



COPING WITH EXAM STRESS!

TOP WEB LINKS

Exam stress - top tips (short guide)


http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/advice/factfile_az/exams_stress

Exam stress - how to cope (longer guide)


http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/exam_stress

Revision and exam preparation (comprehensive guide)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/studentlife/revisionandskills/>

Revising for exams - Top 10 Tips (short video) 

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjh10kj9Y64&feature=fvwp>

Brainsmart - Managing Stress (short video) 

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/brainsmart/success/>

BEFORE & AROUND EXAMS

- ✓ **No comparison:** During exam time, it's easy to start comparing your own revision or performance with that of your friends. Avoid it. Some people in your class might be bragging about how easy they are finding it all whilst you might be struggling. Those "Oh my God, I've only read Macbeth 17 times" conversations are such a wind up. Everyone learns in different ways and you have to find a way that suits you.
- ✓ **Stick to the schedule:** Plan your workload. Make a realistic timetable. Stick to it and don't let the work pile up - that will panic you more. Sticking to your timetable will make you feel in control of your work.
- ✓ **Study everything:** Don't avoid revising a subject because you don't like it or find it hard. You'll still have an exam on it so it's important to cover as much as possible.
- ✓ **Check dates and times:** It's your responsibility to get to your exams on the right day and at the right time so make sure you do!
- ✓ **Early to bed:** Don't stay up late cramming for your exams - you need to be fresh for the next day. So, wind down before bed, get to bed at a reasonable time (but also don't overdo sleep as you'll feel groggy) and remember to set your alarm for the morning! Also, don't revise under the duvet ... your bed is a sanctuary - not a desk!

- ✓ **Breaks:** Worrying constantly won't help you do any better in the exams, so take time to chill out on a regular basis. Go for little and often - you should ideally spend at least 10 minutes of every hour to switch off.
- ✓ **Pamper yourself:** Make sure you create 'you' time where you go and do something that cheers you up. Make a list of things you enjoy and choose one to reward yourself with. Finding time to look after yourself will help you cope with stress.
- ✓ **Eat regularly and eat well:** Paying attention to your diet can help you to improve your mood and help reduce mood swings. Try and eat balanced meals, including fresh fruit and veg. Eat at set times. Treat yourself like a well-honed machine - your brain needs energy to work.
- ✓ **Exercise:** When we get anxious, adrenaline rushes through our bodies to prepare us to either run away or fight the feared object/situation. This causes the physical effects of anxiety such as feeling shaky or light headed. By undertaking regular activities such as walking, running or swimming, you can burn off the adrenaline, which will reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety. Nothing distresses the mind faster than physical activity. Being a sloth makes our mind sloppy too.
- ✓ **Relaxation techniques:** Panic is often triggered by hyperventilating (ie quick, shallow breaths). Find a quiet room away from any distractions and let your mind clear, focusing only on your breathing. Gently breathe in and out from the diaphragm instead of the chest. Take a deep breath. If you take a few slow deep breaths to calm your normal breathing, it will help you feel more in control. Also, focus on each muscle group, one at a time, tensing and then relaxing the muscles.
- ✓ **Avoid caffeine:** Drinking lots of coffee or other drinks containing lots of caffeine is not a good idea as this can make you feel more nervous. Ditto sugary foods and drinks.
- ✓ **Think positive:** When we feel anxious, we often give ourselves negative messages such as, 'I can't do this', 'I'm useless' and 'I'm going to fail'. It can be difficult but try and replace these with encouraging thoughts such as: 'this is just anxiety, it can't harm me' and, 'relax, concentrate; it is going to be ok'. Make yourself feel more positive by visualising the exams going well. Imagine you are confident and relaxed during the exam. Try to imagine the scene in as much detail as possible. You turn over your paper, write down what you do know and come away knowing you tried your best on the day. If you do have negative thoughts, replace them with this positive image. By picturing how you would like things to go, can help you feel more positive.
- ✓ **Write away your worries:** Writing down what you are experiencing can be an effective way of gaining a new perspective on the problem, making it easier to deal with. When a problem seems really big, it can be scary to know where to start sorting it out. First of all, look at what the problem is. Think of all of the possible solutions and write down the consequences of each one. This will help you choose what the best solution would be. Writing a diary can be very helpful for some people.
- ✓ **You're not alone:** Learn to recognise when you're stressing out. Talk to your trusted friends, family members and/or staff about what's worrying you. It's normal to feel stressed about exams. Off-loading on a regular basis can help you feel much calmer and put things in perspective.

- ✓ **Get organised:** Make sure you pack your bag and check you have *everything* you need for the exam the night before.
- ✓ **Don't panic:** Say to yourself in your head 'I *can* do this exam'.

DURING THE EXAM

- ✓ **Fuel:** If you feel nervous just before a test, try eating a banana - it sounds strange, but bananas can help to calm you down and they release energy slowly (plus it will also help stop you being hungry during the test!). Take some water into exams with you too. Keeping hydrated by drinking water will help you concentrate.
- ✓ **Timing:** Make sure you know how much time you will have in the exam, what kind of questions you will be asked, and how many there will be. That way you can split your time between the questions to make sure they all get answered.
- ✓ **End of exam:** When you're doing an exam that involves long answers - for example English, it's a good idea to leave some space at the end of the answer so you can add any additional comments or arguments that might come to mind when you re-read your paper at the end of the exam.
- ✓ **Don't spend all your time on questions you know the answer to - move on:** Don't spend all your time on questions you know the answer to. Remember that you have to answer all the questions, and you will get a worse mark for answering some questions supremely well and some not at all.
- ✓ **Handwriting:** Make sure your writing is legible. It's worth taking a little extra time making sure your work is neat enough for the examiner to be able to read it.
- ✓ **Breathe:** If you feel yourself losing it just before or during an exam, sit back for a moment and control your breathing. Deep breath in and out through the nose ... counting to five each way.

AFTER EXAMS

- ✓ **No exam post-mortems:** You have a while until exam results come out. Don't try to dissect the exam once you've finished it. There's no point going through what answers you put down compared to your friend. It's too late to go back and change your answers.
- ✓ **Keep perspective and move on:** Remember that although exams are important, they are not the be all and end all. It can sometimes feel like the whole of your future depends on what grades you get. *There is life after exams.* Try and focus on your own work and not put yourself down. Some people are better at taking exams than others, but this doesn't mean your future won't be successful. Even if you don't get the results you need or expect, you still have options and can get help with any decisions you have to make.