

Master the first year of your nursing degree

A beginners guide



ELSEVIER

Advancing human progress together



Dear Student

Congratulations! Your calling, enthusiasm and hard work have got you this far. Now you are about to embark on your next exciting journey, filled with new challenges, friends, experiences and lots of learning!

We can't guarantee that it will be easy, but you won't be alone, we will be here to support your learning as we have for generations of students. The reward will be worth it, because there is nothing more important than helping to improve the health and lives of others.





Acknowledgments

We want to issue a huge thanks to the following students, now newly registered nurses, without whom we would not have this guide. It was their collective knowledge and writing skills that made this possible, a huge thanks to:

Simon James, Student Adult Nurse, Swansea University

Alex Stevens, Student Adult Nurse, Swansea University - SDP

Natalie Elliott, Student Adult Nurse, Glasgow Caledonian University

Joy O'Gorman, Student Adult Nurse, University of Plymouth

Brian Webster, Student Adult Nurse, University of Dundee

Shaun Williams, Student Learning Disabilities Nurse, Keele University

Megan Lowe, Student Paediatric Nurse, Swansea University

We have also included some information from our books and digital learning tools where we think that it will be useful for your first year and will supplement the great advice provided by the nurses above.

Contents

- Page 5** Learning at University is different
- Page 6** The academic stuff
- Page 9** New beginnings
- Page 10** Making connections
- Page 13** Growth and development
- Page 15** Self care
- Page 20** Money, money, money
- Page 21** Just for fun

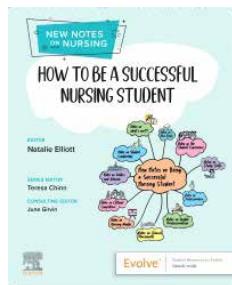
#1

Learning at University is *different*

Some of you may have come to university straight from school, or some of you may have taken a break from study and are now returning. Whatever your circumstances are, it's important to remember that this is your journey – so you can take charge and make it your own!

Learning at University is likely to be different from any other learning that you may have done before, as the responsibility lies with you to make it successful. It can be daunting entering the university environment for this reason; however, you will develop skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that will serve you well in life – such as the ability to prioritise your workload, control over your own learning, and critical thinking, to name a few, which are also important nursing skills!

But to be successful, you need to be able to use your time effectively and find ways to keep motivated when times are challenging.



Adapted from notes on study skills
How to be a Successful Nursing Student
Natalie Elliott & Teresa Chinn



#2

The *academic* stuff

Librarians are a nursing students' best friend

Whilst at university you will likely want to supplement your lecture notes with other learning materials like books, 3D anatomy tools, question banks and video's.

As well as reaching out to older students and your tutors for the best learning tools & materials, the librarian at your university will know all of the learning tools that you have access to digitally or physically. They can share registration and log in details which will save you time as well as money.

There are lots of brilliant resources to tap into from Elsevier; like [Ross and Wilson's Anatomy and Physiology](#) which you can find on [ClinicalKey Student Nursing](#), among many others..

If you don't have access to Osmosis and Complete Anatomy via your med school there are some offers at the start of term that you can take advantage of:



Osmosis; providing the right study techniques to help you retain, understand and study more efficiently. Exclusive 25% off your subscription [here](#)



Complete Anatomy; Master human anatomy and boost patient understanding with the most accurate 3D models, extensive courses, and interactive tools. Up to 50% off your subscription [here](#)

*offers valid until 30th November 2025

Assignments



Some people start their assignments early, some leave it to the last minute. Find out how you work best and when you are most effective at studying. Not everyone is a morning person, some are night owls. Do you need distraction or absolute silence to focus?

Referencing



Pay attention in your library tutorials- referencing correctly can save you a whole world of pain and can mean the difference between scraping a pass and achieving a great mark. Compile your reference list as you write your essay, save yourself the stress at the end of desperately trying to go back and find the sources you've used to reference. Write down the references in the footnotes as you go along - you can format at the end, just get it down! Check your references before submitting your assignments - most libraries offer one to one support sessions either face to face or online. If you do get a comment regarding this on a marked essay, learn from it and develop your skills.

Additional learning requirements



If you identify as requiring additional learning support, make yourself known to the university and its relevant services. This can make life easier for classes and during any exams / assessments you may have.



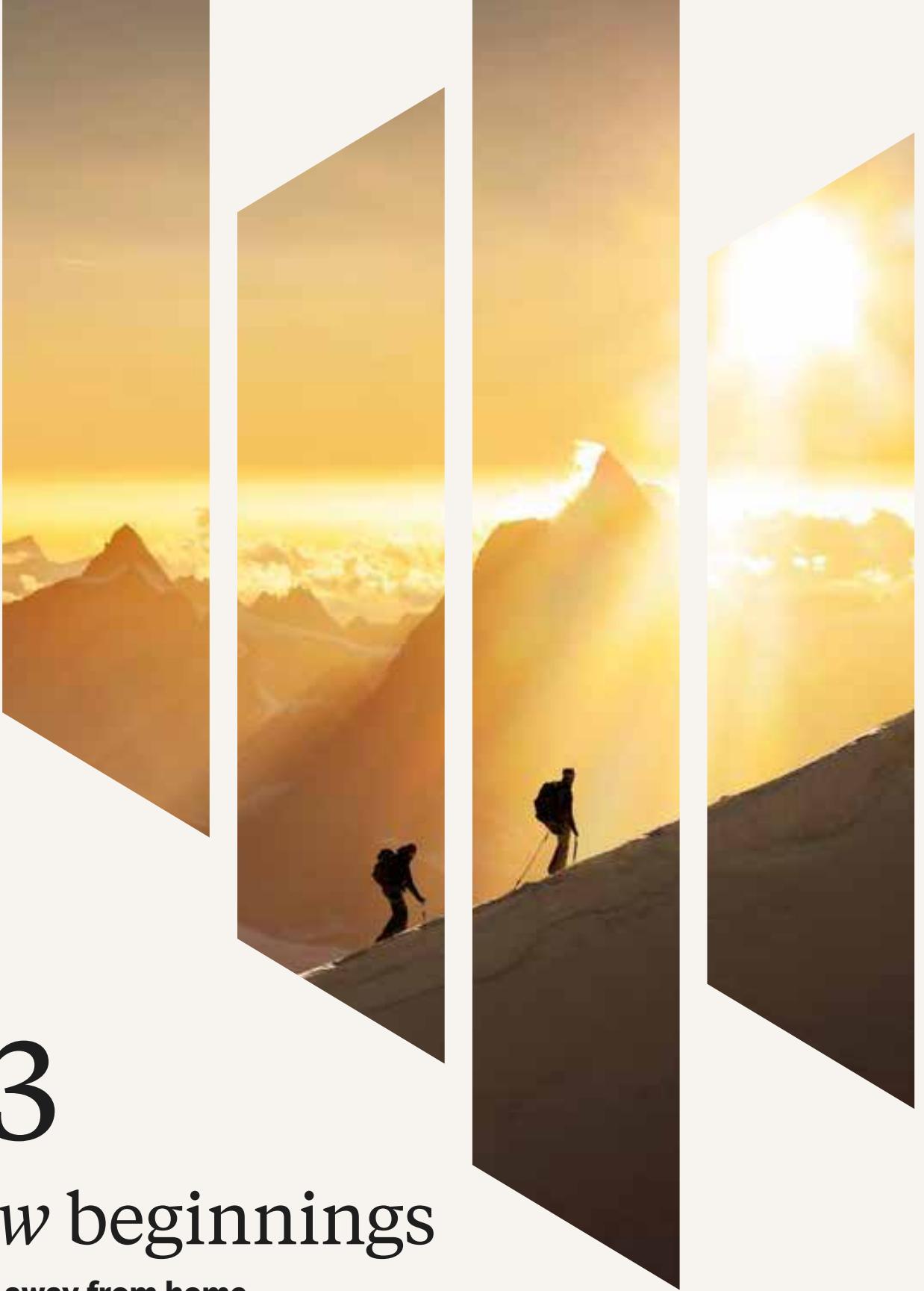
Have *fun* while you learn

As a nursing student, you are like a sponge, learning and absorbing new things all the time. It can be tough, but there are many interesting ways to learn. Here are some tips for adding some fun to learning anatomy.



Get creative & interact with the content

- Why not trace and colour your stress away, while strengthening your understanding of the human body at the same time. Check out [Ross & Wilson Anatomy & Physiology Colouring & workbook](#) for inspiration.
- Use pens, eyeliner, body paint and clay and pipe cleaners to draw and model anatomical structures
- Create visual representations using strawberry laces to map out bloody supply. Also, you can eat them when you have finished!
- Flashcards are a great way of learning alone or with friends, they boost your retention and are fun. Why not make your own on [ClinicalKey Student](#); ask your librarian if you have access.



#3

New beginnings

Living away from home

University can often be the first time we live away from our families. If you are staying in accommodation, get to know your floor mates and the people on your course who live on campus. Embrace the local culture! Get yourself out walking and explore the local area. Try and bring some of your existing routines into your new life. Do you go to the gym every Monday? Try and keep that habit living away from home. It will help you to settle in. If you have moved to the UK, to study find out if there is a local community group who can point you in the right direction for your spiritual, cultural and religious needs.



#4

Making connections

Extra-curricular activities

Being a nursing student is like having a golden passport that gives you access to a whole range of learning opportunities outside the lecture hall. Get yours well stamped, it will help you during your final year interview. Find out what research is happening at your university, if you are in the UK contact your local UNION branch to see what conferences and learning opportunities they may be hosting, or touch base with local patient groups in an area or speciality that interests you.

Elsevier Ed's note: We also love to work with students and would be keen to hear from you and collaborate. Drop us a line here: elm.edu.marketing@elsevier.com to find out more about how you can work with us.

If you're a student within the **ANZ region**, please reach out to us at anz-education@elsevier.com.

Be Professional

Always consider your new professional role as a student nurse, not adhering to new public health guidelines could jeopardise your ability to study at University and/or register with the **NMC**, if you are studying in the UK.



Find your *tribe*

This doesn't need to be in person, it can be online. Studying can be incredibly isolating, so it's important to have a network of people who you can lean on when times are tough.

Join your universities nursing society (or create your own one if one doesn't exist), it's a great way to make new friends who understand what you are going through. Utilise support networks, (such as NHS staff networks if you are in the UK, and your Uni LGBTQI+ society, for example) and engage with online communities.

Join other societies, a network, sports societies, or get involved with areas you are passionate about. You can easily access webinars and tweetchats/twebates which can enhance your knowledge. University is primarily focussed on attaining your degree. However, it doesn't hurt to polish up your CV in the process and make yourself stand out from the crowd when it comes to applying for jobs.

Elsevier Ed's note: Social media can be a great place to talk with people and be part of a community. Join our social community where you can find out more about Elsevier, get access to learning materials, exclusive content and become part of a community. Find us on socials:



[@elsevierforNursingStudents](#)



[@ElsevierAustralia](#)



[@elsevier_nurse_ed](#)

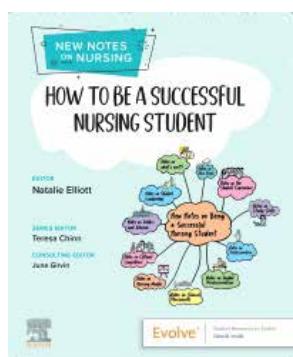


[@ElsevierEMEA](#)

Developing peer support networks & their *advantages*

Part of your student experience is getting to know your peers. It's a unique bond that you will form sharing your journey as well as reflecting upon experiences or situations you have been in. Peer support in educational terms is supporting others by offering education, individual experiences, practical help, and feedback to benefit the learning needs of a group. Benefits include:

- Increased mental health support
- More inclusive classroom
- Higher achievement within the classroom & in assessments
- Increased self-esteem & positive behaviour
- Enhanced self-advocacy skills
- Increased attendance within lectures and placements
- Development of positive and diverse relationships amongst peers
- Enhancing problem-solving skills



Content adapted from
How to be a Successful Nursing Student
by Natalie Elliott
Chapter 1: Notes on The Student Experience, available on [ClinicalKey Student Nursing](#) and in print



#5

Growth & Development

Be open to change

The nursing and the healthcare world never stand still and is constantly evolving. As your lecturers will tell you, when you finish your course you won't be the same person who walked through the door on your first day- in part this is true. Try not to be resistant to growing and becoming the person you need to be. Constructive feedback can be one of the most important tools to becoming a qualified nurse.

Let your voice be heard

Learn to use your voice from the start of your degree, not through bad karaoke, but in a respectful and professional way. Nurses are powerful advocates for their patients, and this is a skill that needs to be mastered over time. If an opportunity comes along to enrol in a leadership skills course....bite their hand off! Increasing your knowledge and skills and building your CV whilst doing it never hurts. Find ways to get involved in different activities to make you stand out from the crowd.

Elsevier Ed's note: We have a fantastic set of practical YouTube videos drawn from the experiences of some of the nurses who wrote this guide, called Virtual Mentor: Leadership Series - check them out [HERE](#)

Be Inquisitive



This is your time to learn and prepare yourself for the future. Ask questions... don't be scared you can guarantee that you won't be the only person who wants to know the answer.

Reflection



Keep a reflection journal - it's how we develop and grow. Periodically you can look back and see how far you have come.



#6

Self care

It is hard to look after those needing your care if you are not looking after yourself. Do what makes you happy, whether that be exercising, spending time with friends, or catching up on your favourite box set. Or perhaps its using meditation techniques or attending your favourite yoga class to take a few mindful minutes away from a high intensity course. Nursing can be a physically and emotionally exhausting course make sure you have a healthy work/life balance.



Keep your Brain *fueled*

Remember, sitting at your laptop, doing long shifts, being away from your usual support networks and eating unhealthy food will add up over your time as a student. Eat well and look after yourself, time invest in weekly meal planning will be worth it. Remember food is fuel and taking care of yourself is always a priority.



No bake brain balls

1	cup oatmeal	1/2	cup ground flaxseed
1/2	cup peanut butter	1/2	cup mini chocolate chips
1/3	cup honey	1 tsp	vanilla
1	cup unsweetened coconut flakes		

Directions: Mix everything! Chill for 1/2 hour. Roll into balls and cover.

Green Hornet Smoothie

1	tablespoon yoghurt	1	handful loose spinach
4	kale leaves, stems removed	1	cup coconut water
1/2	apple	4-5	fresh mint leaves

Directions: Mix everything in a blender and enjoy.

Reach out



Talk to people. Being a student is hard, being a student nurse is really hard. If you find that it's all getting on top of you, then seek help. You need support and if you look in the right places, you'll find it. Your personal tutors/academic mentors/other nurse lecturing staff have been where you are now. Most of them are wonderful, will listen to you and help you out when you need it. Support can also be sought from university services, friends and family. Share your problems and seek solutions. No one wants you to struggle, in fact, they all want you to succeed.

Stay Connected



Keep in touch with your family and friends. You may have moved away for university or are staying in your hometown, either way, catching up with loved ones is vital to your own wellbeing. Let your family and close friends know you care about them, but explain how deadlines and Uni demands mean you will not always have the usual social time available, however breaks are planned ahead. Make sure to utilise them and take some well deserved rest.



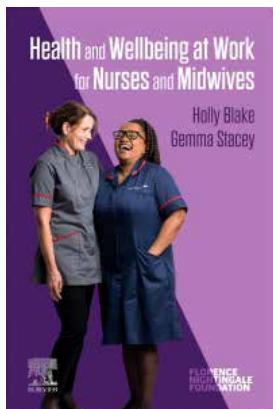
Mental wellbeing for nursing students

As with all courses there are pressure points that could impact negatively on students' mental health. As nursing students it's good to recognise what the pressure points are and have strategies available to help maintain good mental health and wellbeing.

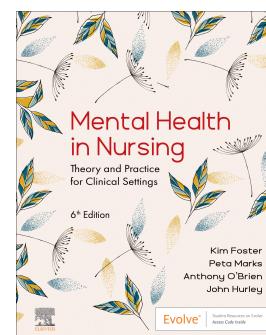
Pressure points

- **Transitions;** transitions can disrupt our sense of safety and control as we are faced with new challenges, unfamiliar experiences and potential changes to our usual ways of coping.
- **University And Home Life;** Being at university and studying in a healthcare programme may impact on existing relationships, as students have new experiences and are exposed to different perspectives. The time commitment ...changes to usual family routines, which may disrupt home life.
- **Placements;** Placements are for many the highlight of the course and offer unique and rewarding opportunities ... However, they are a significant transition accompanied by a weight of expectations.
- **Assessments;** The pressure of assessment is an area many students will be familiar with. There may be multiple deadlines to contend with and assessments that are due during or after placement. Managing these workload pressures can be challenging.

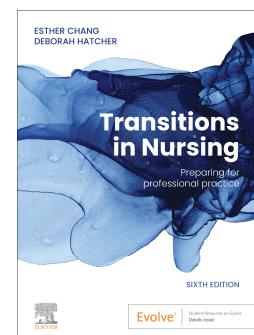
ClinicalKey Student



Content adapted from:
Health and Wellbeing at Work for Nurses and Midwives
by Holly Blake
Available in print and on [ClinicalKey Student Nursing](#)

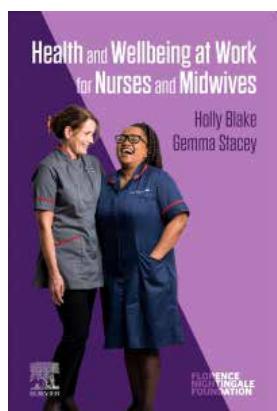


If you're a student within the ANZ region, find health and wellbeing resources in these books.
Available for print and on [ClinicalKey Student Australia](#)

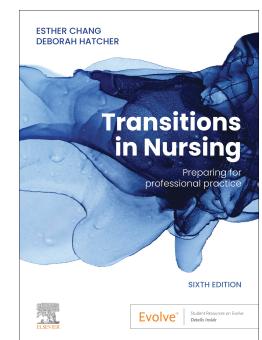
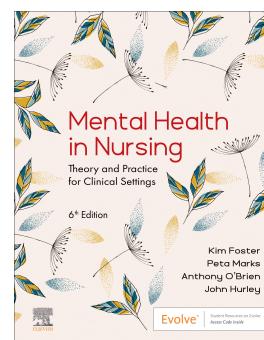


Strategies to *maintain* health and wellbeing

- **Mindfulness;** Buddhist-derived meditation interventions have been shown to be effective treatments for a broad range of physical and mental health illnesses, and a version of this, known as mindfulness, is now advocated by recognised healthcare bodies to promote good mental wellbeing
- **Support Network;** Starting to build your support network while at university will help sustain you throughout your career... also Knowing which family and friends you can talk to.
- **University Support;** Universities recognise that,... robust student support systems are important to attracting and keeping students (GuildHE, 2018). Due to this, universities and student bodies have invested in developing services to specialise and advise on a range of needs a student may present with...
- **Communication;** Often we become concerned that if we attempt to discuss issues we are struggling with, there might be an assumption made that we are not coping... In reality the opposite is true: professional codes ask us as student nurses or midwives to act with honesty and integrity and to uphold our professionalism. Therefore, being clear about your needs, and sometimes even your limitations, is evidence of professional conduct.
- **Space For Yourself;** Plan your weeks so you have a variety of ways to nurture your emotional health. Making time for mindfulness is a great way to begin, and you may want to incorporate some form of activity or exercise to support your body in what can be a physically demanding job... It is important that time for yourself also feels meaningful for you.



ClinicalKey
Student



Content adapted from:

Health and Wellbeing at Work for Nurses and Midwives

by Holly Blake

Available in print and on [ClinicalKey Student Nursing](#)

If you're a student within the ANZ region, find health and wellbeing resources in these books.

Available for print and on [ClinicalKey Student Australia](#)



#7

Money, money, money!

You'd be shocked at how costly those daily coffees and takeaways are to your pocket! As student nurses, we have to make our money stretch. If you can, try to build up some savings before you start your course. Don't be tempted to blow your student loan (if you have one) all in one go and be unable to afford your rent or food for the rest of the term. Unions aren't just for employees, they can offer great benefits as a student in the form of discounts, offers and free stuff! Businesses love students too, so keep an eye out for any deals, especially during Fresher's Week.

#8

Just for fun

Study songs

Remember there is always time to have some fun, it's not all work, work, work!

Check out our 'great' playlist on [Spotify](#) for some excellent medical related tunes

- Comfortably Numb - **Scissor Sisters**
- Every Breath You Take - **The Police**
- Stayin' Alive - **Bee Gees**
- The Drugs Dont Work - **The Verve**
- Bad Medicine - **Bon Jovi**
- Another One Bites The Dust - **Queen**
- The First Cut Is The Deepest - **Sheryl Crow**
- Doctor! Doctor! - **Thompson Twins**
- Dr. Beat - **Miami Sound Machine**
- Sister Morphine - **The Rolling Stones**
- Love Is The Drug - **Roxy Music**
- Dizzy - **Vic Reeves**
- Night Nurse - **Gregory Isaacs**
- Medicine Man - **Zero 7, Eska**
- Girl, You Have No Faith In Medicine - **The White Stripes**
- Lithium - **Nirvana**
- The Bitterest Pill (I Ever Had To Swallow) - **The Jam**
- I Wanna Be Sedated - **Ramones**

Quick Quiz

Do you know the actual medical names for these common terms? Answers are below, don't peek!



1. Tennis Elbow	A. prepatellar bursitis
2. Goosebumps	B. tibial stress syndrome
3. Housemaid's knee	C. lateral epicondylitis
4. Sneezing	D. sternutation
5. Shin Splints	E. horripilation

Good luck *future nurses*

We hope that you have found our guide helpful and informative. Our mission is to support and help prepare you for the road ahead.

To find out more about Elsevier and how we help to support nursing students please visit:
<https://studenthub.elsevier.com>



[@elsevierforNursingStudents](#)



[@elsevier_nurse_ed](#)



[@elsevierhealtheducation](#)



ELSEVIER

Copyright © 2025 Elsevier B.V.