

# EXAM STRESS GUIDE

( COMPILATION OF TIPS TO HANDLE EXAM STRESS )



WELLSKOOL CLINIC

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(Compilation of tips to handle Exam Stress)

Stressed out about exams? Stress can show itself in many ways. Some of the common signs are your heart racing, stomach cramps, trouble sleeping, losing your appetite or overeating. Let us learn a little more about how to fight this annoyance.

## What is Exam Stress or Exam Anxiety?

*Exam anxiety is:*

- excessive worry about upcoming exams
- fear of being evaluated
- apprehension about the consequences
- experienced by many normal students
- not mysterious or difficult to understand
- manageable by following a plan of helpful suggestions

## What factors contribute to increase in Exam stress or anxiety?

*Lifestyle issues:-*

- inadequate rest
- poor nutrition
- too many stimulants
- insufficient exercise
- not scheduling available time
- not prioritizing commitments

*Information needs:-*

- strategies for exam-taking
- academic information such as course requirements, lecturers' expectations, exam dates and exam location
- knowledge of how to apply anxiety reduction techniques while studying before any exam

### **Poor Studying Styles:-**

- Inefficient: inconsistent content coverage; trying to memorize the textbook; binge studying; all-night studying before exams
- Ineffective: reading without understanding; cannot recall the material; not making revision notes; not revising

### **Psychological Factors:-**

- feeling little or no control over the exam situation (rather than knowing and applying exam strategies)
- negative thinking and self-criticism (rather than being one's own best friend)
- irrational thinking about exams and outcomes
- irrational beliefs "If I don't pass, my (family/boyfriend/girlfriend/friends) will lose respect for me"; "I will never get a Degree."
- irrational demands "I have to get at least a 2.1 or I am worthless."
- catastrophic predictions "I'll fail no matter what I do—there's no point."

## **TIPS TO HANDLE EXAM STRESS & ANXIETY**

Here are some tips to help you chill out.

### **1. Start studying early**

Start studying as soon as your teacher announces the exam. Even before that, read over your notes after each class to make sure you understand them. Put the notes in your own words.

You can prepare even more by thinking of questions that your teacher might ask on an exam. Write the questions down and answer them after your class is finished. This will make studying easier.

### **2. Have a plan to manage your time**

Cramming all night doesn't usually work. Plan your study time ahead so you'll feel confident for the exam.

Plan to have enough time to study about 50 minutes at a time with five or 10-minute breaks. Have a snack, watch some TV or go for a walk. Study so you understand the material and not just to memorize it. Plan to study in a place where you can concentrate without distractions.

### **3. Be healthy**

Studies show that taking the time to get some exercise and eating healthy improves performance on exams. So get out and get moving. When we're stressed we sometimes want to eat junk food but eating healthy will actually make you feel better.

Also, get enough sleep - especially in the days before your exam. Good sleep helps you remember what you learned.

### **4. Practice, practice, practice**

Ask your teacher for a practice test. If there isn't one, make your own. Answer the questions with friends and grade each other's work.

### **5. Chill out, try these relaxation techniques**

Think about the stress you're feeling. Write down your stressful thoughts.

Whenever a stressful thought pops into your head, replace it with a positive one. For example, replace "I'm going to fail this exam" with "I'm going to study early so I can ace this exam."

Also, you may want to practice deep breathing. Take a few deep breaths, breathing from deep within your abdomen and not just your chest. Let them slowly out. This will get more air into your lungs and will help you relax.

### **6. Visualize success**

This one might seem a little out there, but sometimes it helps to imagine success. Think of yourself writing the exam and knowing the answers. Visualize the A+ on the paper after writing the exam. When you imagine yourself being successful, you're more likely to succeed. But don't just visualize studying - you actually have to do it!

### **7. Talk to someone**

If you find that you're still stressed, talk to someone you trust, whether it's a parent, teacher, school counsellor or friend. They will help you put things in perspective.

### **8. Believe in yourself**

If you prepare for the exams properly you should do fine, meaning that there is no need to worry excessively..

## 9. Don't try to be perfect

It's great to succeed and reach for the stars, but keep things in balance. If you think that "anything less than a 2.1 means I've failed" then you are creating mountains of unnecessary stress for yourself. Aim to do your best but do recognise that none of us can be perfect all of the time.

## 10. Take steps to overcome problems.

If you find you don't understand some of your course material, getting stressed out won't help. Instead, take action to address the problem directly by seeing or talking to your Tutor or getting help from your classmates.

## 11. Keep things in perspective

The exams might seem like the most crucial thing right now but, in the grander scheme of your whole life, they are only a small part. Interrupt negative thoughts with positive ones. Examples: "I can do this", "I will do my best", "I can pass this test", "I will focus only on the question in front of me." "I have done it before, so I can do it again." Actively challenge your irrational thoughts. Life will be worth living regardless of this exam. Respect yourself for taking this course and getting this far, regardless of the outcome.

## 12. Plan your study time.

Too much material + Too little time = Anxiety. Plan your studying with regularly scheduled study sessions about 50 minutes long separated by 5 - 10 minute breaks.

## 13. Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Anxiety increases when one feels tired, run down and overwhelmed. Overall resilience depends on one's physical and mental health, which can be strengthened by:

- enough movement and exercise (vs. couch potato lifestyle)
- balanced life (vs. over-stress)
- positive thoughts/beliefs (vs. self-defeating thoughts/cynicism)
- health focus (vs. self-neglect)
- replenishing nutrition (vs. junk food)
- regular and adequate sleep (vs. late night lifestyle)

#### **14. Get accurate information.**

Check your School Handbook and get an understanding of the grading procedure. If you don't understand, ask. Well before the exam, make sure you know where it will be held, the start time, how long it will last, whether extra time will be allowed. Ask your Lecturer any questions like when the marks will be available, what materials can or should be brought into the exam room.

#### **15. Get yourself into exam mode.**

Practice on sample tests in the textbook or study guide. Look at past exams. Ask for suggestions from your Lecturer what to expect in the exam, what course materials should be emphasized, how to prioritize study time for the course.

#### **16. Plan.**

Rest well the night before the exam. Plan to arrive at the exam location early. If you can pick your seat, choose one away from the doors, windows or other distractions. Plan to monitor the time during the exam so wear a watch or sit where you can see the clock. Plan to wear layers of clothing so you can adjust your need for more warmth or coolness. Check out the examination room ahead of time if you can.

#### **17. Avoid bad things.**

Give coffee and other stimulants a miss the night before the exam or on the day of the exam. Avoid anxious or talkative students. Avoid other people or things that may disturb your self-confidence, focus and level of relaxation. Definitely avoid arriving late.

#### **18. Leave plenty of time to revise**

So that you don't have to do last minute cramming. Giving yourself adequate time will help to boost your confidence and reduce any pre-exam stress as you know you have prepared well.

#### **19. Develop a timetable**

So that you can track and monitor your progress. Make sure you allow time for fun and relaxation so that you avoid burning out, but avoid drugs and alcohol.

## 20. Take a short break

As soon as you notice your mind is losing concentration. Make yourself a sandwich. You will then come back to your revision refreshed. Be careful that you don't reward yourself during your break with five minutes of TV or checking your e-mail or Facebook. A few minutes can easily turn into an hour before you know it.

## 21. Experiment with alternative revision techniques

So that revision is more fun and your motivation to study is high. Try mind-mapping, use multi-coloured index cards, get yourself an assortment of highlighter pens.

## 22. Don't drink too much coffee, tea or fizzy drinks

The caffeine will 'hype' you and make your thinking less clear. Eat healthily and regularly; your brain will benefit from the nutrients. Don't give in to a Saturday evening of binge drinking, either!

## 23. Regular moderate exercise

This will boost your energy, clear your mind and reduce feelings of stress. Try out some yoga, pilates, tai chi or relaxation techniques. They will help to keep you feeling calm and balanced, improve your concentration levels and help you to sleep better.

## While Taking the exam

### 1. Avoid panic.

It's natural to feel some exam nerves prior to starting the exam, but getting excessively nervous is counterproductive as you will not be able to think as clearly.

The quickest and most effective way to eliminate feelings of stress and panic is to close your eyes and take several long, slow deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system. Simultaneously you could give yourself some mental pep-talk by mentally repeating "I am calm and relaxed" or "I know I will do fine".

If your mind goes blank, don't panic! It will just make it harder to recall information. Instead, focus on slow, deep breathing for about one minute. If you still can't remember the information, then move on to another question and return to this question later.

Take a small bottle of water into the exam with you and some sweets (if allowed—find out ahead of time). Have a drink of water. If you are really stuck, you might consider

getting up and taking a short walk outside the room to compose yourself or going to the toilet. Ask the invigilator for assistance. When you are able, get back to work - remember that it is better to put something down rather than nothing.

Remember that the invigilator is there to assist you (for instance, if you have a problem with distracting noises inside or outside of the examination room, if the sun is shining on your exam paper, if you need a drink of water, etc.).

## 2. Survey what's in front of you

- Read the instructions carefully
- Quickly survey every page of the exam paper
- See what will be expected of you
- Re-read the instructions a second time (are you really being asked to answer either one or three of the questions?)

## 3. Prioritize what needs to be done

- When surveying the exam paper, place a mark beside all questions you know you can answer
- Divide up your time according to the importance of the questions
- Answer the easiest questions first to guarantee marks in the least amount of time

## 4. Pace yourself

- Do not rush through the exam
- Scan each page of the exam before starting to make sure you have all the questions. This will also help you decide how much time you'll need to complete it.
- Read all the instructions on the exam. Do the questions you can answer first to make sure you get the marks for them.
- Regularly check time left for the rest of the questions
- Give yourself time to proofread; you should not still be writing at the invigilator's "5 minutes remaining" announcement

**HAPPY STUDYING !!!**



## **References**

<http://youthconnect.ca>

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk>

<https://www.childline.org.uk>

<https://www.examtime.com>

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