

Issues faced by female ALTs

Niigata Mid Year Seminar 2005
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Health

Menstruation

- Adjusting to a major change, such as moving to Japan may interrupt a woman's cycle. It may cause you to stop menstruating for several months or it may cause very frequent menstruation. You may want to check with a doctor should this happen.
- Sanitary towels and tampons are widely available though usually not Western brands. Those made from cotton have a small picture of a cotton flower on the front of the packet.
- Used sanitary towels and tampons are classed as burnable rubbish!
- Eve (pronounced Eee-bu in Japanese) is a good painkiller for menstrual cramps (contains ibuprofen)
- Hokkairo is a self adhesive heat patch that can be stuck to your undershirt to relieve back pain or abdominal cramps. They are sold in pharmacies near the muscle ointments.
- Check your contract to see if you are entitled to menstrual leave. Usually menstrual leave is unpaid, rather than paid as sick leave (byokyu). However if you have bad cramps then technically you are sick so that could also be classed as byokyu. (i.e. tell your supervisor you are sick and taking byokyu!)

General Health

- Many Japanese foods are really healthy – learn how to cook them and which foods to buy.
- Vitamins are widely available.
- Make sure you eat a balanced diet and take vitamins, particularly in winter as colds and influenza are rampant in school!
- Ask local ALTs to recommend a gym and help you to sign up.
- Whilst fruits and vegetables might be more expensive than in your home country, you're worth it! Your health is more important than a few yen.
- Get a dehumidifier or some absorbent pots to keep your apartment healthy.
- Get a water filter and drink plenty in those hot summer months.

Finding Doctors/Gynecologists

- Ask other JETs in your area to recommend English speaking doctors or gynecologists.
- Call AMDA for listings of English speaking doctors. (See Resources)

Visiting the Doctor

- Bring your Alien Registration Card and Health Insurance Card.
- While technically doctors' visits are confidential, you might want to stress that you expect your consultation to be kept confidential.
- Look in your JET Diary for useful Japanese vocab, and the JET Programme General Information Handbook for information on visiting the doctor.



Visiting the Gynecologist

- Bring your Alien Registration Card and Health Insurance Card.
- Regular gynecological check-ups are not common practice in Japan, particularly for women under the age of 30.
- Most gyn visits in Japan will be different than what you are used to in your home country.
- Usually, when being examined, you will sit in a chair with stirrups, and there will be a curtain drawn across at waist level to save on the “embarrassment” of having to look your gyn in the face or your gyn having to look at you, depending on how you want to perceive it!
- If you receive an ultrasound, there will usually be a monitor for you look at.
- A Pap smear (sumea tesuto) will cost about 10,000 yen.
- Women over 30 can receive free breast and cervical examinations.

Sexual Health

- STD tests are available at regular clinics or hospitals.
- For information on AIDS, call the AIDS Helpline (see resource es)
- Tests should be confidential, so don't give your name or contact information.
- AIDS tests are available at your local Public Health Clinic (Hokenjo), and should be either free, or cost around 2000 yen. A blood test is called “*ketsueki kensa*” while an AIDS test is “*aizu no testo*”

Contraceptives

- Condoms are widely available in pharmacies, supermarkets etc. However Japanese brands may be too small for Western men.
- Female condoms are apparently also available, although I have yet to come across them in Niigata.
- Diaphragms, caps and IUDs aren't widely available.
- The birth control pill is available (only legalized as a method of contraception in 1999!). Though dosages may be higher and familiar brands might not be available.
- Lower dosage versions of the pill are now available. If you take along the package from the pill from your own country the doctor will be able to try and match it as much as possible to the Japanese brand.
- The birth control pill usually isn't covered by health insurance. However, if the patient has irregularities or severe menstrual cramps, it is partially covered under health insurance. It will cost around 3000 yen per monthly pack with the health insurance reduction.
- You can have birth control pills sent from home if they are accompanied by a prescription and doctor's note (only one month at a time in theory, or twelve?!).
- It is possible to legally take a years supply of birth control with you or have it sent, however there are specific rules you must follow i.e. you need the right documentation (Permisson Certificate or Yakkan Shomei). Consult the JET Programme General Information Handbook for more information.

Emergency Contraception and Abortion

- The morning-after pill (hinin yaku) is available at some family planning clinics and hospitals. However it can be difficult to come by in Niigata, especially in rural areas. Your best option is to get to an English speaking doctor or gynecologist in Niigata (see Resources for details). It costs around 3000 yen, plus the cost of the doctor's visit. Health insurance may cover part of the cost.
- The morning after pill should be taken within 48hrs of unprotected sex.
- Abortions are available within the first trimester, effectively on demand. They aren't covered by medical insurance and typically cost up to 200,000 yen. Attitudes to abortion may be different to what you are used to in your home country. The religious moral issues are not the same and abortion is often simply viewed as a "necessary sadness."

Pregnancy

- Pregnancy tests are widely available in pharmacies and supermarkets, including Western brands such as Clear Blue. Check One brand has English instructions also.
- For information on pregnancy, maternity leave, etc. see the JET Programme General information Handbook or refer to your contract.

Culture Shock and Mental Health

- Get involved in your community and spend time with other JETs while settling in.
- But don't be afraid to say no to invitations and have some time to yourself.
- Talk to other JETs or your PA if you're finding it hard to adjust.
- If you want to talk anonymously, call one of the help lines listed in the resources section.

Self-Esteem and Body Issues

- Sometimes you might feel like a giant in a land of waifs. Don't despair! You are not Japanese, and your body shape is not inferior!! Many Japanese women would kill for your curves...
- There are stores which sell clothes suitable for Western shapes and sizes. These are mostly in Tokyo and other big cities but there are some places in Niigata. Ask local JETs where they shop and see the Resource list.
- It may seem that Japanese women are permanently dieting and assume that you are/should be too. Ignore their advice and don't let them get to you!
- If you think that you, or someone you know might be suffering from an eating disorder, contact a professional for advice. See the resource list for useful numbers.
- You might find that your hair or skin changes after a while, and you might need to change shampoo or cosmetics.
- Japanese products/cosmetics can also be unsuitable for non Asians and you may need to get things sent from home or stock up when traveling.
- Ask other JETs to recommend Japanese products or help you shop. Or try the Foreign Buyers' Club to get familiar Western products.

Safety

Hints and Tips

- Japan is a safe country, but don't fall into a false sense of security - take the same precautions as you would at home!
- Befriend your neighbours and learn their names, they will look out for you, and might be able to help you in an emergency.
- Carry your Alien Registration/Gaigin card with you at all times, and always have your PA's and supervisor's numbers handy.
- If you have a keitai (mobile phone), programme useful contacts/emergency numbers so that you can call quickly.
- Check at your local community centre to see if they offer martial arts or self defence classes.
- Bear in mind that not all foreigners/JETs can be trusted. Just because a man comes from the same country as you doesn't mean you should abandon all caution.
- Don't hang your underwear outside to dry – this advertises the fact that you are a single woman living alone (plus there are some panty thieves out there!)

Harassment

- In some cities (but not in Niigata Ken!), "women-only" train carriages are available in the mornings, or women-only sections on the bus.
- If you are harassed on the train, grab the arm of your harasser and call for a conductor. Your harasser can then be arrested at the station.
- In most cases if you can draw attention to the situation, the harasser will be embarrassed enough to stop.
- Harassment can sometimes happen at enkais (drinking parties) and in school - don't put up with anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Don't accept behaviour that you wouldn't accept at home.
- Make sure the harasser knows that their behaviour is unacceptable. Check the useful phrases below...
- If you are harassed at an enkai, or at your workplace, ask another member of staff to help you.
- Remember that it's much easier to take care of yourself at enkais if you haven't drunk too much.
- In Japanese schools, relationships between students and teachers are often more physically intimate than would be deemed appropriate in Western schools. Make it clear to your students where you draw the line.
- Remember you are not in your home country anymore, while you should not accept unacceptable behaviour, society is different and as such a "Japanese" approach to the situation will be more beneficial to you in the long run, especially in the work place. Bear in mind you will still have to work with these people unless it is a very serious case of harassment. Screaming, losing your temper and slapping the guy in the face will not help you and will only reinforce many stereotypes of Western women. There are other ways to make your point.

Useful Phrases

- Leave me alone/Stop it. **Yamete (kudasai)**
- Stop following me! **Tsuite konaide (kudasai)!**
- You shouldn't do that! **Dame yo!**
- Don't touch me! **Sawaranaide (kudasai)!**
- I'll call the police! **Keisatsu o yobimasu yo!**
- That's sexual harassment. **Seku hara desu yo.**
- I don't want to answer (polite). **Noo comento desu.**
- None of your business! **Kankei nai desho!**
- Pervert! **Chikan!**
- Please help! **Tasukete kudasai!**

Even if you can't remember any Japanese phrases, speaking in a stern tone of voice can often convey your meaning to any potential harasser. Most will be embarrassed if you are loud and draw attention to the situation.

How to Report a Crime

If you are the victim of a crime and feel the police should become involved, follow these steps:

- Notify the police by dialing 110 or going to the nearest *koban* (police box). If you need an ambulance, dial 119. In case English is not understood, the phrase "*tasukete kudasai*" (please help me) is simple and useful.
- Contact your supervisor, or another colleague if your supervisor is unavailable.
- If you need to go to the hospital, ask your supervisor or friend to accompany you. If you've been sexually assaulted, do NOT shower before seeing the doctor!
- Discuss with your supervisor and the police what steps you feel should be taken about the situation and try to come to an agreement. Find out if your town/city has a Counseling Service for Foreigners with the police department (*gaikokujin komarigoto sodan kona*) that can help you.
- Inform your Prefectural Advisor (PA) and CLAIR. CLAIR asks to be informed of crimes so that they can help your Contracting Organization prevent and deal with crimes.

Keep a record of what happened, the people with whom you have talked, and any other information you think is pertinent. The Japanese police can sometimes take a great deal of time on investigations and the like, but keeping records will help you remember important people and times.

Relationships/Dating

Dating

- In general, it's not as common for a Japanese man to date a foreign woman as it is for a Japanese woman to date a foreign man. But, it does happen!!
- There are of course some cultural differences in dating between Japan and Western countries, and the language barrier may make relationships more difficult.
- But there are plenty of women dating Japanese men!

Check out the following articles:

- www.mynippon.com/romance/jlover.htm
 - http://members.tripod.com/~NORE_SOORE/9_98/Dating.html
 - <http://japanese.about.com/cs/relationships1/#m>
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- You might also find it difficult to date a Western/foreign man – there aren't that many around, and lots will have Japanese girlfriends! (Plus there is a serious lack of fit western guys in Niigata Ken! Ganbatte girls!)
 - A great Japanese invention that can come in handy is the "love hotel", more politely known as "fashion hotels" where you pay for a room, either for "a rest" (by the hour), or "a stay" (overnight). They aren't as sleazy as they sound, really! Japanese etiquette requires the man to always pay also!

Women's Roles in Japanese Society

- Compared to most Western societies, women's lib has had little effect in Japan. Women are often shown less respect, and making tea etc. is still seen as the women's job in many offices. While this can be very frustrating bare in mind that the demise of the Feudal system was really not that long ago in Japan.
- As a western woman, many of these expectations won't be applied to you. You can often "select" expectations you choose to live up to, and ignore those that don't suit you.
- Do not expect to "change" Japan. If you can influence your female students and Japanese friends even a little bit then you will have made a small difference. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither was a women's lib movement!
- JETs of Asian descent may find that they are under pressure to conform to the same roles as Japanese women.
- On the plus side, female JETs may find less pressure than male JETs to drink heavily at staff parties.
- Female students and staff may be more willing to befriend you (as opposed to hero worship you!) and socialise than they would with male JETs. Take advantage of these opportunities.
- Local women and families are often more willing to "adopt" female JETs and teach you many things about Japan and your community.
- Your relationships can vary according to location. Rural JETs may find themselves very involved in community life. But on the downside, their lives will tend to be scrutinised a lot more!
- Urban JETs might have to make more effort to become involved in community life and make Japanese friends. But on the plus side, they will probably have more privacy.
- If you are a married or cohabiting JET, you might find people assume that you have to go home and look after your partner, and therefore are less likely to invite you to events.
- Remember you are not Japanese, you can go home at the end of this to a society where women are equal! Keep things in perspective.

Resources

If in doubt...

- For information at a local level, contact your supervisor, Prefectural JET supervisor or PA (Prefectural Advisor).
- Ask your fellow JETs, chances are they've been in the same boat at some point!
- Refer to your JET Diary or the JET Programme General Information Handbook for useful information.
- Check out the help lines listed in various categories below.

Recommended Reading

- **Being A Broad in Japan** by Caroline Pover
- **Japan Health Handbook** by Maruyama, Shimizu, & Tsurumake
- Both available from Amazon.co.jp and large books stores with English book sections, such as Kinokuniya in Bandai.

Clothes that fit...

To find your nearest store:

- GAP 03-3499-8600
- Laura Ashley 03-5474-2643
- Isetan 03-3225-2514
- Jusco 043-212-6110
- Kenzo 03-5485-9860
- Kashiwaya 03-3205-1960
- Zara 03-5449-1718
- Talbot's Japan 03-3571-2922
- Uniqlo www.uniqlo.co.jp/english

Mail Order:

- www.coldwater-creek.com
- www.freemans.com
- www.llbean.com
- www.landsend.co.uk
- www.jcrew.com
- www.peruvianconnection.com
- www.sierrablue.com
- www.victoriasscret.com
- www.sumisho-otto.com/store/home/home.aspx (Japanese only)
- www.nissen.jp (Japanese only)

Foreign Food and Stuff

- Foreign Buyers Club www.fbcusa.com
- The Flying Pig (Costco) www.theflyingpig.com
- Tengu Natural Foods www.tengufoods.com
- Mediya. Foreign food store in Furumachi.
- Yamaya. Two in Niigata city, one in Joetsu, one in Nagaoka.

Health/Wellbeing

- **Tokyo English Lifeline (TELL)** 9am -11pm 03-5774-0992 www.telljp.com
- **Japan Helpline (24hrs)** 0120-46-1997 (Toll free) www.jhelp.com
- **AIDS Hotline (24hrs)** 0120-46-1995 (Toll free)
- **Association of Medical Doctors in Asia** 03-5285-8088 www.amda.or.jp/eng
- **CLAIR JET Line** (Mon - Fri 9am - 5.45pm) 03-3591-5489
- **AJET Peer Support Group** (8pm – 8am) 0120-437-725 (Toll free)
- **Emergency Interpretation Service** (for medical institutions) 03-5283-8185 (Mon – Fri 9am – 8pm; Sat – Sun 9am – 10pm; English, Thai, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese)
- **International Mental Health Professionals – Japan (IMHJP)** www.imhjp.org
- **Medical Institutes where foreign Languages are available** <http://on-top.net/cgi-bin/hospital/index.cgi>
- **Ministry of Health, Labour & Welfare** www.mhlw.go.jp/english/index.html
- **About pregnancy, check-ups, mental health and misc.** www.japan.com/living/healthcare/healthrelated.php
- **About life as a parent or expecting a baby in Japan.** Including forums, lists of babysitters etc. www.tokyowithkids.com
- **Condom Mania** www.condommania.com
- **Women's Online Media** <http://wom-jp.org/indexE.html> It features health and safety information, nursery schools plus some Japanese women's perspectives on their own country. It's interesting, try checking it out!

Niigata Information:

The following health professionals speak English and have been used by other female ALTs.

Gynecologists:

- **Bandai Ladies Clinic, Niigata-Shi, Bandai 1-2-3, Cope Nomura Bandai, 2F.** Tel: 025 245 1735. Hours: Mon, Tues, Wed and Fri 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Sat 9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 2:30 – 6 p.m. Closed: Thurs, Sun and national holidays. Note: The gynecologist is a man but has been recommended. Directions: Take the road between Daiei and the Bus Center in Bandai and walk towards Niigata Eki. Pass the intersection by the McDonalds and one more intersection. It's on the right, on the corner, second floor.
- **Hatekeyama Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic, Niigata- Shi, Horinouchiminami 1-18-16.** Tel: 025 2438421. Hours: Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 9:30 a.m. – 13:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. – 6 p.m. Wed, Sat, 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Closed: Sun and national holidays. Note: The gynecologist is a woman. Directions from Dekky: Go down the street by Dekky towards Niigata station. Turn right after the major road that comes from Showa O-hashii (by Hakusan Park). Turn Left at the first street and it will be on the corner of the next intersection.

General Practitioner:

- **Kawai Surgical Clinic, Gastrointestinal Surgery and General Practice, Niigata-Shi, Higashi-Odori 2-3-26, Niigata Ekimae Bldg. 3F.** Tel: 025 2421311. Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Tues, Thurs, 1st and 3rd Sat 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
- Take a look at his site. There's a very useful map in English. www.asahi-net.or.jp/~PR6C-KWi/index.html
- Dr. Kawai is a lovely man and a great doctor. His English is amazing and he has a lot of experience treating foreigners. Highly recommended.

Safety

- Police 110 Ambulance/Fire 119
- Police Counselling Hotline for Foreigners 03-3503-8484
www.npa.go.jp/hiqaisya/en/index.html

Notes