

# COPING WITH EXAMS STRESS

## Before Your Exams Start

### Mental Health:

#### Sleep

Make time for regular sleep up until and during the exams. 8 hours is recommended but if you struggle, even just resting with your eyes closed will help your body and mind wind down. Try not to do anything like using your phone or computer, eating, drinking anything but water, exercising or revising for the hour before you sleep. This will allow you to switch off easier. If you feel anxious and can't wind down, try listening to a meditation track, reading your favourite book or, if you have to, write a list of the things that you are thinking about and a quick plan of how to sort them out tomorrow- it's like telling your brain to stop worrying for now as often at 10pm, there's not a lot you can do to solve the issues on your list!

#### Study Time

Make sure you are breaking down your work into topics and revising in short bursts. Why not use some time in between lessons in the Hub or Study Hall, allowing you some downtime at home? Take regular breaks- no one can concentrate fully for hours at a time! 30 minutes of solid revision at a time is better than a few hours being distracted and unfocused, then feeling worried afterwards because you have wasted time.

Not taking breaks to do things you enjoy can lead to further stress. Make time for friends, family and doing things that you enjoy.

#### Planning For Revision

Use your FOTF booklet from tutorial if you haven't already. If you have your own plan, that's fine but either way, try to stick to it to avoid feeling guilty or anxious. Take practice papers, condense your notes, make flashcards, anything active rather than just reading over them which will quickly become very boring. Seek help if you are missing something or don't understand it and go over the challenging stuff first, coming back to 'easier' topics later.

### Physical Health:

#### Food & Drink

Look at your current diet, are you getting a good mix of vegetables, fruit, carbs and protein? If you are not sure, look on the NHS website under healthy eating. You will need to maintain a good diet to give you the energy to revise and to get you through your exams.

Drink plenty of water- hydration is key when you are under pressure. Avoid sugary or caffeinated drinks which will make your mind race and dehydrate you. If you are anxious or stressed, certainly cut out caffeine as it will only add to your symptoms.

#### Exercise

Whatever physical activities you enjoy, try to fit them around your studies, even if it's just getting out for a walk regularly. It relaxes your muscles and relieves tension. It also releases those feel good chemicals which can help you to feel rested and more positive.

#### Breathing

It sounds simple enough but breathing in a particular way can calm you down before or during exams.

For example:

Breathe in deeply through your nose for a count of 4, whilst picturing a place you feel safe and happy (I think about being on a quiet beach with the sun on my skin- bliss!)

Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of 6 and repeat for a minute or two. Focusing on something as simple as inhaling and exhaling can centre you and also helps stop any panicky or anxious feelings.

# On Exam Day

## Before The Exam

Review brief notes or flashcards on your way to college but don't try to cram as this will just add pressure. Instead, take a little time before the exam to eat something healthy that will give you energy, hydrate with water (avoiding sugar/ caffeine which are counterproductive) and take some time to calm your nerves by breathing deeply and focusing on what you need to do i.e. what room are you in? What seat? Do you need to know your candidate number?

Arrive with a little time to spare to your exam but don't be too early as other people can sometimes make you feel more stressed, even if they think they are being helpful. Speak to your teacher if they are there for reassurance and positive back up.

Remember the deep breathing exercise and use it if you need to settle when you get to your seat. This will help your ready your brain for the questions and calm you down if you are feeling anxious.

## During The Exam

- Manage your time- how many points are attached to each question? You may need to work out which way to tackle them depending on this.
- Take time to read over the questions thoroughly and give yourself time to digest the information. You can recall information easiest when you are settled and calm.
- Plan your answers, this will help you recall information needed and boost your confidence.
- Most people will be feeling the pressure, you are not alone. Those feelings can boost your adrenaline to help you focus so don't see it as a bad thing.
- Settle yourself with the deep breathing exercise. It's ok to take a minute if it helps you calm yourself and focus. Close your eyes for a moment and move your head side to side, release the tension in your neck and shoulders.



Don't panic if you're feeling stressed about your exams, we're here to help.

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