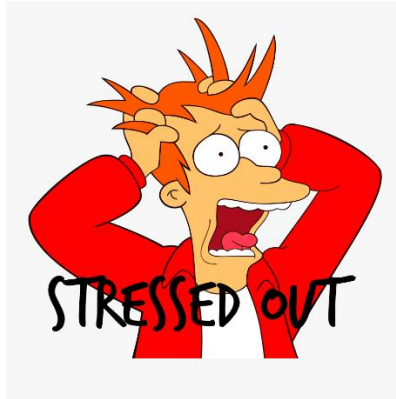


## Exam Stress



### Is it possible to avoid getting stressed before an exam?

Taking exams is a stressful time, there are a lot of things going on for you at this time:

- The weight of expectation to succeed.
- Am I good enough?
- Have I done enough work and revision?
- Will I let myself down?
- Will I get into college or university?

Stress is not all bad and the right amount of stress actually helps us to produce our best performance.

However, too much stress, or being stressed for too long can have a negative effect on both you and your chances of doing your best in exams.

The good news here is that "YES" there are some things we can do to help reduce stress to a healthy and positive level.

# Minimising exam stress

1.

## Get Organised

It may sound obvious, but you would be surprised how many people do not organise themselves to prepare for exams.

Firstly find out what resources are available to you.

Teacher are a great expert resource, although they may not have a great deal of time for every student. However, they will be able to point you in the right direction.

There are many good revision guides out there in different formats, books, internet sites, videos and talking to others about what they find helpful.

2.

## Make a timetable

Start your revision in plenty of time.

Make a timetable that is flexible, so that it is a guide, rather than a plan that is set in stone.

When you get your exam timetable link your revision timetable to it so that you are revising your topics at the best time for you.

Don't forget that you will also have to consider other things that are in your life, such as:

- Eating
- Sleep
- Family
- Other commitments
- RELAXING

Take all of your life into account and decide what time of day is best for you to study.

If you are on study leave split your days into sections, you could have morning, afternoon and evening. Then split these times in half, giving you six sections to your day.

Here is an example of a revision timetable:

Mon	English	English	RS	Maths	Maths	Dinner
Tue	Swimming	Swimming	Science	Science	IT	Dinner
Wed	Geography	History	History	Spanish	relax	Dinner
Thu	Product design	Watch TV program	Art	Art	English	Dinner
Fri	Maths	Maths	Relax	Drama	Go out	Go out
Sat	Science	Science	Football	Football	Family	Family
Sun	relax	relax	Food and textiles	Food and Textiles	Relax	Relax
	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please note that this is just an example of a revision timetable

When you are on study leave you can divide your timetable up in three main sections for morning, afternoon and evening, and then into smaller sections if you prefer.

After deciding on how you are going to divide your time and the length of time for each section make a **list of topics you need to revise**.

Remember that if you find a certain subject more difficult you may need to allocate it more time for revision, then add on a bit more time.

When you have worked out all of this divide your topics up between the units.

**Remember:**

- This is a guide and you may need to adjust it depending on life events.
- Always leave yourself some free time every week.

## De-stressing

To de-stress we need to take a whole person approach. This means looking at all aspects of our lives.

### Diet

Knowing what foods we should and shouldn't be eating can be really confusing, especially when it feels like the advice changes regularly.

#### How diet can help

Eating a balanced and healthy diet is key to helping our bodies to manage the physiological changes caused by stress. An important part of any stress response includes identifying and reducing the causes of stress. Adrenal function is significantly influenced by blood sugar levels, therefore much of the dietary advice below aims to stabilise levels of sugar in the blood.

#### Prioritise protein.

When chronically stressed the body has an increased demand for protein. Protein requirements are estimated at 0.7-1.8g per kg body weight daily. Choose lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds in each meal. Protein helps to slow the release of sugar into the blood stream.

#### Try not to skip meals.

Ensure that you eat regularly, taking healthy snacks as necessary. Small, regular meals will help to maintain energy levels, focus and mood, while decreasing tiredness and irritability.

#### Avoid highly refined foods,

Such as white bread, pasta, chocolate, biscuits, sweets or foods with added sugars. Hidden sugars are also in many cereals, breads, tinned produce and processed or packaged foods. Replace processed foods with the unrefined foods such as brown bread, rice, oats and rye.

#### Watch the caffeine.

Stimulants such as tea and coffee may provide a temporary energy boost, but consuming too much may reduce energy levels and deplete nutrients in the long term. Aim to drink at least 1-1.5 litres of water throughout the day and try herbal teas instead of caffeinated drinks.

## **Exercise**

Regular exercise is very beneficial for relieving stress and decreasing negative emotions such as worry or anxiety.

It is recommended that we do an hour of exercise a day. This doesn't have to be all in one go, we can do it in smaller doses.

You can also fit it around your day, for example; walk instead of taking the bus or getting a lift. Take the stairs rather than the lift, walk the dog(if you have one).

## **Relaxation**

Regular relaxation needs to be built into our daily life.

Reading, having a bath (Lavender bubble bath and smelly candles are great to help relaxation, just don't fall asleep in the bath!), listening to calming music or doing some creative art is a great ways to promote relaxation.

Here are some relaxation techniques that you can try. It is usually best to do these regularly and it is better to do them in daily short sessions than in long sessions every few days.

Find a comfortable place where you can do these without being disturbed for your daily sessions, you can also use them in day to day life to keep yourself calm and in a good place.

## **Breathing techniques**

Breathing techniques can be a very effective way to help with anxiety. Here are a few that you can try and find which one or ones you find most effective.

### Belly Breathing

Here is a link to a video that you can follow to learn this technique.

Belly breathing trains you to slow down your breathing and take fuller, deeper breaths which help you calm down, slow your heart rate, lower blood pressure and calm both your body and mind.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wemm-i6Xhr8>

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice that many people use every day.

It is not a quick fix, but incorporating it into your life will help reduce: stress, anxiety and help you focus your mind.

Practicing it every day for about 20 minutes will have a positive impact on your life.

You don't have to do your 20 minutes of practice all at once, try 10 minutes when you wake up an 10 minutes in the afternoon/lunchtime/when you get home or bedtime.

Here is a quick and simple mindfulness exercise that you can try:

1. Right here, right now, bring all your awareness to your breath. Shift your focus down to the belly and allow the belly to soften as you deepen your breath.
2. Now mentally repeat to yourself, "Breathing In, I calm myself. Breathing out, I smile." Say this like a mantra as many times as you need until you feel the shift.
3. Notice the corners of your mouth begin to curl, even if just a tiny little bit, even if you have to pretend. Notice how your breath becomes a bit more even and deep. The subtle smile brings relaxation and carries the message "all will be OK" to your mind and body.

Here is a link to a guided Mindfulness session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUeEnkjKyDs>

Here is a link to some more guided meditations that you may like and gives you a verity of meditations to choose from:

<https://mindfulnessforteens.com/guided-meditations/>

## Progressive muscle relaxation

Here is a link for you to follow. I would recommend following a guided muscle relaxation session to begin with, so that you can see how it should be done.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=progressive+muscle+relaxation+youtube+nhs&docid=607990179739927334&mid=695877F70000C5FDDE29695877F70000C5FDDE29&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

## **Sleep**

Being tired can make your worries appear even worse and this can cause anxiety which can then make sleeping difficult. It can be a vicious circle to get into, but there are things that we can do to help us have a good quality sleep:

- Make sure that you use your bed **just for sleeping**, not for doing homework or playing games on.
- Set yourself a realistic bed time and stick to it.
- If you can't sleep get up and read a book or listen to some calming music until you are tired.
- Avoid using screens for at least 30 minutes before bedtime and don't use them while you are trying to sleep. Screens include: computers, laptops, tablets, T.V, phones, all of these screens emit a light that stimulate your brain and reduce relaxation.
- Avoid caffeine and other stimulants, such as sugar and alcohol after lunch time.
- Have a warm bath before bed and maybe use some aromatherapy oils to aid sleep.
- Have a regular time to get up and when your alarm goes off get out of bed!

Having a routine for sleep will help as it sets unconscious triggers off in your mind that will put you into a sleeping mind-set.

## **Support Groups**

Try to build some support groups with your peers so that you can all study together.

It will help with revision and give you an opportunity to talk to others about your worries. This will allow you to let off steam and reduce tension as well as maybe picking up some tips that may help you.

## **Signs of excessive stress**

Feeling stressed is a natural reaction to pressure and the correct amount of stress can help us to feel motivated. However, too much stress can be de-motivating and unhealthy for us.

Some early signs of too much stress are:

- Headaches
- Poor sleep
- Loss of appetite or over eating
- Being more bad tempered than usual
- Feeling tired and lethargic all of the time
- Feeling sick or nauseous

Stress can make you feel restless, making concentrating difficult as well as making it hard to relax. You may become very disorganised and experience a sense that you are in danger or life is getting out of control.

You may start to feel panic and this can cause some physical sensations, such as:

- Chest pains
- Muscle cramps
- Pins and needles
- Dizziness
- Stomach problems
- Fainting

If you do experience these symptoms see your GP or talk to the school nurse or school counsellor.

## **What can I do when things are getting on top of me?**

Challenge these thoughts and see what is really going on for you.

Ask someone who knows your work and the required standard to see if you are setting yourself much too high a standard.



## **Talking treatments**

Talking about our issues can be a great stress reliever and will often give you the opportunity to discover solutions you would not have seen on your own.

Holding your feelings in may make them worse, but talking to your school counsellor or a therapist can help you to deal with your feelings. Remember that talking to your school counsellor is completely confidential and he will explain this to you when you first start going to counselling.

Counselling can help you to understand your feeling and help you find a way of dealing with them.

## **What to do immediately after your exam:**

### Don't dissect the exam paper when you have finished

There are many ways to interpret exam questions and being consumed by the different answers that you and your peers got is going to make you feel worse and raise your level of anxiety.

Once you hand your paper in at the end of the exam there is nothing you can do to change those answers.

### Don't spend time trying to verify the answers you gave

As we have said you can't change your answers, so worrying about it isn't going to help.

Plan to do something you like after an exam and try to leave your answers in the exam room.

### Some tips to do while you are waiting for your results

The list below will give you some ideas on how to reduce the stress and anxiety you may experience waiting for your exam results. These are distractions from your worrying and suggestions to encourage you to enjoy the time between the last exam and results day.

- Put down any fear of failure
- Talk to friends- just not about exams.
- Recognise your feelings, then you can deal with them.
- Realise your own expectations –what would you be happy with?
- Help others with their unrealistic expectations, this may be difficult but it will relieve some of that extra pressure
- Remember we all get stressed.
- Believe in yourself, you can do anything you put your mind to.
- Don't miss happy moments with worrying about your results.
- Relax, try: meditation, practicing yoga, listen to music, play games, have fun.

## **What to do when the results arrive**

Make sure you plan something to look forward to; you have worked hard for the exams, it is time to treat yourself.

Finally, if you don't get the results you wanted, try not to worry.

You will always find a way forward from this.

Here are some links for further information and reading,

- <http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/coping-with-exam-stress.php>
- <http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=16171-dealing-with-exam-stress>

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