

# Preparing from living away from home

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Embarking on life away from home is an invitation to discover just how capable you truly are. Suddenly, simple decisions - what to eat, how to spend your money, when to tackle chores - rest entirely in your hands. By proactively developing key life skills, you'll turn potential stress into confidence and make your first taste of independence a resounding success.



# Mastering your budget

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Creating and sticking to a budget sounds boring (it is) but it saves a lot of stress if you can get on top of it early.

Begin by noting down your student loan dates so you know when each load drop fits into your year, then:

- List any fixed costs (accommodation payments, bills, subscription services)
- Estimate how much you need to spend on things like groceries and toiletries each month.
- It's also very important to allocate a little bit for a 'fun-fund' because not everything has to be so serious!

Once you have this you can split up your month into weekly blocks to help you stay on track. If a spreadsheet is your thing, use it to track your spending to keep you on track. A big perk of keeping a weekly budget is that some weeks you will underspend so there might be a little extra for a treat at the end of the month.



# Meal prep doesn't have to be boring

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Planning meals in advance saves both time and money but it doesn't have to be boring. Not every meal-prepper has the same food 5 days a week!

- Draft a weekly menu, then write your shopping list to help prevent impulse buys.
- Embrace versatile staples like rice, pasta, canned beans, eggs, and frozen veggies that form the base of countless dishes.
- Planning your week of food in advance helps to keep costs down and avoids food waste too which is a perk for you and the environment.
- Always check for student discounts or loyalty-card deals in local supermarkets.
- Remember that although you may have the most expensive branded cereal at home, the cheaper ones are also worth a try, and consider teaming up with flatmates to buy bulk items and split the cost.



# Masterchef in the making

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Start with foolproof recipes: one-pot pasta, stir-fries, and sheet-pan meals require minimal equipment and little cleanup.

Learn techniques like boiling, sautéing, and roasting by following video tutorials or online guides. As your confidence grows, experiment with spices and fresh produce—roasted vegetables with a drizzle of olive oil, garlic, and a squeeze of lemon can elevate any dish from simple to spectacular.

My top tip is to get the recipe for your favourite home-cooked meals and learn how to make them. Not only is it bound to be way more nutritious than frozen nuggets and chips, but it's also a great way to combat homesickness when it strikes.





# It's a balancing act

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Juggling lectures, assignments, and free time requires a clear structure.

Start by mapping out your semester calendar—marking deadlines, exams, and important events. Each week, block out dedicated study periods alongside breaks and social activities to maintain balance.

Use reminders or calendar alerts for key tasks and set achievable daily goals to keep momentum. Establishing a consistent wake-up time and bedtime also helps regulate your energy levels, making sure you stay productive without burning out.

University life is busy and comes with natural ebbs and flows with the exam seasons. Although it can be tempting to ease off your scheduling in the lighter points of the year, it will make it much harder when busy periods come around.

Balance is key – make time work for you rather than always chasing deadlines.



# Tidy room, tidy mind

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I'm not afraid to admit that you can tell what my stress level is by how tidy (or not) my bedroom is, the messier it gets the more I have on my plate.

Although this can be a helpful reminder for me to calm down and take a breather when it gets a bit too cluttered, keeping a tidy space does massively boost your focus and mood.

Set aside time for a short weekly clean – ten to fifteen minutes maximum – to vacuum, wipe down surfaces, and clear clutter to help keep your space and mind clear. It's amazing what a tidy space can do for your mood!



# Building a support network

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While practical skills are vital, don't underestimate the power of community.

Swap recipes with flatmates, form a grocery-share group, or have dinner get-togethers. Sharing responsibilities and knowledge not only eases the load when life feels heavy but also turns a collection of strangers into a true home away from home.

Everyone has times when they don't feel so hot so building relationships where you can lean on each other in those trickier times is so important. (And it's still okay to call home and complain too).



# Final thoughts

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Your first taste of independence is a journey, not a sprint. By taking control of your budget, planning meals that excite you, carving out time for study and rest, keeping your space clutter-free, and leaning on your new community, you'll turn every challenge into a stepping-stone.

Remember, it's the small, consistent habits that make everything that little bit easier.

Embrace these skills, trust yourself, and enjoy the ride: you're not just surviving student life – you're growing into the person you're meant to become.

