



Dealing with exam stress

So, exams are looming and you're starting to feel the pressure? Worry not!

Whether you're sitting GCSEs, A levels, university exams or other tests, here are 12 sure-fire ways to decrease stress levels and cope with what's ahead.

1) Be prepared

Make sure you know what you are supposed to have revised and that you have all your notes, books and essays to hand. Do you know what format the exam takes and how the marks are allocated? If not, ask your teacher and/or research the marking scheme, which is often on the exam board's website. This can be particularly important with A-levels and GCSEs, when there are so many exams, all structured in different ways.

2) Make a plan

Working out how much time you have to revise and planning how you can use it best by making a timetable is a key factor in how to deal with exam stress. Another technique, recommended by all time management experts, is to take what feels like an overwhelming task and break it down into manageable chunks. Perhaps you need to spend more time on some subjects than others? Vary the timetable so you don't get bored. You can always update the plan, if necessary, as you go along.

3) Know when and where you work best

Work when you are most alert. We all have slightly different body clocks – are you a night owl or a dawn lark? Everyone has different revision styles – maybe you like to sit at a tidy library desk or under the duvet with your laptop. Wherever you feel calm and in control is the best place for dealing with exam stress.

4) Take a break

Take breaks to stay refreshed. Instead of cramming in more revision or, indeed, stressing over how to deal with exam stress, the best thing might simply be to do something completely different.

5) Eat well

Keeping your blood sugar levels steady, so that you don't have energy dips during the day and can sleep well at night, is a vital way of dealing with exam stress. Avoid lots of processed, sugary foods like cereal, biscuits, sweets and chocolate. Instead, try to eat:

- lean protein like chicken, salmon or egg;
- plenty of vegetables;
- carbohydrates that release energy slowly, such as wholegrain bread, rice and pasta;
- pulses, eg chickpeas and lentils, which are great for vegetarians (and others), since they contain both protein and slow-release carbs.

If you are so nervous before an exam that you can't eat, then don't worry, your body will catch up later – but do make sure that you drink lots of water.

6) Drink well

Staying hydrated with lots of water, or herbal tea, is key to feeling alert. Juices or sugary drinks can make you feel jittery and mess with your energy levels.

7) Get exercise

This is probably one of the best ways of dealing with exam stress. Anything from walking the dog to going for a swim, run or bike ride helps reduce physical tension that can lead to aches and pains. Exercise also releases natural feel-good brain chemicals. If you can't get motivated, rope in friends – it's much harder to make excuses then!

8) Sleep well

Tossing and turning the night before an exam is understandable, and our bodies are able to cope with lack of sleep for a day or so. Worrying about not being able to nod off can only make matters worse!

A hot bath before bed and having a room or space dedicated just to sleeping (and not watching TV or using a computer, phone or tablet) will help you switch off. If you really can't get to sleep, find something repetitive to do, such as a jigsaw or ironing. For more tips, visit the Sleep Foundation website:

www.sleepfoundation.org

If you really, really can't sleep, it's important not to panic. Sheer adrenaline will help you get through your exams the next day better than you might expect.

9) Relaxation

If you are really anxious, find a calm, quiet space and try breathing deeply in and out for a few minutes, focusing your mind on something pleasant, like a beautiful place with happy memories – anything that helps you wind down.

10) Talk about it with someone

Almost everyone finds exams stressful – so you are not alone. Expressing your worries to a good friend, family member, your teacher, church minister or youth leader will help get them out of your system.

11) Reward yourself

Build treats into your timetable – anything you can look forward to as a reward for sticking to it. Plan something exciting to celebrate the end of the exams.

12) Keep it in perspective

If you are worried that you have really messed up an exam, there's nothing you can do until you get the results. Worrying about it won't help – and may reduce your chances of doing well in other exams you are taking. Think about what you could do about a disappointing result – that will help you feel in control.

Yes, it's great to do well in exams. But, whether you are suffering GCSE stress, A-level stress or taking university exams, remember that exams aren't the only thing that will help you succeed in life. Employers will be equally interested in other things, like your attitude, work-rate or ability to get on with others.

Many people, famous and otherwise, who did badly at exams went on to do well in adult life – and vice-versa.