

Tips to Deal with Exam Stress

1. Exam time can be an anxious, stressful and potentially overwhelming experience. Remember, **test taking anxiety is normal**, and because anxiety is an emotion it will pass if you give it time. The more you fight it the longer it will last. As the phrase goes, “if you see a wave coming, grab a surfboard”.
2. Don't forget to mind yourself, especially:
 - a) **Sleep:** you should be aiming for 8-10 hours per night. Try to wind down before going to sleep. You don't go from fifth gear straight to first gear when driving a car; your mind works similarly and needs time to slow down before sleep.
 - b) **Eat:** Make sure to eat regularly. Continuing the car analogy, a car won't run without petrol. Eat regular meals and eat well: this will help your ability to think, concentrate and last the distance.
 - c) **Exercise:** Regular exercise will help to relieve some of the stress build-up and improve your mood. Build it into your plan: walk the dog, go for a swim or cycle or anything that gets you active.
 - d) **Take regular breaks.** Try to recognise when you're getting too stressed. It's a sign that you need to take a break, to do something else for a short time
 - d) **Downtime:** Make time for some fun, it's not only allowed, it's recommended. Schedule things you enjoy doing at weekends or during breaks between exams.
3. Have **the practical issues organised in advance**, not at the last minute.
 - What's my timetable for the exam period - have I a printed copy?
 - **Make a revision timetable.** Timetable your revision with breaks at a frequency that works best for you. Work when you naturally feel more alert, whether that's in the morning or evening, at home, or in the library.
 - How am I travelling to the exams?
 - What do I need for each exam? Pens, rulers, calculators, exam number?
4. The run up and the exams themselves can be very tiring, both physically and mentally, and there's a tendency to increase caffeine intake. Caffeine is a stimulant, and its impact can mimic feelings of anxiety and interfere with our ability to sleep and concentrate. Where you can, **minimise your intake of caffeine during exam time.**
5. **Try to keep some perspective.** Ask yourself the question: “in 10 years time are you likely to remember what grades you got in the exams?”. It's unlikely.
6. Try not to despair. This increases anxiety which can impact on exam performance. It's more helpful to focus on what you can do as opposed to what you can't do/didn't do.

7. Remember, **exams don't define you as a person**. We're all more interesting and important than a grade on an exam.

8. Post-mortems - dwelling on what has already happened will only mess with your head. It doesn't help because you can't change the past. With social media and instant messaging there's a temptation to take the post-mortem online, and this is also unlikely to be helpful. Try to leave the last exam behind you and **focus on what you can do**, which is the next exam.

9. If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed make sure to **talk to someone**: friends, family, a lecturer. You're not going through this experience alone, support is available.

10. **Treat yourself**. Use treats to motivate yourself and build these into your revision timetable, for example allow yourself time to watch an episode of your favourite TV programme after a few hours hard work or plan something nice for when your exams are over.

11. **Try relaxation techniques**. It will take a bit of practice, but relaxation or breathing techniques can really help to calm nerves.

12. Remember, **exams are time limited**, there is an end in sight, there's a long, hopefully busy and enjoyable summer break ahead.