parents have done a lot for you, and deep down, you care about them. Family remains important, and it's not about breaking contact but rather about taking care of yourself.

That means you don't have to accept every comment that discourages you. You are allowed to express what's on your mind and communicate what is important to you. If discussing this openly feels difficult, try to find a balance in the time you spend with family. Maybe you don't have to go home every weekend and can instead spend time with friends or fellow students who uplift you. Or you might choose to have a quiet weekend for yourself, staying in your room or spending time with housemates who motivate you. It's completely okay to make these choices for yourself.



Influencers: who are your role models?



When you hear the word 'influencers', you might think of social media. Let's not forget the digital world. Who do you follow on TikTok or Instagram? Influencers can also be energy-givers or energy-drainers. If you feel insecure because of certain posts, unfollow the accounts that share these messages. Let yourself be inspired only by influencers who bring out the best in you. The ones who motivate you. Don't just think of online influencers. Think of role models in your real life as well. Which comments from teachers should you take with a grain of salt? Which people have achieved something you also want to achieve and can ask for advice? Know who your advisors are.

Be social: keep meeting new people

Do you think it's radical to cut people out of your life? Won't you end up alone? Isn't that even worse? Know that you're not the only one with this thought. But ask yourself: isn't it even worse to not be able to be yourself and feel alone while being surrounded by people? Know that nearly half* of all young people in the Netherlands feel lonely. But fortunately, there are many ways to make new friends and welcome positive role models into your life. Don't be afraid to reach out to people. Many students long for energy-givers in their lives. You're not the only one. You also need them.

**44%, source: June 2024, RIVM*

Where can you find your new energy-givers? In many places. Think of: school activities (make sure to be present during an introduction week), student associations, sports clubs, study groups, neighbourhood apps, online (hobby) groups (and apps), and networking events. Of course, you can also take the initiative yourself. For example, post a call on social media saying that you'd like to exercise together with peers in the neighbourhood three times a week. Or organize a neighbourhood barbecue to meet people in your area (just check if barbecues are allowed in your neighbourhood first).





Student Survival Tip

PUT ALL YOUR ACTIVITIES IN YOUR (ONLINE) AGENDA

In your student life, you'll probably have many activities coming your way. Not only (online) lectures, but also meetings with friends, birthdays, sports classes, work shifts, a household schedule if you live in student accommodation, and so on. Keep track of all these appointments. Write them down in your calendar right away. This can be an online calendar like Google Calendar or a physical paper calendar. Some students like having their phone send them a notification for an activity (you can set this up yourself). Other students turn off notifications and forget to check their digital calendar, in which case a physical paper calendar placed in a visible spot might be more practical. The same goes for to-do lists. Test what works best for you.



A young woman with curly brown hair is smiling and standing with her arms crossed. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The background consists of horizontal dotted lines.

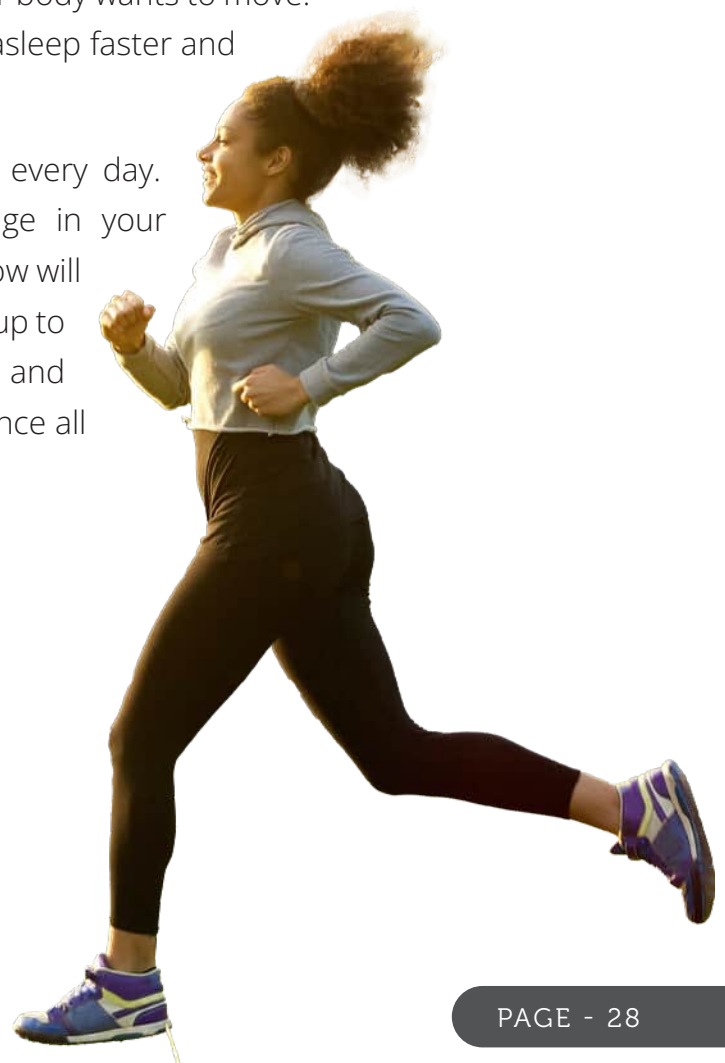
3.3 Move every day

Of course, you know you should move every day. Exercise is good for your health. But in a busy student life, it's easy to push this healthy habit to the background. "I'll really start working out next week." "I'll get back to it after exam week." Stop telling yourself that! It needs to happen now. Today. Do you know why? Exercise helps you feel fitter, and it has a huge impact on your brain. Not only will you be able to concentrate better on your studies, but you'll also retain the material better, giving you a higher chance of success and a more enjoyable student life. The third ingredient is: Move every day.

Find balance between mental and physical effort

Your studies, and maybe even your part-time job, mostly require a lot of mental energy. Your brain has to work hard. At the end of the day, you may feel mentally exhausted. You might think that you'll just fall asleep immediately, but if you haven't moved during the day, you might still have trouble falling asleep. Or you might wake up tired in the morning. Your mind is running overtime while your body is still full of energy. Your body wants to move. It's been proven: if you exercise enough, you fall asleep faster and improve your sleep quality.

You need both mental and physical challenges every day. Don't forget to schedule that physical challenge in your agenda as well. But how do you approach this? How will you move physically every day? This is completely up to you. Of course, it's important to know how much and what type of physical activity you need to experience all the health benefits.



- * **At least 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week, preferably spread over several days.**
 - ▶ **For moderate-intensity activity (where you feel your heart rate increase and breathe faster), think of: *walking, cycling, swimming, or household chores that require moderate effort, such as vacuuming.***
 - ▶ **For vigorous-intensity activity (where you start sweating), think of sports such as: *running, cycling, hockey, soccer, and fitness.***
- * **At least 2 times a week strength training, to strengthen your muscles and bones.**

Think of: fitness exercises, jumping, stair climbing, dancing, but cycling, walking, and running can also help with this.

Make it easy: move during your breaks

‘Exercise is good, more exercise is better,’ is the commonly known guideline for adults. Exercise doesn’t have to be difficult or complicated. While studying, you already need to take breaks, so why not take a quick walk around the neighbourhood? Or do a fitness workout for a boost of energy. You could also consider taking the bike to the train or school more often instead of the bus. Or walk to do your shopping instead of using the scooter or car. If you’ve made a New Year’s resolution to tidy up your room more often, grab the vacuum cleaner and give the floor a good scrub. That way, you’ll be moving more intensely while also checking off a household task. Plus, you’ll feel more at ease mentally because you don’t need to overthink things while moving. Now that’s multitasking!

Make exercise fun: seek variety

Remember that you don’t have to exercise in the same way every day. Does swimming or cycling sound fun to you? But you’re not sure if you’ll stick with it two or three times a week? That’s perfectly fine. You can swim once a week, cycle once a week, and run once a week. If you have no idea which sport you’d enjoy, or if a gym seems too expensive, try a free trial class at different sports clubs. This way, you can discover a different form of intense exercise each week, and who knows, you might stick with one.



Let me quickly **summarize** the health benefits of exercise for you

Exercise provides:

- * **A stronger physical resistance:** reducing the risk of illnesses (such as the flu, but also more serious diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease) and physical aches like headaches, neck pain, and stomach pain caused by stress-related issues.
- * **A better physical condition,** making you feel more energetic and fit.
- * **A better mood:** exercise activates certain happiness hormones, like serotonin, in your body. Regular exercise can even reduce and prevent anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- * **Better functioning brains:** it boosts your cognitive abilities, helping you concentrate better and for longer, understand and retain things more effectively, and simply learn better.
- * **Better sleep and falling asleep faster:** exercise impacts the sleep hormone melatonin, promoting a better balance between your sleep-wake cycle.
- * **A dose of motivation** to integrate healthy habits into your daily life: such as eating healthier, buying fewer unnecessary clothes, and so on.
- * **A smaller chance of developing unhealthy habits** and even a greater chance of preventing addictions (such as nicotine or alcohol addiction).
- * **A greater chance of successfully quitting an unhealthy habit** (such as smoking): particularly intensive exercise stimulates dopamine production, giving you a happy, fulfilled, and motivating feeling to keep going.

Sources: Hersenstichting, Thuisarts, RIVM, Nutrition Centre and Heart Foundation, 2024.



Go walking and exercising together: this way, you'll stick with it longer.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter: “Who you surround yourself with, you catch.” If you want to choose health and get enough exercise, it can be extremely helpful to have people around you who motivate you. Go for a walk or bike ride with your friends or fellow students. The same goes for exercising. Do it together.

According to the 2023 “Sports Behaviour in the Netherlands” study by Kantar Public, people who exercise together are more likely to stick to their habits. Do you think fitness suits you and want to go to the gym, but you're the only one in your circle? Consider checking out a sports club or seeing if a team sport is right for you. The chances of sticking to the habit are much higher when you're part of a group than when you go to the gym alone. Together, you make a commitment to stay on track. If you give up or don't show up, you'll feel guilty. Plus, you know it's better for you to go, so you're much more motivated to stay active.

TAKE A TEST! WHICH FORM OF EXERCISE AND SPORT SUITS YOU?

Now a days, you can find a lot of quizzes online. You know the type—like which personality suits you. There are also quizzes to discover which form of exercise or sport is right for you. Look them up and take them. Then let the results inspire you.





3.4 Make time for relaxation

In addition to physical activity, relaxation is of course also an important ingredient in the cocktail for a pleasant student life. But don't be mistaken. Relaxation can also involve movement. In fact, many people, including students, recharge by walking in nature or by being creative with their hobbies. So, it's a myth that you have to sit on the couch staring into space. Although for some students, that can be relaxing too. The key is to give your mind a break from all the things you still have to do. You need distraction. An outlet.

Discover today which forms of relaxation suit you best.

GET RID OF FOMO, GO FOR JOMO: JOY OF MISSING OUT

Try this: spend a few days with as little screen time as possible. Turn off your notifications. Go for a walk outside, tidy up your home, make time for your hobby, and engage in a social activity in real life. Bet you'll feel much freer in your mind after just a few days? Not to mention the amount of energy flowing through your body. You don't need to know everything that's happening in the world or in your surroundings, especially online. What really matters, you'll often hear naturally from the people around you, and if not, maybe it's time to change that. You don't always have to be everywhere. Take care of yourself. What do you need? Don't get caught up in FOMO culture—choose your own happiness, choose JOMO.



Why is relaxation so important again? Relaxation ensures that you...:

- * **...feel good:** you feel happier because your body produces happiness hormones like serotonin and reduces the stress hormone cortisol.
- * **... your immune system strengthens,** reducing the chances of physical illnesses and stress-related complaints like headaches, while also lowering the risk of burnout and depression.
- * **...fall asleep more easily** and experience a good night's rest.
- * **...enable more positive thinking** and a solution-oriented approach.
- * **...create more mental space** for new ideas and creativity.
- * **...improve cognitive function,** helping you focus better and thus study more effectively.
- * **...reflect better** on situations and handle criticism more constructively.

Sources: *Hersenstichting, RIVM, Thuisarts, 2024.*

Sitting still isn't the only solution: find your outlet, a relaxing activity that gives you energy

When students think of "relaxation," many immediately picture resting—sitting still, taking a nap. While these forms of relaxation are important, most students only truly unwind when they engage in an activity that brings them joy. You probably feel the same way. Think back to all your vacations. At the beginning of your time off, you likely feel very tired and just want to sleep in and lie on the couch. Only after a few days, or even a week, do you feel energized enough to do something fun. Those activities bring you so much joy that they are the real source of new energy.

The same principle should apply to your daily life. What activity makes you shine? What gives you energy? Often, this is a hobby, but it can also be a sport. Ideally, it's something that doesn't involve looking at a screen, since that keeps your mind active.



GET INSPIRED! WHAT COULD YOUR DAILY OUTLET BE?

- * Exercising
- * Walking in nature
- * Reading a book
- * Painting or engaging in other creative activities
- * Having a drink with friends
- * Game night with friends
- * Baking
- * Writing in a journal
- * Listening to music or a podcast
- * Taking a warm bath or shower

Stay balanced: if you put in a lot of effort every day, you also need a lot of relaxation.

The next question is: how often and for how long should you relax? This can vary for each student. Remember that the more (mental) effort you put in during the day, the more relaxation you need to stay physically and mentally balanced. If you find it difficult to relax at home, make sure to go outside at least once a day, for example, by taking a walk or meeting up with friends. Just be mindful of the time. You can also follow these general guidelines and discover for yourself how to make them work best for you.



How do you relax? Follow these guidelines and make them your own:

- * **Take a 5 to 15-minute break for every hour you study:** use this time to do something relaxing.
- * **Plan at least one low-effort, relaxing activity every day** that energizes you. This could be reading a book, walking, painting, exercising, or listening to music.
- * **Plan at least one longer activity each week that gives you energy.** This could be an outing (a day or afternoon somewhere), a dinner, or a social activity with friends.
- * **Mix it up.** You don't have to have the same outlet every day or week. Sometimes it's really refreshing to do something completely different.
- * **Make sure you get a good night's sleep:** students need at least 7-9 hours of sleep per night.

Source: Netherlands Youth Institute



Take stress signals seriously

If you're experiencing a lot of stress in your daily life, you're not alone. Nearly half* of all young people in the Netherlands feel stressed. So, it's quite possible that your daily life is out of balance. If you recognize one or more of the following signs, take your symptoms seriously.

- * You often have headaches
- * You feel fatigued
- * You forget things frequently
- * You have trouble concentrating
- * You worry a lot
- * You doubt yourself constantly
- * It takes a lot of effort to work on assignments (you may even experience blackouts)
- * You feel a lot of pressure to perform
- * You sleep poorly
- * You feel easily irritated and far from cheerful
- * You get angry quickly
- * You feel emotional and/or cry easily
- * You experience heart palpitations
- * You have stomach problems
- * You have high blood pressure
- * Your muscles feel tense
- * You suffer from neck and back pain

Sources: Hersenstichting, Nederlands Jeugdinstituut en *(45%) RIVM, 2024.





Survival Tip:

A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP WORKS WONDERS

1 in 4 young adults suffers from sleep problems. If you sleep poorly, it can have a big impact on your student life. You feel tired and have trouble concentrating. On the other hand, a good night's sleep contributes positively to a more enjoyable daily life. Don't underestimate the power of a good night's sleep.

Try to avoid too many stimuli during the day. Turn off your phone notifications when you need focus. Also, make sure to turn off all screens at least an hour before bedtime. One notification can keep your mind active, and honestly, you'll absorb information and react much better in the morning. Allow your mind to relax by unwinding. Take a warm (but not too long, due to energy costs) shower, read a paper book, or fold the laundry.

Source: CBS



Goodbye stress and relax: treat yourself to a pleasant student life.

Do you recognize one or more of these stress symptoms? Then pay attention to your lifestyle, especially relaxation. Give yourself those moments of rest and joy. Recharge with new energy. You need it, especially if you want to lead a pleasant student life and confidently earn your diploma.

A LOT OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCE FEAR OF FAILURE: HOW DO YOU OVERCOME IT?

Do you feel very insecure about yourself and your abilities? Do you experience a lot of negative thoughts? Do you strive to get the highest grades possible? Are you afraid of making mistakes? Does everything have to be perfect? Do you sabotage yourself by procrastinating on assignments? Do you struggle with teamwork? Is your motivation continuously fading? You might be dealing with fear of failure. Fear of failure is often accompanied by perfectionism and low self-esteem. Take these signs seriously and address them, because otherwise, this can continue to affect your life for a long time.

First, take a close look at your lifestyle and see where you need more balance. Plan extra relaxing activities for the upcoming period. Also, eliminate any unnecessary distractions from your study environment. At the start of each semester, create a realistic study plan. Break down all your study material and assignments into smaller tasks. Tackle them step by step. Remind yourself that making mistakes is okay; in fact, you often learn the most from them. Positive affirmations can also help. Set a timer when you study, and agree with yourself that when the timer goes off, you'll stop everything and take a break. Later, you can continue where you left off. Finally, talk to someone about your fear of failure, so they can support you in overcoming it. This way, you won't feel like you're going through it alone.



How will you relax more for a pleasant student life?



3.5 Take your nutrition seriously.

“After my studies, I’ll have a more stable life and cook healthy meals every day.” Right? That’s a nice resolution. But you’re living today. You’re probably reading this because you’re experiencing a lot of stress in your student life right now. Healthy nutrition can change that. Eating well helps you feel fitter and happier, both physically and mentally. This makes it much easier to concentrate and increases the chances of confidently earning your diploma. In short, the right nutrition is an important ingredient in the cocktail for a pleasant student life. Eating and drinking healthy doesn’t have to be difficult. It doesn’t even have to take much time or money.

The benefits of healthy nutrition, summarized for you. Eating and drinking healthy provides:



BETTER IMMUNE SYSTEM:

Healthy food provides the vitamins and minerals you need to reduce the likelihood of aches like headaches and stomach pains. It also lowers the risk of illnesses such as the flu, as well as serious conditions like obesity, diabetes, various types of cancer, and cardiovascular diseases—issues that are becoming increasingly common among young people.



BETTER PHYSICAL FITNESS:

By giving your body the right nutrients, you’ll feel physically more energetic and stronger.



**BETTER FUNCTIONING BRAIN,
IMPROVING YOUR ABILITY TO STUDY:**

Think of food as fuel for both your body and mind. Nutrition provides all the essential nutrients your brain needs to work efficiently. These nutrients help activate certain neurotransmitters in your brain, allowing you to concentrate better.

**IMPROVED MOOD:**

Healthy food contains the nutrients needed to produce happiness hormones, helping you feel relaxed and happy. In fact, a good diet can even help alleviate and prevent serious stress, depression, and anxiety.

Sources: Voedingscentrum, CBS en RIVM, 2023-2024.



How to eat and drink healthy?

Somewhere deep down, you know exactly which foods and drinks are good for you and which ones are not. Yet, healthy nutrition often remains an under-discussed topic in society. Healthy eating can be different for everyone. For instance, if you're underweight, fruit smoothies can be very healthy for you because they contain a lot of fructose (fruit sugars), which can help you gain weight. However, if you're carrying a few extra kilos, it's better to avoid smoothies and other liquid fruit drinks. It's also generally better to eat solid foods that require chewing, as this helps you absorb the fibre better and makes you feel fuller.

If you're unsure whether something is healthy for you, the *Voedingscentrum* is a reliable online resource to gather information. But don't overcomplicate things for yourself—just follow the well-known, though periodically updated, *Schijf van Vijf* (the Dutch food wheel) as a guideline.

Take the **Schijf van Vijf** seriously

- * **Eat plenty of vegetables daily:** Ideally, aim for at least 250-300 grams per day to experience the maximum health benefits from the vitamins and minerals that support the proper functioning of your brain and body. Vegetables also contain fibre, which is essential for optimal gut health.
- * **Eat 2 pieces of fruit daily (about 250 grams):** Not more, due to the amount of fructose (sugar), but also not less, as you need the vitamins and minerals that fruit provides. Additionally, fruit contains fibre, which is essential for optimal gut health.
- * **Eat whole grain products:** These contain more fibre than refined products, which is crucial for maintaining a healthy gut flora, and specifically for a healthy intestinal lining. A healthy intestinal lining ensures that your gut can efficiently absorb and deliver important nutrients (vitamins and minerals) to the rest of your body, including your brain. When your gut is healthy, it's likely that you'll feel good mentally as well. Conversely, if your gut isn't in good shape, your mental well-being can be affected too. A healthy intestinal lining also prevents toxins from the food you don't need (such as additives, E-numbers, or preservatives) from passing through, ensuring they are expelled from your body through your digestive system and ultimately your stool.

- * **Choose soft and liquid fats (unsaturated fats):** Such as soft margarine for spreading on bread and liquid cooking fats like vegetable oils (e.g., olive oil or sunflower oil) for frying and baking. These are better choices than saturated fats, such as hard butter, frying fat, cream butter, ghee, coconut fat, and palm oil. Saturated fats increase your cholesterol levels, which in turn raises the risk of heart disease and cardiovascular problems. Unsaturated fats are essential for the creation of healthy cells, as well as for the production of hormones and bile.
- * **Ensure enough protein in your diet:** You can find proteins in legumes, nuts, fish, and meat. If you want to choose the healthiest and most protein-rich meat, opt for organic chicken. Proteins are essential for the health of your muscles, bones, skin, and blood. Are you an avid athlete, or do you often experience muscle soreness or have skin issues? Then make sure you're paying extra attention to your protein intake.
- * **Drink 1.5 to 2 Liters of water per day:** Water is simply the best drink for your health. Your intestines need this fluid to dissolve nutrients from food and to transport important nutrients and waste products through your blood. Drinking tea is also fine, preferably green or black tea (which can help lower blood pressure), but it's best to limit herbal teas, as they can sometimes raise blood pressure. Coffee is okay too, but aim for no more than 4 cups per day due to the caffeine content (for espresso or coffee pods, limit to 2-3 cups).
- * **Avoid sugary drinks and alcohol:** If you follow the Schijf van Vijf, you're likely already getting enough natural sugars from your food. Sugary drinks cause energy crashes throughout the day and increase the risk of many physical and mental health issues, as well as serious diseases. This doesn't do your enjoyable student life any favours. Alcohol also has a very negative impact on your health, affecting both your physical well-being and mental clarity.
- * **Treat yourself 3 to 5 times a day** with something small outside the Schijf van Vijf: Think of a few pieces of chocolate, a glass of cola, a beer, or a small bowl of chips.
- * **Treat yourself weekly with something larger outside the Schijf van Vijf, but limit it to 3 times a week:** Think of a kroket sandwich, an oven-baked pizza, or a takeaway meal.

Source: Voedingscentrum, MaagLeverDarmStichting, 2024. On the Voedingscentrum website, you can always find more detailed and up-to-date information. Remember, you are a unique individual, and the guidelines for your daily life may vary based on your personal needs and circumstances.



30% of young adults experience allergy symptoms

More and more people, especially young adults and children, are experiencing allergic reactions. Hay fever is the most common culprit, but increasingly, young people are also developing allergies and intolerances to food ingredients such as gluten, wheat, cow's milk, lactose, and soy. Fortunately, many stores now offer shelves filled with alternative products.

If you've been struggling with symptoms for a while and feel like you've tried everything but they persist, it might be time to consult a doctor or a holistic healthcare provider, such as an orthomolecular doctor. Food intolerances and allergies can lead to digestive issues, which in turn can cause vitamin and mineral deficiencies (taking supplements often won't help in these cases). A blood test through a healthcare provider can help identify any intolerances or allergies, allowing you to adjust your diet or lifestyle accordingly.

Source: CBS



Easy and quick healthy eating:

4 TIPS

1. **Make one-pan dinners:** Cook as many ingredients as possible in one pan. This saves space and minimizes dishes in a small student kitchen. Think stir-fries, rice dishes, or pasta with lots of vegetables.
2. **Cook and eat together:** This is motivating, saves money, and is fun. If you live with other students, consider setting up a cooking schedule so everyone takes a turn cooking a healthy meal. It also saves you time!
3. **Meal prep:** Cook a large batch of food for several days. This way, you don't have to cook every day, which is a big help during busy weeks. Larger quantities are often cheaper at the store.
4. **Keep healthy portions in the freezer:** If you've had a busy day and don't feel like cooking, just grab a portion from the freezer. It's a lifesaver when you're tired or don't have time to shop.
5. **Go for healthy snacks:** Snack on easy-to-grab items like cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, or fruit. Don't have time for breakfast? Grab a banana on the go!



16% OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS ARE “HEAVY” ALCOHOL DRINKERS

Did you know that students drink more alcohol on average than their peers who are not in school? Alcohol often seems to be part of the Dutch student culture. In 2023, 1 in 10 higher education students drank excessively, meaning men consumed more than 21 alcoholic drinks per week and women more than 14. 16% drank “heavily,” defined as at least 6 drinks (for men) or 4 drinks (for women) on the same day. The negative effects of alcohol on brain function are not to be ignored. If you want to lead a more enjoyable student life, cutting back on alcohol—or even better, avoiding it—will bring you huge health benefits. Your brain simply works better. This leads to better sleep, improved concentration, more energy, and an overall happier feeling.

Sources: RIVM, Trimbos Institute.





Survival tip:

Hungry? First, drink a glass of water

Many people, especially students, drink too little water. The result? Difficulty concentrating and frequent cravings for small snacks, which can eventually turn into bigger ones. You might even feel hangry (angry because you're hungry). You're constantly searching for food and experiencing cravings for unhealthy snacks, leading to energy dips throughout the day. This doesn't contribute to an enjoyable student life.

It could be that your body isn't actually hungry at all. Instead, it might be asking for hydration. So, next time you feel hungry halfway through the morning or afternoon, try drinking a full glass of water first. You might find you can power through the next hour without needing a snack.





3.6 Be smart with your money

Be honest with yourself. What do you truly value in life and for your future? Many things in life cost money, but many things don't. How you manage your money now can have a big impact on your student life and future. That's why it's important to be smart with your finances. This doesn't mean you have to give up having a great time. On the contrary, being wise with your money can actually make your life richer in many ways. That's why the next ingredient in the Cocktail for a fun student life is: Be smart with your money.

Student Finance & Loans?

If you've been studying for a while, you've likely experienced the old DUO* loan system. In that system, only the supplementary grant and the student travel product—after earning your diploma within a certain period—were converted into a gift. However, the basic grant for students has now been reintroduced. Now, every student is entitled to the basic grant from DUO*. This basic grant is initially a loan but will be converted into a gift once you graduate (within ten years). That's why it's often referred to as a "performance grant." You've probably already looked into this topic to some extent, and you may have even discussed the possibility of taking out an additional student loan with your parents or others in your life.



*This information about the duo loan system applies to Dutch students and may not apply to international students who live (temporarily) in the Netherlands.

Receiving the basic grant retroactively

With just the basic grant, most students can't make ends meet, let alone lead an enjoyable student life. It's understandable that you're considering additional student financing, such as an (extra) loan from DUO. It's a comforting thought that you don't have to worry about money during your studies or that you can worry less. However, there are other ways to make money and, conversely, many ways to spend less. Don't forget that a loan from DUO is student debt that you will need to repay after your studies. This could affect your ability to get a mortgage and the amount you can borrow in the future.

A group of students chooses not to take out loans. In fact, some students even decide not to receive the basic grant at the start of their studies, which is allowed—you can simply refuse it. If you don't finish your degree within ten years, you'll have to repay the basic grant that was deposited into your account each month. But the situation works the other way around too. If you've been studying for a while and it looks like you'll graduate, but you previously refused the basic grant, you can apply for the grant retroactively within a certain period. That's a nice bit of money coming your way!

"76% of all higher education (HBO and university) students in the Netherlands have a part-time job."

How do you make money? Most students have a part-time job. On average, they work 19 hours per week alongside their studies. We can already hear you thinking: are you crazy? 19 hours! If you're studying full-time and also working 19 hours a week, you basically have no life left, right? Even adults with a full-time job generally seem to have it better. But that's not the case. Adults often have many more responsibilities beyond their work than you do. Think about managing the entire household, keeping up with paperwork, taking care of the kids, managing the family calendar, and so on.



As a student, you also have more holidays and free days throughout the year. Of course, you're allowed to go on vacation, but you don't need to take six weeks off during the summer. If you're smart, you'll look for a part-time job where you can work more hours during the holidays. It's also a good idea to find a job related to your studies, as it will look great on your resume. Perhaps you can even combine study assignments with your part-time work. However, it can also be nice to do something completely different for your part-time job—something that doesn't require too much mental effort.

How do you determine what to spend?

Making money is important, but how you manage your money is just as crucial. Think about it for a moment: for every euro you spend, you have to work and give up your precious time. So, the more unnecessary things you buy, or the more often you grab coffee or a sandwich in the afternoon, the more money you have to earn. Ask yourself with every euro you spend whether it's worth your time and energy. Or could you easily live without it? Of course, you also need money in life. You have to pay bills and buy necessary food and drinks. But take a close look at your bank statements from the past few months. Do you really need two different streaming service subscriptions? Or could you live with just one? Did you really need that new jacket? Or did you already have three nice ones hanging in your closet?

There's no wealthy person on earth who looks back on their life and thinks, "All those beautiful possessions made me happier." If you ask your grandparents what they hold most dear in life, it's often the memories made with loved ones. Yes, social activities can sometimes cost money. However, the amount you spend is largely in your control. You don't need to go out to eat every night or every week to have a good time with people. You can also suggest going grocery shopping together and cooking a meal at home.



The best money advice: “Don’t ask yourself if you can afford it, ask yourself if you should afford it.”

Famous YouTuber and minimalist Gabe Bult, who has built a substantial financial fortune for himself, gives this advice: “Don’t ask yourself if you can afford it, ask yourself if you should afford it.” When you have money in your account, it’s easy to come across something nice and think: I can afford that now. But also ask yourself if it’s wise to spend that money right now. You never know what bill might arrive on your doorstep tomorrow. Or maybe you could save that money for a new laptop. What can really help in managing money better is creating a budget and sticking to it. After all, money that you don’t have a specific purpose for, you simply can’t spend.

Gift cards are very valuable: don’t spend them right away.

As a student, you probably receive gift cards from time to time, whether for your birthday or as a thank you. You might feel the urge to redeem them immediately for something fun. You go to the store or shop online to pick something out. However, you can also view gift cards as a form of income. First, ask yourself: do I really need something right now? If not, don’t be tempted to go shopping. Save the gift card for a situation when you actually need something, like when your bag rips or your pants are truly worn out. Gift cards are often valid for at least a year, but be sure to keep an eye on the expiration date or mark it in your calendar.



Create a Wishlist

What can also help is creating a wish list. Keep a note on your phone where you list the items you'd like to have. Most students only make such a list when their birthday is coming up—do you do that too? Then you might recognize that you can't think of anything at that moment. That's why it's useful to have this list throughout the year. Do you see something that's almost worn out or a gadget you'd like to try? Add it to your list first. By not buying it immediately but putting it on your list, you give yourself more time to think about it, and maybe you'll change your mind later. Or you can ask for it as a birthday gift. Or you might come across it during a big sale. It can work wonders not to buy everything immediately but to sleep on it for at least a few days. In most cases, you'll find that you didn't actually need it, or you've already forgotten about it.

How to divide your budget?

The **10-10-10-70** principle

Many financially successful people follow the 10-10-10-70 principle for budgeting. This means you set aside 10% of your income for emergencies, such as when your laptop crashes or you drop your phone. Another 10% goes towards long-term savings. Think of future expenses like tuition fees, your home furnishings, a car, or your first home purchase. Another 10% of your income is allocated to a charity. The idea behind this is to recognize that money is just a tool and should not control your life. The remaining 70% is your disposable income, which you can spend on bills, groceries, social activities, hobbies, travel, and whatever else you need.





Survival tips

- * **Living at home or renting a room:** Renting a room may give you a sense of freedom and might be necessary if you study far away. However, you can save a lot of money by staying at home for a longer period. This way, you also need to work less or maybe work more and save up for your future home or first property. Take a moment to list the pros and cons for yourself. Are you already renting a room, but realize that living at home might actually have more benefits for you? Many parents will gladly welcome you back (temporarily).
- * **Buying study books:** At the beginning of your academic year, many students receive a list of required books. In practice, you'll often find that you don't even need to open many of those books to pass all your courses. During lectures, you can take notes, and those summaries are often enough. So, wait before purchasing books until you're sure you need them. First, see if you can find them second-hand for a bargain. If necessary, post a request in a social media group for your college or university. Have you already bought books? Don't forget to sell them yourself during the summer vacation.
- * **Birthday gifts and thank you's:** Avoid giving cash or gift cards. With a physical gift, you can often spend less, and no one will mind. A gift doesn't need to be large; it could be a nice set of scented candles or a box of chocolates—it's the thought that counts. With a nice card and a personal message, you'll definitely earn points. A card doesn't need to be expensive either; many stores offer sets of 10 to 20 cards at an affordable price, which is also great for thank you gifts. Lastly, instead of a physical gift, you could treat someone to a nice lunch or drink, which benefits you too.
- * **Smart grocery shopping:** You can do this by keeping an eye out for sales, buying larger packaging, storing food in the freezer, and not purchasing more than you need. Make use of loyalty cards as well. Always make a shopping list first and only then go to the store or shop online. This helps prevent buying unnecessary items. Finally, avoid grocery shopping when you're hungry.

- * **Eating with others and meal prepping:** Cook as much as possible with or for multiple people. Share the costs or agree to take turns doing the grocery shopping and cooking. Meal prepping can also save a lot of money (and time): cook for several days at once. Take your lunch with you instead of always buying a sandwich in the cafeteria. This will save you a significant amount of money.
- * **Sell your stuff:** Do you have any study books lying around that you no longer use? Clothes you've bought but never worn? Any items in good condition can likely find a second life. Sell them. Every little bit of extra income helps.
- * **Student discount:** Many companies offer student discounts. Be sure to check this before making a purchase. Think of gyms, restaurants, clothing stores, libraries, and museums. Also, don't forget about public transportation: take advantage of your student travel pass and discounts.
- * **Clothing:** Avoid fast fashion and invest in smart, sustainable basics that will last for years. Basics never go out of style. If you do care about fashion, focus on timeless trends rather than short-lived ones. Opt for clothing pieces you're likely to wear for several years, like straight-leg pants with a straight or slightly wider cut, instead of jumping on the oversized baggy jeans trend.
- * **Sustainable investments:** Cheap is often expensive in the long run. Always choose quality over quantity. Compare products or ask for advice before making a decision.
- * **Avoid study delays:** Your education costs a lot of money, and so does your student life. No student wants to spend an extra year studying. If you're struggling with something, ask for help and seek support. If it costs money, see it as a valuable investment in yourself. Even if you're not facing any challenges yet, at Studielab, for example, we are ready to assist you with thesis writing, statistics, and study guidance. This helps you avoid study delays and extra costs, allowing you to graduate within your study period with confidence.

When you look at your expenses and income this way, you'll realize that you don't actually need a lot of stuff or money to live a comfortable student life. This way, you can manage your money wisely!



3.7 Dare to ask for help

Do you want to earn your HBO or university degree with confidence? Then you can't avoid the following ingredient in the cocktail for a pleasant student life: Dare to ask for help. Be sure to know who your advisors are. Seek advice from people who are a step ahead of you regarding your specific question. People who set a good example and truly know what they're talking about.

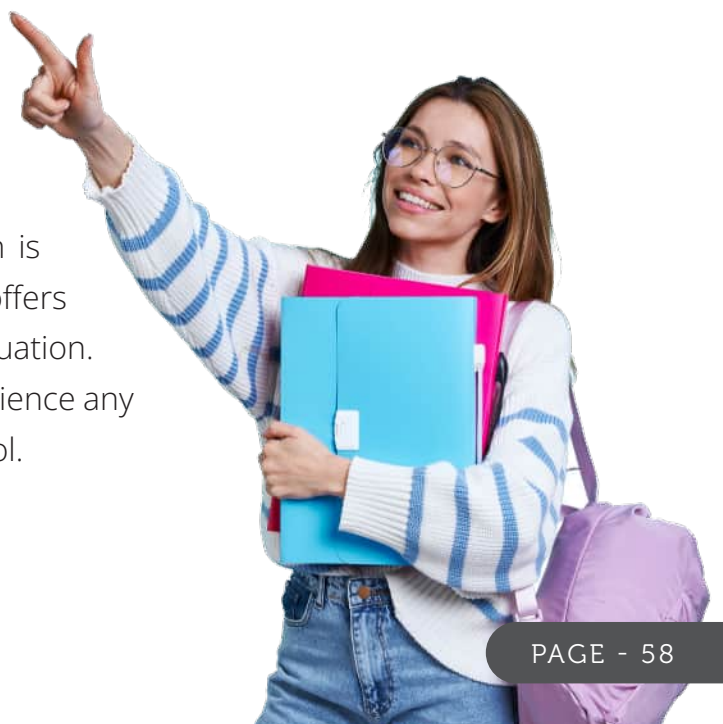
Who can you ask for help?

People around you

The people around you will likely be more than happy to help or offer wise advice. If you find it difficult to manage money, ask your parents or your wealthy aunt and uncle how they manage their finances. Missed a lecture because you were sick? Ask a classmate if they can share their notes with you. Unsure about a research question for your thesis? Let your graduated family members or friends take a look at it for a fresh and possibly surprising perspective.

Your academic advisor, dean, or counsellor

If you're facing challenges at school or dealing with a personal situation, you can often turn to a career counsellor at a college or university. This person can offer you valuable advice or practical guidance. Are you afraid of falling behind in your studies or uncertain about your study choice? In that case, you can often reach out to a dean. If you're not feeling well mentally or struggling with issues like performance anxiety, depressive thoughts, or simply need someone to listen, you can often find support from a counsellor at your school. This person is external to your immediate environment and offers a fresh, non-judgmental perspective on your situation. The counsellor is also there for you if you experience any unpleasant or inappropriate situations at school.





Survival tip: Being assertive pays off

If you don't understand something in your study material, it's easy to think: "I'll ask about it later, I'll figure it out at home, or I'll ask a classmate." However, it's the teacher's job to provide you with explanations. Often, they appreciate it when you approach them because it shows that you're interested and engaged.

So, if you're in a lecture or seminar and the teacher is explaining something that you don't understand, raise your hand. Speak up. You have the right to an answer. Even if you raise your hand five times in a lesson, it doesn't matter what other students think. If you find this really nerve-wracking, approach the teacher at the end of the class (not literally pulling on their sleeve; just walk up to them calmly and address them politely). Or send an email. Don't wait too long, as that will waste unnecessary time and energy, or you might forget, which could lead to problems during your exam. The same goes for internships or part-time jobs. Be assertive, and it will pay off.





Your general practitioner (GP), practice nurse (POH), psychologist, and other healthcare professionals.

For both small and large physical or mental health issues, you can visit your general practitioner (GP). Your GP can then refer you to another healthcare provider, such as a physiotherapist, dietitian, psychologist, or lifestyle coach. Keep in mind that the costs for these referred healthcare providers are not always covered by your health insurance. However, you can often deduct them as personal healthcare expenses from your income tax. You can also view these costs as an investment in yourself to become a better person.

If the waiting times for a psychologist are long, you might be able to receive help from the POH (Practice Support Nurse) temporarily. The POH listens to what's going on with you and helps you think through practical tools and solutions. The POH can also be helpful if you find it difficult to take the step of talking to a counsellor at school, because you're afraid of what your professors or classmates might think. The costs for the POH are often covered by your health insurance.

Study counsellors outside your study programme

Have you reached out to many people but still feel unheard? Don't worry. You're not alone. That's why we're here at Studielab for you. We know exactly what students in 2025 are facing and what challenges may come their way. We don't have a waiting list.

Do you have no idea how to create a good and realistic study plan? Struggling with performance anxiety or autism? Or do you have another question? Our study coaches and academic advisors will give you the tips and practical tools you need to study with confidence and earn your degree.

Who will you ask for help to ensure a pleasant student life?



Your path to a successful career

During your studies, you can't avoid the need to apply for jobs. 76% of HBO and university students in the Netherlands have a part-time job, working an average of 19 hours per week. You will also need to complete an internship. Perhaps by the end of your final year, you'll want to start applying for your dream job. But how do you make the right choices? What does your path to a successful career look like?

A few valuable tips for finding your dream job.

- * **Don't set too many demands at the beginning of your career.** We know, you probably want to land an exceptionally well-paid job right after graduating, do only tasks you're truly passionate about, and travel a lot. In practice, this is often unrealistic. In fact, many students quit their first job within a year due to unrealistic expectations. Instead, feel incredibly grateful if you're able to start at a company where you can continue developing yourself. From there, the steps toward your dream career will gradually follow almost on their own.
- * **Be prepared for rejection and disappointment.** Many students are turned down the first few times they apply for a job. Don't worry. 90% of all graduated HBO students find a job within three months of earning their diploma, and 73% of all graduated university students find a job right away. Rejection is often not about you personally, but rather because companies may receive hundreds of applications for a single position. However, a job might also turn out differently than you expected. Maybe you don't get along with your colleagues, or you receive a lot of critical feedback that discourages you. Know that feedback is often given with good intentions, to help you grow in your role. Keep pushing forward and discuss things if you're finding something difficult or if you're feeling disappointed. Make this a goal for your personal development.
- * **Show yourself.** Attend networking events. Send an unsolicited application. Dare to stand out with your cover letter and resume. Highlight what drives you in life and in your work. Explain why you are the perfect candidate for the position. Do you come across an exciting job vacancy? But you're unsure whether you meet the requirements or have a question about it? Call the company. By showing interest, you often leave a positive impression, and that stands out.

- * **Be patient.** It's great to have a big goal, like landing your dream job, in mind. But be realistic about how you plan to achieve it. Work towards it step by step. Give yourself the time you need.
- * **Keep developing yourself. Accept feedback.** Learn from your mistakes, because believe us, those are common for recent graduates in their first job. Keep pushing forward. Practice self-reflection. Set goals for yourself and achieve them step by step. Become your own best leader: read the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey for inspiration.
- * **Get coached by Studielab.** It can be incredibly helpful to have an experienced professional by your side who provides you with tools for your career and motivates you to keep going. Think of career coaching for questions like: How can you best handle rejection or disappointment? What questions can you expect during a job interview? How do you prepare for such an interview? How do you present yourself at a networking event? What do you do if your internship doesn't go as expected? What if your colleagues make unpleasant comments? We can also review your cover letter and resume and offer tips. Career coaching can be helpful both during and after your studies, for short or long-term support.

Facts

- * 76% of HBO (higher vocational education) and university students in the Netherlands have a part-time job, working an average of 19 hours per week.
- * 39% of all students in the Netherlands feel like they “fall into a gap” after graduating.
- * 90% of all graduated HBO students find a job within 3 months of earning their diploma.
- * 78% of the jobs of all recent HBO graduates align with their field of study.
- * Graduated HBO students earn an average of €2,710 (gross) per month in their first job.
- * 73% of all graduated university students find a job right after graduation.
- * Graduated university students earn an average of €3,100 (gross) per month in their first job.

- * 59% of all employed Dutch people have a job that does not align with their education.
- * 87% of all employed Dutch people are open to jobs outside their field of expertise.

Sources: Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, Maastricht University, CBS, National Job Board, and 3FM HUMAN, (2022-2024).



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5 steps to a more pleasant student life



Maybe you've noted down a valuable tip from one chapter of this e-book. Or perhaps you've gathered a bunch of tips to integrate into your student life. Either way, you're already on the right track!

Based on experience and proven behavioural strategies, we encourage you to apply the tips you've collected step by step. This way, you're more likely to stick to your new habits. The chances are even higher if you follow the step-by-step plan below.

Follow this step-by-step plan for success

Step 1: Review your notes from all the ingredients in the Cocktail for Success. If you haven't made any notes or highlighted anything yet, now is the time to do so.

Step 2: Make a choice: where do you want to start? Which chapter did you find the most valuable tips in? Choose one topic to focus on right now. If you're unsure, feel free to revisit your answers from Chapter 3, 'Your Situation Under the Microscope,' to help you decide.



Step 3: Write down your main goal and smaller goals. Work on them consciously over the next 3 months. Research shows that it often takes at least 6 weeks to 3 months for a new habit to become fully integrated into your life, so it becomes automatic and unconscious. Setting smaller goals can positively contribute to this process.

Write down your main goal first and then the smaller goals to achieve it.

Examples of setting goals:

- * "I want to feel fitter, so for the next 4 weeks, I will exercise 3 times a week for 15 minutes. In weeks 5-8, I will exercise 3 times a week for 30 minutes, and in the 3rd month, I will exercise 3 times a week for an hour."
- * "I want to feel healthier, so for the next 4 weeks, I will eat 2 pieces of fruit every day. In weeks 5-8, I will also eat at least 300 grams of vegetables on weekdays, and in the 3rd month, I want to eat at least 300 grams of vegetables on weekends too."
- * "I want to improve my concentration, so for the next 4 weeks, I will schedule 30 minutes of uninterrupted study time every morning. In weeks 5-8, I will extend this to 1 hour, and in the 3rd month, I will increase it to an hour and a half."



Step 4: Reflect weekly on your goals. Write down the reasons why you want to achieve these goals. Use the following questions as examples to answer each week. Reflecting helps you consciously engage with your goals, reminds you of the 'why,' and motivates you to keep going.

Example weekly reflection questions:

- * Why do you want to achieve your main goal? #reminder
- * Did you achieve your goal for the past week?
- * What went well last week?
- * What will you do better next week?
- * What is your goal for the upcoming week?
- * Write down a motivating word, motto, or slogan that can help you in the coming week and remind yourself of it throughout the day. For example: focus, positive energy, let go, or assertiveness.

Step 5: Start after 3 months with a new goal. Then, begin again with Step 1 of this action plan.

TOGETHER, YOU ACHIEVE MORE!

If you find it difficult to stick to your goals, find a buddy who wants to join you. This way, you can motivate each other. If you can't find a buddy or would rather have someone next to you who can also provide practical tools and valuable tips to help you stick to your goals even better, consider being coached or guided by Studielab. This way, you won't have to do it alone. We support and motivate you. We are your accountability partner. Together, we can plan those weekly or monthly reflection moments. After all, together, we always achieve more.

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Even more certainty to obtain your diploma?

Do you want to go all in and secure even more certainty for a happy student life and graduating on time?

Our coaches at Studielab are ready to support you. **Get in touch via our website for study guidance or career coaching.** Within 48 hours (but usually 4-8 hours), we will carefully match you with your ideal coach, and you can request a free introductory meeting.



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GET IN TOUCH



We are also available through our website for any questions, comments, or potential B2B collaborations.

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