

GETTING EXAM READY

TIPS FOR STUDENTS

It's normal to feel stressed when preparing for exams (especially big exams).

A bit of stress actually helps us succeed by increasing motivation. But ... when stress is too much it becomes unhelpful and can reduce academic performance.

This sheet is designed to help you get mentally ready for exams by recognising when stress is too much—and if it is, how to bring it back down.



When pre-exam stress is normal

- * It's short term (like a few days or weeks around the exam, but subsides once exams are over)
- * You can still distract yourself by other things
- * You feel fatigued, but only until exams are over
- * You feel butterflies or shaky right before an exam



When it's too much

- * The shakiness and nervousness doesn't go away
- * You're unable to study or sleep properly
- * You feel nauseous, depressed or constantly worried about not doing well or failing
- * You feel overwhelmed and panicked

REMEMBER— It's normal to feel stressed when preparing for exams, but if you're totally freaking out you should seek help.

Have you seen this in a friend?

If you notice a friend showing any of these signs, there are things you can do to help. First, try to gently bring it up with them, for example: "I can't believe our exams are already coming up ... how do you feel about them?" Listen to them and let them know you have heard them. Then share the tips on this sheet, and encourage them to talk to a teacher, year advisor, parent or other trusted adult for help.

IN A NUTSHELL

Stress is the activation of our 'flight-or-fight' response—a natural part of our sympathetic nervous system designed to prepare us to deal with threat or danger. If we suddenly feel unsafe or under attack, the flight-or-fight system increases our heart rate (which activates

blood flow to our muscles to help us either run or fight), stimulates our sweat glands (to cool the body) and heightens our senses (to increase alertness).

At first it can be hard to see how this is relevant to exams. But when people think of exams as threatening (worrying they won't do well) the flight-or-fight response is activated. Although it isn't helpful to have a racing

heart or to sweat in an exam situation, the increased mental alertness and motivation that stress brings may be helpful.

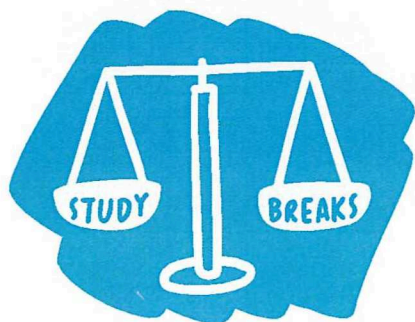
When stress is too high or goes on for too long, the symptoms actually hinder performance.

If this sounds like you, it's time to check in with someone—whether it be a teacher, friend, family member or GP.



MANAGING STRESS LEADING UP TO EXAMS

For most students there are simple ways to manage stress. We don't want to make it go away completely, but we do want to use it to our advantage. Different things work for different people, so experiment to see what works for you.



* Set up a routine that balances study with breaks

Think about when you can study effectively—perhaps before or after school, in study breaks, early evenings or weekends. Remember to build in downtime, but try to study before rewarding yourself. Be honest with yourself and set up routines that can realistically work.

* Have a dedicated quiet space

In general it's better to study at a desk than on your bed or lounge. But regardless of where you study, put your phone on silent, turn off chat features and keep the music low (or off).

* Get moving

Vigorous exercise uses up excess adrenaline and stress hormone (cortisol). Try running, swimming, fast walking, bike riding, aerobics or dancing (just not all at once!).

* Chill out

Give yourself some downtime (preferably screen-free). Take a bath or long shower, listen to relaxing music or a guided meditation, read a book (but not a school set text), or maybe do some gentle yoga.

* Sleep and eat well

Although it might feel like it helps in the short-term, relying on any sort of drug only makes things harder in the long-term. It's much more effective to make sure you get adequate sleep, drink plenty of water and keep some healthy snacks (like trail mix) on hand to keep energy levels up.



* Talk to someone

Talk to people who seem to deal with exam stress easily or who have already been through it, and get their perspective. You can also access professional help by talking to your teacher, school counsellor or GP.

* Study small, study often

Rather than cramming, try to study in smaller chunks, but consistently over a longer period of time—it'll help you remember more, and stress less.

* Do the best YOU can

Don't worry about or compare yourself with what others know. Instead, take the time to practise and prepare as best you can, and walk into your exam confidently. The more time we spend facing a fear, the less unknown it is—it's usually not as bad as we thought.

EXTRA RESOURCES



Websites

ReachOut.com

Information, support and resources about mental health issues for young people

Headspace.org.au

A non-profit organisation for youth mental health

BeyondBlue.org.au

Helping with issues related to depression, suicide, anxiety and other mental illnesses



Apps

Calm

Soothing visual backgrounds and a range of meditations

Stop, Breathe & Think

Develop the skills to stop everything and just be still

Smiling Mind

Equipping young people with integral skills to thrive in life



Helplines

(available 24/7)

Lifeline

Call 13 11 14

Kids Helpline

Call 1800 55 1800