



Health & Wellness at the MICEFA

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH & WELLNESS DURING YOUR PROGRAM ABROAD

Introduction

Thinking about your **health & wellness** while abroad is an important step to preparing your international experience. Your health & wellness can have a measurable impact on your experience abroad in terms of student success, cultural adaptation and overall wellbeing. Students who struggle with their health abroad can become isolated from the local community, miss classes and activities and even miss out on a positive abroad experience. At the MICEFA, we believe that students should prepare for their health abroad prior to arrival, should continue to evaluate themselves during their time abroad, and be mindful of their health after returning home.

Check out the three sections below which will guide you through the three stages of health & wellness planning at the MICEFA.

Pre-Departure Preparation

You are embarking on an exciting adventure coming abroad to Paris! It is important to plan for your specific health & wellness needs abroad before arriving in country. When preparing, you will need to learn about **Culture Shock**, think about your healthcare needs, investigate your insurance coverage, plan for your care abroad, and, of course, communicate with the MICEFA. **By taking charge of your health & wellness now you can have a better ability to enjoy your program later.** Use the questions below to guide your preparation for your time abroad.

What is my health and wellness plan abroad?

It is important to plan for your health and wellness abroad BEFORE coming to France. The University of Minnesota has provided a template questionnaire that guides you in understanding your health and wellness, identifying your triggers, and creating a wellness plan to adapt to your new home. Please take time to create your personal health and wellness plan using [this guide](#).

Will I need additional support?

Who do I turn to when I need health and wellness support at home?

- Family members
- Friends
- Mentors
- Health care professionals
- Church or religious group / Club / Support Group / Teammates etc.
- Another outlet



Will I be able to contact these people from abroad in times of need? If not, am I aware of outlets that I can use in France to fill the gap?

Many students reach out to similar structures while abroad before they need help so that in a difficult time they have the support they need. This could mean joining a local sports team, finding a church, making an appointment with a health care professional when you arrive etc.

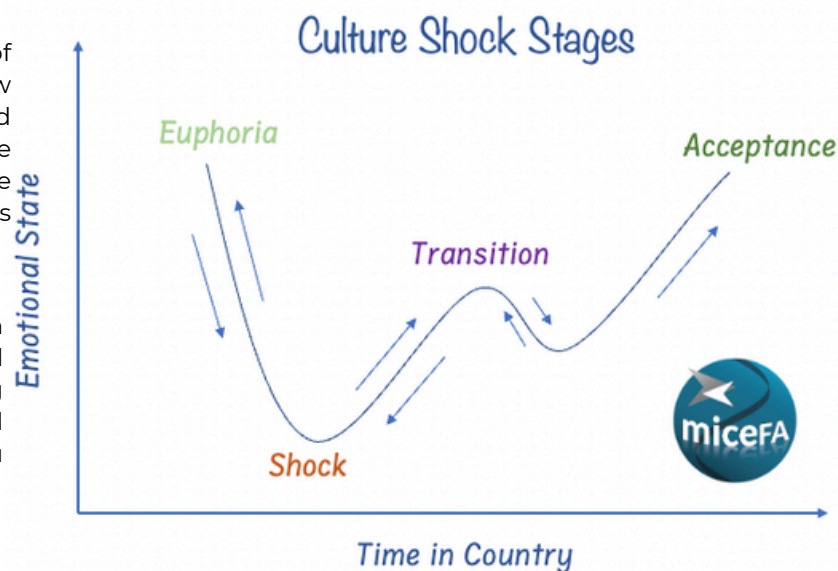
Your home support system will be valuable while you are abroad but it is important to find your community and support system in country. You will not always be able to contact your support system in times of need during your program and they might not have the tools they need to help you from another country. **Talk to the MICEFA if you need help creating this support system.**

Preparing for "Culture Shock : Do I understand the cultural differences of my host country?

Culture Shock, also commonly referred to as **Culture Stress**, is a common experience for students adapting to their new life abroad. It can be described as the feeling of disorientation when one is confronted with living in a new and different culture than their own. **This period of adaptation is commonly divided into 4 stages** (though it can be represented by more ups and downs depending on the individual):

1- Euphoria / Honeymoon

- This stage is characterized by the feeling of excitement we have when we first arrive in a new culture or country. We are elated by the new and different surroundings, this excitement tends to die down as we face challenges and difficulties and we transition into the second wave, sometimes even as quickly as 24 hours after arrival.
- Some students do not experience this honeymoon phase as certain individuals have a heightened sense of anxiety directly upon arrival or during their travel abroad. This is normal and will eventually lead into the third stage as you transition and adapt to the differences.



2- Shock / Anxiety

- Gradually or suddenly the euphoria that you were experiencing will transition to shock and/or anxiety as you come to terms with living in a new and different environment. Things that were simply interesting as being different may begin to annoy you or cause you stress. Some students begin to feel like an outsider or an other as they constantly are faced with the differences in their new surroundings. This period can be filled with difficult emotions, homesickness and sometimes loneliness. Make sure to connect with your support system during these 'low' times.

3- Transition / Acceptance

- Eventually the **cycles of up-and-down will dissipate** as you come to terms with how you fit into this new environment. You will begin to feel more in control of yourself, your emotions and the situation. Things will start to bother you less than before.
- **As you start to better understand the culture and they environment you may even start to enjoy it again as you too will begin to find your place.**

4- Adjustment / Mastery

- In this stage you finally begin to feel 'at home' in the new environment and often times the desire to return home can dissipate and the feeling of 'otherness' also begins to fade.

Scientists have been studying this phenomenon for over a century and have worked to inform people about this process to better help confront the difficulties each person may face in a new situation. Everyone experiences culture shock differently and at different intensities; it is important to be aware of these feelings and to prepare yourself for the changes that you will face. Culture shock is not derived from one particular event or experience but is rather a combination of a realization of all the changes around you; it can happen gradually or suddenly during your experience. The process is not always linear; students can hop between phases 1 and 2 many times before reaching phases 3 and 4, others will skip phase 1 altogether. As you move through these stages you will experience "up" or "high" periods and "down" or "low" periods. It is therefore important to be aware of your feelings to cope with these different stages. Often we are prepared for the first "down" period after arrival, it is sometimes harder to deal with the 'surprise' down periods that can occur well into your exchange abroad when we think we are familiar with our new surroundings. As time passes, the lows will become less intense and less frequent as you eventually adapt and master your new life abroad.

Symptoms of Cultural Shock:

- Homesickness
- Depression & Anxiety
- Disorientation
- Isolation
- Loss of Motivation

Understanding Why: Travelling abroad is often a once-in-a-lifetime experience and we can put high expectations on ourselves and on what we hope our experience will be. When our expectations do not live up to our realities we can experience the lows of culture shock.

What to do: Research your host country before going to manage your expectations. When you are in country, feel your emotions fully, it is okay to work through them. However be vigilant that you do not let them lead you to difficulty. Watch out if you are crying more than usual, if you are isolating yourself, lacking the desire to participate, having trouble controlling your temper, etc. Should you feel like you are struggling, get help from your support group and/or the MICEFA.

The MICEFA recommends trying new things, keeping a positive outlook, and learning the language as ways to progress in the stages of culture shock.

Do I understand the differences in the approach to health and wellness in a country?

Every country and culture approaches healthcare and wellness differently. What may be standard and accepted in your home country may not be available or common in France. It is important to do a little research and ask questions concerning your health care needs to make sure that you are aware of what is available. Some things to think about:

- **Psychological Care:** In France there is a difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist: only psychiatrists can prescribe medicine. It is important to note that psychologists in France prefer to have many sessions with you before prescribing medication.
- **Homeopathic Care:** This type of care is widely available in France at pharmacies and you can find different plant-based remedies. Please note that some plants such as marijuana are not legal in France.
- **Support Animals:** France is very accepting of service animals such as seeing-eye dogs, but is not as aware of other types of support animals. Should you have a support animal, please talk to the MICEFA to see if this type of animal is accepted in France.
- **Academic Accommodations at University:** The MICEFA is here to help you communicate your accommodation needs to your host university. Please note that the North America does have one of the most progressive accommodation practices and sometimes France is not able to meet all needs requested. Relevant documentation will be required.
- **Mobility Accommodations:** If you currently need mobility accommodations, it is important to understand that, though France has been making strides in improving accessibility, many of the facilities and structures are not equipped with handicap access. This includes many metro stations, buildings, and university facilities. Elevator or escalator access cannot be guaranteed.



Can my current care strategy and/or accommodations be continued while abroad?

Think of all of the aspects that englobe your health & wellness plan:

Do you meet with healthcare professionals regularly (for ex. counseling, support groups, physical therapy, etc.)? Do you need to keep up this schedule while abroad? If so, do you know how to reach out to these professionals?

Do you have learning accommodations at your home university (extra test time, quiet room, etc.)? Have you explored if those accommodations are possible abroad? Have you gathered the necessary paperwork required for these accommodations?

Do you take a medicine regiment? Is the medicine that you need readily available in France? (Adderall for example is not available in France) Can you get enough in advance to cover your full stay?

Have I met with my health care professionals at home to discuss my needs abroad?

If you need regular treatment, either medical or therapeutic, have you met with health care professionals to talk about a strategy for your time in France? It is important to work with them to plan for the following:

- Preparing paper prescriptions signed by your healthcare professional for all medications you need for the duration of your stay abroad.
- If you have a specific condition, it is helpful to have your healthcare professional write a letter, detailing your condition and the treatment plan that you need, to be provided to a healthcare professional in country.
- Your healthcare professional can find out if your medication is available in France. If your specific medication is not available (Adderall for example), check if you can get a long enough supply for your full program or discuss if other medications available in France can be prescribed instead.

Am I aware of what my insurance covers?

All students participating in the MICEFA program must subscribe to international health care coverage for the duration of their program. Many study abroad offices have resources about which plan you should purchase. It is important to carefully consult your plan and its coverage policy to see what kind of care it covers. Think about your specific health & wellness plan, what do you need covered? How long does reimbursement take?

- Medication
- Regular visits to a healthcare professional (counseling, physical therapy, medical treatment dispensing, etc.)
- Emergency treatment

Most MICEFA students do not sign up for the French national healthcare plan 'Sécurité Social' as this administrative registration process is lengthy and complicated. If you are staying for only one semester it is unlikely that you will receive your coverage before the program end. However, if you have a chronic condition that requires regular hospital or treatment visits, it might be interesting for you to look into signing up locally.

Have I communicated about my situation to the MICEFA?

The MICEFA is a source of support for your health and wellness abroad.

Disclosing your health & wellness needs to the MICEFA will not impact your acceptance to the program and remains confidential.

The MICEFA has information that can help you to prepare your health and wellness plan before coming. Please talk to the MICEFA during your Zoom interview or via email so that we may provide you with information about health and wellness in France and connect you with the support that you may need.



Health & Wellness during the Program

Preparing for your program is a great start, but the work does not end there. It is important to track your health and wellness evolution while you are on program. The earlier you identify your needs, the easier it will be for you to take charge of your health and wellness and keep enjoying your program. Use the questions below to continue to evaluate your needs during your program.



Have I been checking in on my personal health & wellness?

Set benchmarks to check in on how you are feeling regularly, don't let problems sneak up on you. Mobile apps exist which help you to log your feelings; you can also keep a journal or start your day off by asking yourself how you are doing. If your responses change over time you may need to look for health resources.

Remember, you do not need to wait until you have hit a "low" period to seek help – track your feelings early and often.

Have I been checking in on my local community about how I am doing?

In the preparation phase, you were asked to identify a support community for your time abroad, this could have been a number of different people and/or groups (friends, family, mentors, religious groups, support groups, etc.). Have you continued to check in with these groups during your time abroad? Making time to keep up familiar strategies and activities that provide support is important while abroad, but you can also look into finding new support in your local community (student groups/activities, interest groups, community associations, etc.).

Am I keeping up with my wellness plan?

Think about the health and wellness routines that you had at home (meditation, physical activity, yoga, therapy, art...), have you been maintaining your routine abroad as planned? Do you need to make changes, add something new, up the frequency of certain activities? If your wellness plan involves continuing a specific treatment, have you been proactive in continuing this treatment, keeping up to date on appointments and medication refills?

REMEMBER: Changing up a medically prescribed treatment regime on program is not a good idea unless you have been instructed to do so directly by your healthcare professional.

Do I know where to find the resources that I need?

As much as we can prepare for our needs abroad, being on exchange is always different from what we expected. Now that you are here, do you know how to get help and support locally? If not, talk to your community or the MICEFA about how to get in touch with the right resources locally for your care. If your needs have changed since you made your wellness plan, it might be important to look for new resources.

Insurance claims abroad can be tricky. If you need to make a claim it is best to contact your insurance provider directly with your contract number. If you need help, contact your study abroad office and/or the MICEFA.

Am I communicating any new health & wellness needs to MICEFA while on the program?

Even students who prepare their health and wellness plans before coming and face new and unique health and wellness challenges abroad. This is a normal part of partaking in a life-changing experience as a student. Should you feel that your needs have changed and that you need support, contact the MICEFA staff confidentially to be directed towards resources that can help you.

Am I submitting documentation to insurance for reimbursement?

Insurance reimbursements can take time. It is best to submit any requests in a timely manner from France and not wait until you are back home. Before leaving, look on your insurance provider's website concerning procedures for making claims. If you have questions, make sure to contact them directly.

TIP: Any time you receive treatment or fill a prescription in France it is important to keep documentation and request a detailed invoice of payments to submit with your claim to your insurance company. In the event that a major bill (such as from a hospital) is being mailed to you, please provide an address where you are sure to receive it. (Students may have bills addressed to the MICEFA provided they are under their own name.)

Adjusting to life back home

Your program is over but the impact that it had on you remains! Coming back home can sometimes be stranger than arriving in a new country. Don't stop thinking about your health and wellness just because your program is over; Use the questions below to help guide you through this important adjustment.

Am I prepared for reverse culture shock?

In the previous section you learned about culture shock in terms of adjusting to a new and unfamiliar culture abroad however, culture shock does not end with the end of your exchange program. You most likely will experience a form of "reverse culture shock" as you return to your life back home.

No matter what experience you had abroad, both you and 'home' have changed during this time. Just as your life did not hit pause during your exchange, life back home did not pause either. Everyone and everything will have changed in some capacity and you will have to relearn how you fit into it. You will experience that same sort of rollercoaster of culture shock that you experienced coming on this experience when going home, sometimes even on a stronger level than before because 'home' is not supposed to be strange to you.

Home Has Changed: We often take for granted the notion that home will always be the same, but whether you have left for six months, a year, or longer, home will have changed without you. There will have been new events, developments, tragedies, successes, etc. which will change the fabric of your family, your community, and even the country as a whole.

- Common changes that may have occurred: Changes in relationships (marriages/divorces, friends moving away dynamics in a friend group, colleagues leaving), changes in surroundings (favorite shop/restaurant closes, new spaces open), changes in popular culture (references from TV shows, viral moments, music etc. that didn't make it abroad), changes in politics (new politicians, laws, scandals), and many more.
- You may have been looking through 'rose-tinted glasses' when thinking about home as you compared it to your new culture during the initial culture shock and what you see when you get back might not be what you were remembering.

You Have Changed: During your time here you have had unique experiences that your entourage at home have not. You may not have noticed how much you have changed and adopted a little bit of your new culture while abroad because you have created a new 'home'.

- Common changes you may have experienced: Changes to your routine (eating at a different time, new activities or passions, walking instead of driving), changes to your way of speaking (using new hand gestures or sounds, wanting to speak in your new language), having new tastes and style (new foods or cooking styles, wearing new types of clothes), changes in your political beliefs or outlook, and many more.

TIPS FOR SUCCEEDING WITH YOUR RETURN HOME:

- **Accept that Change is Inevitable:** Prepare yourself that things will be different when you go home and this is okay. Relationships will evolve, you may become less close to certain people but also closer to others!
- **Stay Busy:** Just like when you arrived in France, don't isolate yourself or stay idle. Get back into your routines, stay active, have fun.
- **Connect with Friends and Family:** Make the effort to get in touch with your friends and family to tell them you are home. Remember they haven't left and might not have it on their radar when your program has ended. Make plans and stick to them; soon enough you will be back in the groove.
- **Share and Listen:** Your adventure abroad was exciting and different. Talk about what you experienced and show some pictures. Remember, your friends and family also experienced things while you were away so don't forget to also listen to their experiences too!
- **Be Positive!:** You just had a life-changing experience! You survived culture shock adjusting to your host country – you will adapt to this as well. Be happy to know that now you are rich with two cultures! Integrate what you like of your new culture into the favorite parts of your home culture and you'll find your happy medium.

Do I need assistance readjusting to my environment?

If you are having trouble getting through this adjustment, connect with other study abroad alumni on your campus regardless of the destination of their program. They will have unique insight that they can share with you as they are also experiencing the same thing coming home.

You can also connect with your study abroad office and your university health center to see if they have counselling services available for returning students.

If those resources do not meet your needs, you may also think of getting into contact with a mental health care professional to get support.

Have I touched base with my health care professionals back home?

You have been away from home for at least a semester and it is important to make an appointment with your regular healthcare professionals to touch base about your needs as they may have evolved during your stay in France.

Some universities offer counseling for students returning from study abroad. MICEFA recommends touching base with your study abroad office and student health center to see what services are offered.

Am I following up reimbursements for treatment abroad?

International insurance plans can take time to issue reimbursements. Continue to check up on your reimbursements when you return home in case you need to provide further documentation or information.

Do I have any outstanding bills that need to be taken care of?

Students may not be aware that medical bills, specifically hospital bills, often come much later than when the care was provided. If you have made a trip to the hospital and did not receive a bill, check in with the MICEFA about any bills that may have been received in your name. It is important not to leave any unpaid bills when returning home, especially if you hope to return to France in the future.

Resources

General

- **US Department of State** – [US Students Abroad](#)
- **Canadian Government** – [Studying Abroad](#)

Culture Shock

- **United States Department of State** – [“Reverse Culture Shock”](#)
- **Canadian Government** – [“Coping with Culture Shock”](#)
- **Verto Education** – [“The Psychology of Culture Shock”](#), Broussard, Jackie, 2020
- **Georgia College International Education Center** – [“Culture Stress”](#)
- **GetGIS.org** – [“What is Culture Shock and Ways to Avoid It”](#), Karn, Neelesh, 2023
- **Mobility International USA** – [“Ups & Downs of International Travel”](#)
- **Studee** – [“The Ultimate Guide to Studying Abroad with a Disability”](#)
- **Department of State – Gliman Scholarship** – [“Reverse Culture Shock”](#) video

Health and Wellness

- **Mobility International USA** – [“Medications When Travelling Internationally”](#)
- **International Narcotics Control Board** – [Lists of Drug Legality Abroad](#)
- **Mobility International USA**
- **Western Washington University** – [“Studying Abroad with Disabilities”](#)
- **Diversity Abroad** – [“Students with Disabilities Abroad”](#)
- **Diversity Abroad** – [“Students of Color in France”](#)
- **United States Department of State** – [“LGBTQ Students and Study Abroad”](#)
- **InterExchange** – [“Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock”](#), 2017

Mental Health Ressources in France

- **EPSYKOI** – web documents on mental health
- **STOP Blues** – online e-health tool and mobil application for depression
- **Nightline France** – Student Support Hotline by phone, video, or text, for students by students from 20h30 – 2h00



Student Support Hotline



Local Psychology Resource

NUMÉRO NATIONAL DE PRÉVENTION DU SUICIDE

3114

Key Takeaways



Take charge of your health and wellness abroad BEFORE departure



Speak confidentially to MICEFA staff about anything that you may need help with while abroad



Make a health and wellness strategy plan for you program abroad



Check-in with yourself & others during your program



Prepare for the adjustment of going home