

Article

A Holistic Approach to Student Well-being: Balancing Health and Academic Success for Students Living Abroad

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges encountered by students living abroad as they struggle to reconcile their academic responsibilities with maintaining their mental, emotional and physical health. This article emphasizes the significance of implementing a health-oriented and well-structured routine. A practical and easy-to-implement approach was proposed to assist students living abroad in balancing their tiresome academic journey with a healthy and organic lifestyle. The aspects related to corporal and cognitive health, stress and time management, and psychological well-being were considered while developing an optimal everyday schedule for international students combatting cultural, linguistic, educational and social discrepancies beyond borders. The authors experimentally implemented the proposed framework in a case study. As a result, a significant total body weight loss of 16 kg was achieved within four months to get rid of obesity. Other benefits included alleviated levels of anxiety, stress, hypertension, hair loss and visual impairment-related issues. To conclude, this multidisciplinary investigation aims to contribute to the existing literature on social sciences and sustainable cognitive health practices for overseas students.

Keywords: Student Well-being; Academic Success; Health Management; International Education; Work-Life Balance

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1. Introduction

Far from families and associated surroundings, studying abroad is both an opportunity and a challenge. Annually, thousands of students leave their native territories to pursue higher education, sometimes in ethnically and socially distinct circumstances (Smith 2024). Chasing higher education and engaging in scholarly research beyond borders often comes with prospects for intellectual growth, job advancements, and societal contribution. However, these opportunities frequently result in distorted physical health, emotional wellness, and social links. Anxiety, sadness, and even emotional breakdown can result from the draining caused by balancing scholastic commitments while dealing with the loneliness of being far from loved ones (Bilecen et al. 2024). Students must prioritize their health while implementing a viable daily routine supporting a healthy life to succeed in this persistent setting.

Studying abroad is often associated with enthusiasm and hope. On the other hand, it also creates significant pressures, as students may experience stress due to financial limitations, cultural disparities and lack of family support (Heriyati et al. 2024). According to a survey, overseas students are at greater risk of mental health issues than their inland counterparts (Kwame et al. 2024; Li and Liang 2024). Loneliness becomes remarkably acute, especially for those who relocate to territories with contrasting cultures or languages. Students often take their physical and emotional health for granted when their academic responsibilities accumulate, losing sight of the significance of proper sleep, wholesome nutrition and regular exercise, thus resulting in a vicious cycle of tension and deteriorating health (Yin 2024).



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Co-ordinating academic, cognitive, and communal life is a talent that takes time to obtain but is crucial for long-lasting success. Without considering these aspects, students may experience reduced focus, decreased productivity and deteriorated cognitive health. Given these challenges, fostering a comprehensive and sustainable approach to international education and incorporating a practical administration of health and academics is crucial. Recent research has focused on growing concerns related to students' welfare and health in a globalization context, with an emphasis on establishing strategies that allow students to thrive scholastically while sustaining their cognitive and corporal health.

(Kim et al. 2024) have demonstrated the significance of sleep hygiene and its influence on academic performance. Their results suggested that students prioritizing effective sleep experience better cognitive performance and enhanced emotional stability, which are essential indicators for long-term academic accomplishments. (Breslin et al. 2023) highlighted the impact of regular physical workouts on mental well-being, academic functioning and cognitive performance. Their findings revealed that students practicing physical exercise on a regular basis experience lower degrees of sadness and recession and elevated focus and memory retention. (Al-Worafi 2024) demonstrated effective mental healthcare and stress management modules to reduce academic burnout. (Rogers and Baker 2025) showed an increased awareness and action plans to mitigate academic burnout, suggesting that strategies based on mindfulness significantly enhanced learning satisfaction and outcomes.

Nutritional choices significantly influence student health in addition to physical healthcare. Recently conducted research by (Almoraie et al. 2024) demonstrates that inorganic dietary habits are linked to reduced energy levels and academic cultivation. Many overseas students overlook healthy nutrition as they struggle to adjust to new meals and eating patterns, which can lead to both physical and mental deterioration (Kemp et al. 2024). Therefore, balanced dietary interventions from nutritionists could enhance academic and overall functioning. (Barakat et al. 2024) conducted a research study on 769 subjects to investigate the negotiating impact of psychological disorders and mindful dietary manners between intellectual efficiency and orthorexia nervosa (an obsession with healthy eating) among female students. Their results revealed that the way a student focuses on her eating entirely clarifies the relationship between orthorexia nervosa and her confidence in academic capabilities.

The literature review highlights the demand for establishing strategies that overseas students can implement to abate the adverse effects of living with unyielding stressors beyond borders, combining proper sleep, regular exercise, emotional reinforcement and balanced dietary practices. Despite these findings, a knowledge gap remains in determining comprehensive and practical guidelines incorporating these strategies as a daily routine designed exclusively for students living abroad. This research article fulfills this knowledge gap by developing a feasible and easily implementable framework to help overseas students balance their tiresome academic responsibilities with a healthy lifestyle by incorporating all the effective measures to reduce academic burnout, protect their cognitive and corporal functioning, and conquer feelings of loneliness. The key aims and objectives of this study are:

- a) In-depth examination of the challenges that overseas students encounter while managing their academic ambitions, followed by their probable solutions in the light of medical healthcare.
- b) Incorporation of healthy daily-life habits into a feasible, flexible and adaptable schedule that international students can easily follow to balance their academic journey with a healthy lifestyle.
- c) Building a framework for returning to and maintaining an organic and healthier lifestyle by minimizing the hustle caused by modern living standards.

This multidisciplinary research contributes to the existing literature in cognitive health and social sciences, providing a robust framework for overseas students dealing with the difficulties associated with balancing health and academic success. This study spots shortcomings in existing healthcare strategies and recommends further opportunities to promote international educational experience.

2. Materials and Methods

The insights and strategies presented in this study are drawn from the author's four years of experience while pursuing a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering at Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China. The methodologies adopted in the current investigation are based on empirical and qualitative approaches. In addition, the schedule was developed based on health recommendations provided by Dr Sahar Chawla¹, who is a certified Pakistani nutrition and healthcare expert. Basically, the primary method of analysis is based on personal observations and self-experienced data. A detailed literature review was also performed to supplement the outcomes. This sub-section highlights the detailed research methods behind developing a flexible and adaptable schedule based on recommendations from medical healthcare providers.

2.1. Introspection and Reflective Analysis

The key approach for this study is to utilize self-experienced observations and introspections to develop a strategy that could help international students balance their education with a healthy lifestyle. The authors have critically examined their overseas research journeys during their Ph.D. Their daily academic routines, eating habits, and sleeping patterns were carefully monitored to develop inferences for this study. The critical challenges and stress factors were included in this study to develop a deeper understanding of students' lives across borders in an international context.

Over the four years, self-reflection was undertaken on a regular basis through journaling, structured notes, and periodic reviews of academic cultivation and personal health. The author's long-term encounters with rigorous academic and fitness demands, adjusting to and self-sustaining in an absolutely distinct cultural environment, and navigating the pressures of life beyond borders somehow provided the foundation for recognizing common health challenges confronted by international students. These introspections, combined with and validated through observations of peers, allowed for a broader understanding of the multi-faceted stressors that were found to be contributing to academic burnout, physical lethargy, and mental health deterioration.

¹ Chawla, Sahar. 2024. URL <https://www.youtube.com/c/DrSaharChawla>.

2.2. Literature Survey and Comparative Analysis

To supplement the reflective analysis, a methodical review of recent literature was also performed to validate the observations made and to augment the accuracy of the approaches proposed. The systematic review included recent studies on the cognitive and corporal health interventions and academic performance of international students, remarkably in cross-cultural scenarios. The databases, including PubMed, ScienceDirect, MEDLINE, Web of Science Core Collection and Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), were accessed to retrieve peer-reviewed research articles published between 2019 and 2024. The search keywords included students living abroad, corporal health, physical fitness, academic performance, cognitive functioning, mental health, sleep hygiene, stress factors and time management, balanced diet and nutrition. A systematic review and comparative assessment of these publications were performed to develop insights into the real-time challenges faced by students leaving their home countries.

2.3. Data Collection and Observations

To strengthen and validate the inferences based on self-experienced academic journeys abroad, data was also collected informally through detailed group discussions and interviews with overseas companions and peers regarding their academic cultivation, lifestyle, health concerns and time management. Both Masters' and Ph.D. students contributed to the survey and provided information about their challenges, self-experienced remedies and probable solutions. Their data was used to categorize the overall problem statement into various thematic approaches, including (i) how they managed their daily routines and deadlines for complex tasks and assignments, (ii) how they managed stresses arising from a tiresome and recurring phase of responsibilities and emotional encounters, (iii) what were the flexible schedules that could be followed to maintain physical fitness while coping with their academic goals, (iv) what were their eating choices to save plenty of time for research purposes, (v) what were their sleeping schedules, (vi) how they managed their social relations and what percentage of time did they spend as leisure hours, and (vii) to what extent they got emotional supports from their families during their academic journeys. The results were collected as ongoing or past experiences, which served to gain a deeper understanding of common health-related challenges confronted by international students.

2.4. Development of the Proposed Daily Routine

The collected information was processed to draw inferences, which were then combined with the systematic literature review to develop a feasible and adaptable timetable based on 24 hours. The routine was exclusively designed to help students balance their academic goals with a healthy, organic and well-balanced lifestyle. All of the recommended things on the proposed timetable were based on experimentation to adhere to the following aspects: (i) consistency, (ii) punctuality, (iii) flexibility, (iv) internal and external hygiene, (v) spirituality and (iv) organic lifestyle.

2.5. Limitations of Methodology

The investigative procedure followed in this study provides an experience-based outlook. However, it is essential to remember that the reported outcomes are subjective and are based on a single researcher's viewpoint. Reflective practice and observations, while insightful, are not necessarily generalized to all international students, as different cultural, academic, and social contexts may influence the health challenges faced by students in diverse regions. The reliance on informal data collection through peer interactions and conversations may limit the objectivity of the findings. However, this approach offers valuable qualitative insights into the lived experiences of international students, complementing the more formal research studies found in the literature review.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Given the personal and informal nature of the data collection, ethical considerations were observed by ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of peers who participated in discussions. No personal identifying information was shared, and the conversations were purely for observational purposes. All insights and data gathered were used with permission, and care was taken not to infringe upon the privacy or intellectual property of the individuals involved.

3. Results and discussion

The following key strategies have been identified to help students living abroad maintain their health while achieving academic success, as shown in Figure 1. This schedule was experimentally followed by the lead author for six months under careful observations to attain health benefits and reduce excessive body weight by up to 16 kg. Below is a comprehensive guide to help students maintain their health and academic performance while living far from home.

3.1. Prioritize Sleep

Consistent and complete sleep should be the utmost priority in order to achieve optimal health and cognitive functioning. Make a habit of being on your bed at 10 p.m. and make up your mind to wake up for Fajr prayer. It will help you get 7 to 8 hours of sleep, remember the lessons, and pay full attention to your academic tasks. Also, it assists in keeping your emotional instability at minimal levels and dedicating more useful time to outstanding achievements. Avoid using mobile phones and laptops at least two to three hours before going to sleep, as it could help you fall asleep faster. Major improvements were witnessed in both mental and physical health, including enhanced cognitive functioning and memory retention, according to findings.

3.2. Start Your Day Right

After the Fajr prayer, start your day by drinking lukewarm water. The best practice is to infuse your day's first drink with cinnamon, cardamom, or lemon. Steady water intake is found to be helpful in improving metabolism, digestion and detoxification. Afterward, go outside for a morning walk and dedicate this time to listening to Quranic recitations and Tafseer (Kulsoom 2024). It will help you initiate your day in a highly positive and energetic manner while regulating your hormones, boosting your dopamine levels and reducing stress levels for the whole day ahead. Buy fresh fruits and vegetables from the early morning markets on your way back home so that you hardly run out of fuel for your body.

3.3. Have a Healthy Breakfast

Your breakfast should consist of eggs, milk, nuts and fruits, and your recipes should be made of whole organic grains. Avoid using refined sugar, refined flour, preserved products, tea, coffee, excessive oily foods and processed oatmeal (Masoodi et al. 2024). You can also manage porridge made up of naturally processed oats or cereals. For fat intake, you can include organic butter or desi ghee in your recipes. Foods based on natural ingredients will help you feel contented and fully focused on upcoming tasks with enhanced productivity.

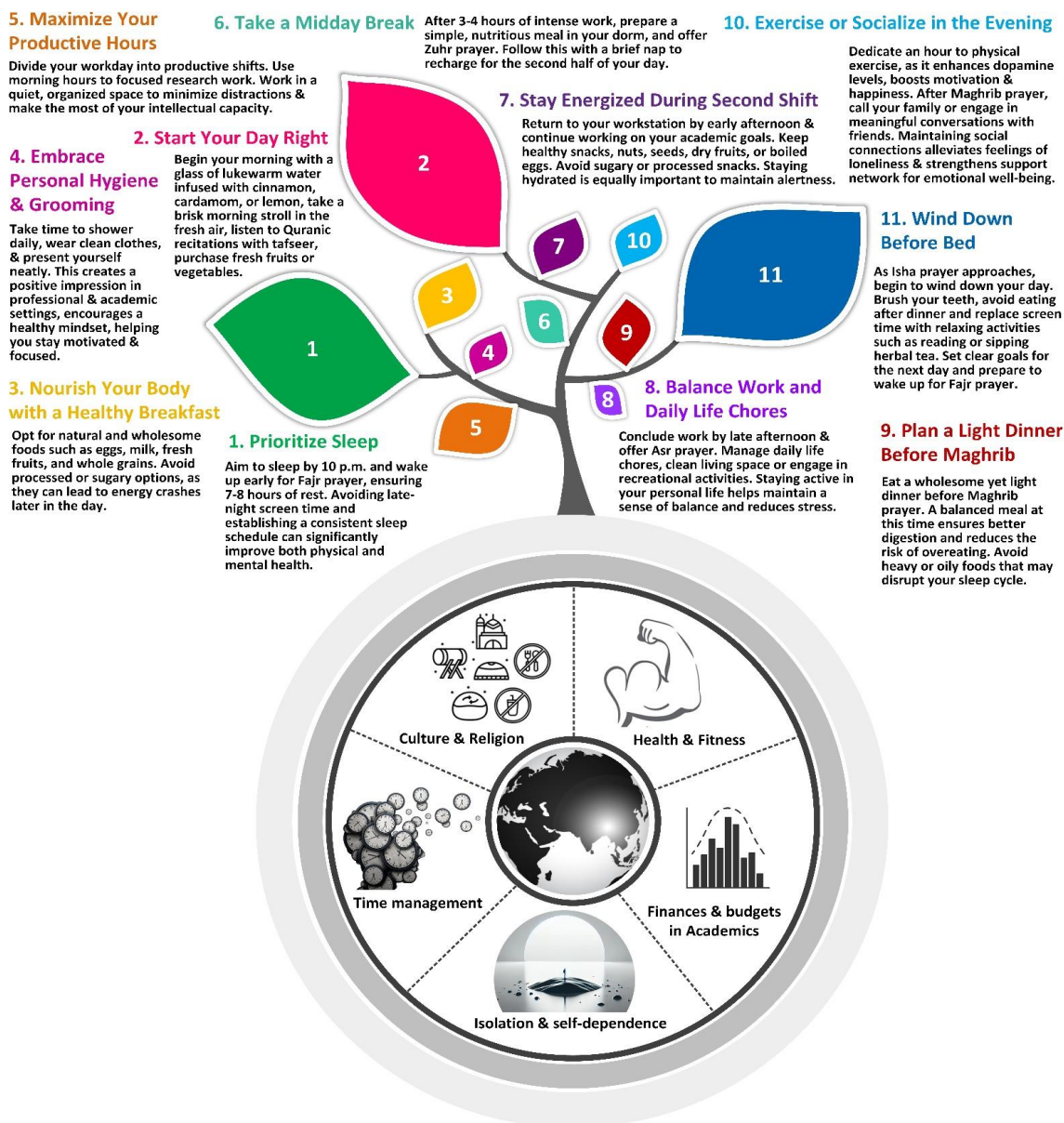


Figure 1. Stress factors and recommendations for students living abroad to maintain their health while achieving academic success.

3.4. Embrace Personal Hygiene and Grooming

Regular cleaning practices are essential to have a healthy mind and functional body, required to perform daily chores effectively. Take a shower daily and wear fresh clothing to maintain a neat appearance. The improved appearance creates both organizational efficiency and individual confidence while generating self-respect in academic and official circumstances. Maintaining cleanliness promotes healthy thinking, which, in turn, enhances motivation and focus.

3.5. Maximize Your Productive Hours

Use your work hours to create multiple focused work periods. Most productivity occurs during the initial morning hours, extending up to noon. Complex academic and research tasks can be easily accomplished during your morning shifts. During these hours, the brain reaches its highest state of alertness, which enables the effective completion of complex projects. It is essential to work in a dedicated, quiet and organized environment so you can focus on your thinking process without interruptions.

3.6. Take Midday Break

Take a short rest during the afternoon after several hard hours of work. Freshly cook a balanced lunch at your residence and perform your Zuhr prayer. It helps you to remain connected with your spiritual realm. Sleep for a short while to get a fresh restart for the second shift of your day.

3.7. Stay Energized During Your Second Shift

After taking a nap, return back to your workplace to focus on your academic tasks once again. Always keep supplies of healthy snacks such as seeds, nuts, dry fruits, boiled eggs or black coffee on your workstation, as it will help you boost your energy levels, maintain concentration and fulfill your daily nutritional needs. Do not use sugary snacks, artificial sweeteners and processed food products, as they can cause energy crashes. Make sure you keep yourself hydrated by drinking enough water, coffee, or green tea.

3.8. Balance Work and Daily Life Chores

Conclude your working shift before the Asr prayer and offer your prayer. Following this, you can dedicate your time to performing everyday chores, for example, cleaning the dorm, washing clothes, grocery shopping, and participating in sports and recreational activities. You can also prepare your meals for dinner. Efforts put into organizing your personal life are found to help maintain a sense of balance and harmony.

3.9. Plan a Light Dinner Before Maghrib

Enjoy your dinner before the Maghrib prayer and avoid overeating. Dinner should be wholesome, light and homemade. Keep away from heavy, oily, baked or fried items and beverages, as they may interrupt your sleep cycle. Dinner before sunset will improve digestion and minimize the chances of obesity. Having your dinner fully digested before going to bed will help you fall asleep faster, and the overall sleep quality will be enhanced (Lewis 2024; St-Onge and Craddock 2025).

3.10. Exercise or Socialize in the Evening

Try to spend at least one hour doing physical exercise in the gym or an outdoor place. It will help boost your dopamine level, which is responsible for enhancing motivation and happiness within your skin. After offering the Maghrib prayer, have leisure time talking to your family members or friends, as it may help you reduce your emotional distress. Spend time managing your social connections to alleviate feelings of loneliness. Networking assists you in keeping yourself updated with your surroundings and keeps you prepared for upcoming opportunities for professional and personal growth.

3.11. Wind Down Before Bed

Prepare yourself to conclude your daily routine with the Isha prayer. Brush your teeth twice a day, first after breakfast and second after dinner. Trace and gradually reduce your screen time on a daily basis. Avoid using mobile phones and laptops after the Isha prayer and engage yourself in soothing activities such as reading books or enjoying herbal tea to enhance sleep quality. Besides, establish definite goals for the next day and make up your mind to wake up for the Fajr prayer. It will help you to reinforce your sense of discipline and commitment.

4. A case study

The strategies mentioned above were implemented to develop an optimal and easy-to-follow 24-hour schedule, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Health recommendations followed and implemented in the experimental study.

Sr.	Recommendation	Self-training (development of habits over a month)																													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1	Sleep from 10:30 pm to Fajr prayer.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Early rise in the morning for Fajr prayer.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	1 cup cinnamon/lemon water.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Aerobic activity: walking/cycling after Fajr.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	NA	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	NA	NA	✗	✗	✓	✓	
5	16-18hr intermittent fasting: 7pm-12pm.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	No sugar/ white flour/ bakery items.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Breakfast: vegetables, fruits, yogurt, eggs.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Snack: nuts, seeds, fruit, milk, green tea.	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Dinner: eggs, corn, soup, salad, meat.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Calorie deficit: cut down to 0.8-1kcal/day.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	
11	No stress: Quran, namaz & zikr.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Subjection to solar spectrum & fresh air.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	NA	NA	✗	✗	✓	✓	

13	Water intake: daily 1.5-2 liters.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Brush teeth twice a day after meals.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Reduce screen time: ~3hrs before sleep.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Don't buy unhealthy snacks or junk food.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Workout:																																					
17	gym/outdoor with 2.5 min rule*.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Healthy ingredients: lemon, cinnamon, green tea, black pepper, eggs, milk, black coffee, fruits, vegetables and rice; **Gym:** 1hr brisk walk (speed ≥6.5 km/h, slope ≥9); **Outdoor:** workout equals ≥15000 footsteps; * **2.5 min rule:** an intense peak of at least 2.5 minutes during a regular workout; **Symbols:** ✓ achieved, * not achieved at all, NA skipped on purpose/not applicable.

Students residing abroad can follow the timetable to create harmony between their professional and personal lives. It will also assist international students in keeping themselves medically fit, avoiding being overweight and resisting various diseases like high blood pressure, stress, hair loss and eyesight loss. It is essential to mention here that this arrangement also includes the health recommendations from a Pakistani Medical Practitioner, Dr. Sahar Chawla. The proposed timetable was experimentally followed by the corresponding author under careful observation, with the results shown in Figure 2. It is worth mentioning that with the strict implementation of this schedule, a significant loss of 16 kg was attained in total body weight (kg) in under 4 months. The overall body weight was 88 kg with 166 cm height at the start of the case study, which was reduced to 72 kg to get rid of the obesity phase, as highlighted in the Body Mass Index (BMI) chart², suggested by National Institutes of Health (NIH) and shown in Figure 3. Students who do not want to reduce their body weight can skip the recommendation number '10' on calorie deficit in Table 1.

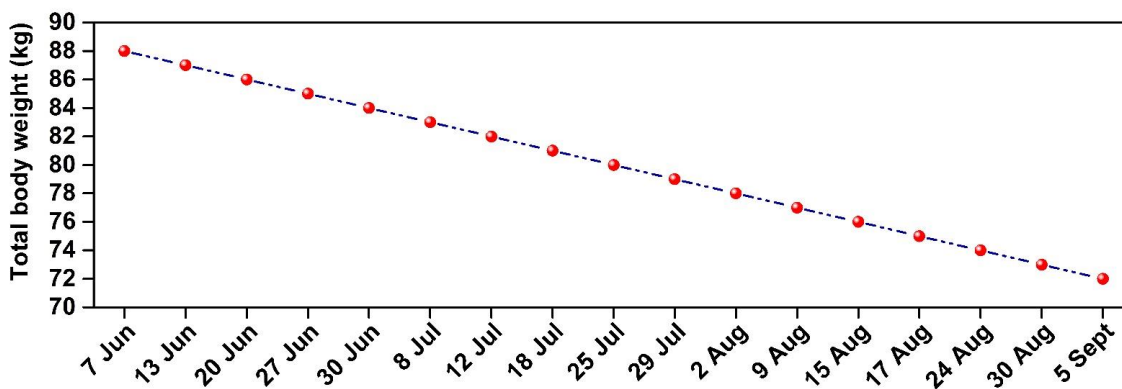


Figure 2. Tracing total body weight loss across a period of four months under strict implementation of the health recommendations.

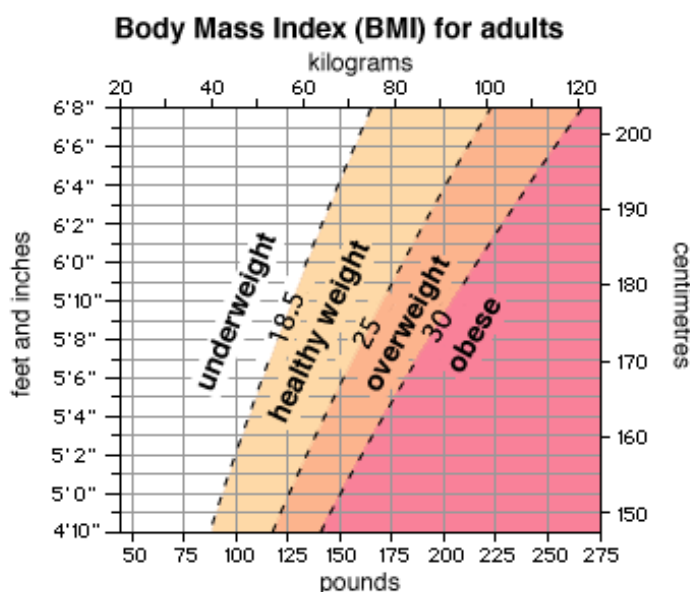


Figure 3. Tracing the total body weight on body mass index (BMI) chart for adults, Figure source: National Institutes of Health (NIH).

² Britannica. 2025. Body mass index (BMI) Definition, Formula, Chart, & Facts. URL <https://www.britannica.com/science/body-mass-index>.

5. Conclusions

A practical and easy-to-implement approach was proposed to assist students living abroad in balancing their tiresome academic journey with a healthy and organic lifestyle. The aspects related to corporal and cognitive health, stress and time management, and psychological well-being were considered while developing an optimal everyday schedule for international students combatting cultural, linguistic, educational and social discrepancies beyond borders. The authors experimentally implemented the proposed framework in a case study. As a result, a significant total body weight loss of 16 kg was achieved within four months to get rid of obesity. Other benefits included alleviated levels of anxiety, stress, hypertension, hair loss and visual impairment-related issues. Students who follow a structured routine not only achieve better academic results but also enjoy improved physical and mental health. Balanced living enhances productivity, fosters resilience against stress, and cultivates a positive outlook on life. By prioritizing health, students can navigate the challenges of living abroad with greater ease and success. Remember, your body and mind are your greatest assets. Taking care of them is not just an option, it's a necessity for success in both education and life.

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