Home alone
Surviving the first weeks at university can be daunting, but you'll manage if you keep healthy, active and organised. Recent graduate Sarah Armstrong offers some advice.

Starting dental school is a daunting time and it's all too easy to overdo things during the early stages – the academic workload being only a small proportion of university life. The first few weeks will be spent finding your feet, settling in with new friends and getting to grips with your course.

Keeping healthy and active is essential. The onset of the dreaded ‘freshers’ flu’ during your first few months is inevitable with so many students congregating in one place, and immune systems being dented with too many late nights and too much alcohol. The obvious solution being to keep both to sensible levels! Come autumn, ‘freshers’ flu’ may not be the only flu you need to be vigilant against, with the increasing incidence of Novel H1N1 flu (Swine flu) it’s important to be on the lookout for flu-like symptoms from yourself and others around you to prevent spread and make sure you register with a doctor on arrival.

A minute on the lips
Eating is an important consideration, even if you’re staying in catered halls! Often halls of residence will only provide breakfasts and dinner on weekdays so you’ll need to provide lunches, all meals throughout the weekend, and depending on your timetable demands you may miss the odd catered meal during the week due to timetable clashes. It’s all too easy to slip into the habit of ordering takeaway and making sneaky visits to the kebab shop on these occasions; but not only is it expensive, it’s also unhealthy! It’s essential to keep a tight rein on your finances, especially during the early stages of your degree.

Although university life is a lot of fun, it can be easy to get overwhelmed, tired and homesick. It’s worth remembering that you’re never alone, there are plenty of people you can turn to for advice including flatmates, family, dental school tutors etc. Don’t keep things bottled up, you’ll be surprised at how much they can help and identify with your situation.

In these difficult financial times it’s worth remembering that loans/credit cards are a lot harder to come by, which in some ways can be viewed as a good thing, preventing unwanted debt amassing early on.

Watching the pennies
Budgeting is another important (though frustrating) consideration. It’s essential to keep a tight rein on your finances, especially during the early stages of your degree. Every year students go on spending sprees after receiving their student loan, seeing it as ‘free money’ leaving precious little to survive on once the term comes to a close and this can lead to an ongoing cycle of debt.

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