

Dealing with Exam Stress



RELAXATION

Develop a regular routine of deep relaxation; this might involve meditation, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, visualisation or all of the above. It is important to practice deep relaxation regularly in the lead up to your exams to help manage your stress levels and become comfortable with the technique as a way of helping you to feel calmer. You might also find other activities relaxing like taking a long bath before bed, going for a walk, listening to music or a relaxation tape.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Eating a balanced diet that includes fresh foods (especially fruits and vegetables) and regularly eating at meal times (especially breakfast) can help you to manage your stress levels more effectively.

OTHER NUTRITIONAL TIPS

- Reduce caffeine intake (as caffeine intensifies the physical symptoms of stress)
- Reduce nicotine intake (has a similar affect to caffeine)
- Reduce processed sugar intake (as excessive refined sugar intake can cause sudden drops in blood pressure – hypoglycemia)
- Reduce sodium intake (as excessive sodium intake can cause increases in blood pressure)
- Include a protein source in your diet (protein is necessary for energy and maintenance of cellular immunity and hormone production)
- Include Vitamin C and B-complex Vitamin sources in your diet (eg. broccoli, tomatoes, citrus fruits, potatoes)
- Include a calcium source in your diet (milk products, tofu)
- Include a zinc source in your diet
- Include a potassium source in your diet (tomatoes, bananas, dark green leafy vegetables)

It is important to try to go to bed and get up at regular times and get at least 8 hours sleep per night and keeping up a routine that includes exercise will help you to discharge stresses that may be building up.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Plan out how you will spend your study time and be realistic about what you can achieve within the time you allocate. Allow for regular breaks and time out/down time. Use a study time table in which you mark out study periods and create a prioritised task list to follow within these study periods.

DOWN TIME

Make sure that you make some time for yourself when preparing for exams, either to do something fun and relaxing, or something social with friends or family. Having some down time can give you more energy for your studies and ultimately help you to concentrate better.

PRACTICAL PREPARATION

1. Find out how to best prepare and study for the exam. Use resources such as lecture notes, readings and do practice questions/practice exams. Start as early as you can and avoid cramming.
2. Find out all the information you can about the exam before the day. This reduces the number of things you will have to worry about on the day. For example:
 - Where is the exam scheduled?
 - How long will it take you to get there? Do a trial run.
 - How will you get there (drive, walk, public transport)?
 - If driving, where will you park and is parking available at the time of the exam?
 - If using public transport, get a timetable and choose a time that will allow you to catch the next tram/train/bus and still be on time if you miss it.
 - What does the room look like?
 - What do you need to do when you get there? Will you need your student card? Pens, pencils, eraser, sharpener, watch, calculator etc.
 - What are the exam rules and regulations?

The night before the exam, gather together all the things that you will need so that you don't have to search for them in the morning.

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GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

On the night before the exam, it is important that you get a good night's sleep to be sure that you are able to concentrate at your optimum level.

GET THERE IN GOOD TIME

Give yourself some time to spare to avoid rushing and increasing your stress levels, but try not to get there too early to avoid getting caught up in conversations with others about what they have revised and what they expect to be on the exam. This will only stress you further. Sit quietly by yourself taking deep, relaxing breaths and repeating positive statements to yourself.

VISUALISE SUCCESS

Spend some time visualising how you would like things to go.

- Picture yourself turning up to the exam feeling calm and confident,
- Picture yourself sitting at a desk in the exam room and feeling comfortable and relaxed.
- Picture yourself reading the questions and smiling because you know what you will write about.
- Picture yourself concentrating well.
- Picture yourself finishing the exam within the allotted time and feeling happy with your performance.

Try to put as much detail into this visualisation as possible as it will make it seem more realistic.

POSITIVE SELF-STATEMENTS

In the lead up to your exam, repeat positive and affirming statements to yourself like "I can do this", "I have studied and I know the material" and so on. Try not to put pressure on yourself by comparing yourself to others or worrying about what your friends and family will think if you don't do well.

When developing your own positive self-statements, there are some basic rules, which can give you some guidance:

- Avoid negatives (don't say "I'm not going to panic", say "I am confident and calm about my exams" instead.)
- Keep it in the present tense (don't say "I will feel better about exams" as this will keep the good feelings in the future and not the present, say "I am feeling better about exams")
- Keep it in the first person (saying "I feel confident about my exams" is better than "it is possible to feel more confident about exams")
- Have some belief in what you say (don't tell yourself something you really don't believe. Try to think about the reasons why something positive is true and challenge your negative beliefs if you have trouble believing a positive self-statement)

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE SELF-STATEMENTS:

"I can find out what I have to do to help me get as prepared as I can"

"Although my time is limited, I can use the time I have more effectively"

"If I can't study all of the material, I can prioritise the more important parts"

"I don't need to compete with others. I'm doing my best. I am showing signs of improvement"

"Others are uptight too. I can control it and make it work for me"

"My feelings are in my control"

"If I get anxious, I can use a relaxation technique and calm myself down"

COUNTERSTATEMENTS

If you find that you are experiencing negative, unhelpful and self-defeating thoughts, for example:

"I'm getting really tense, I'm going to stuff up this exam", or

"My life will be over if I don't pass this exam"

Try creating a counter statement that is accepting of your anxiety, challenges the negative thought and is constructive, for example:

"I'm getting uptight, so all I can do is relax. I'll take a few moments to calm

down and give myself a chance to think more clearly", or

"Will my life really be ruined if I fail this exam? No it won't! I'll be disappointed

if I fail, but I can attempt it again next year or choose another subject"



**Maximising
Academic &
Personal
Potential (MAPP)**