

MANAGING EXAMINATION STRESS

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Examination stress is a feeling of things getting out of control before the examination. Do I know enough? What questions will come up? What if I do badly? Such questions trigger reactions from feeling irritable, to being unable to eat or sleep properly, feeling tearful or even panicky. In other words, it is an excessive worry about upcoming examinations and there is a fear of being evaluated. Examination anxiety is experienced by many normal students but is certainly manageable by following a plan.

It is natural for some students to feel stressed in the days of examination, whatever may be the level of preparation. Examination stress varies for different students. The worry and the fear of failure affects one's studies adversely. So it is important to know how to cope with examination stress. A little stress is good that keeps you motivated but don't let the examination stress overcome you because it can affect your body and your mind adversely.

There are four main areas which can contribute to examination anxiety. These are Lifestyle issues, Information needs, Poor Studying Styles and Psychological Factors.

Lifestyle issues include inadequate rest, poor nutrition, too many stimulants, insufficient exercise, not scheduling available time and not prioritising commitments

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

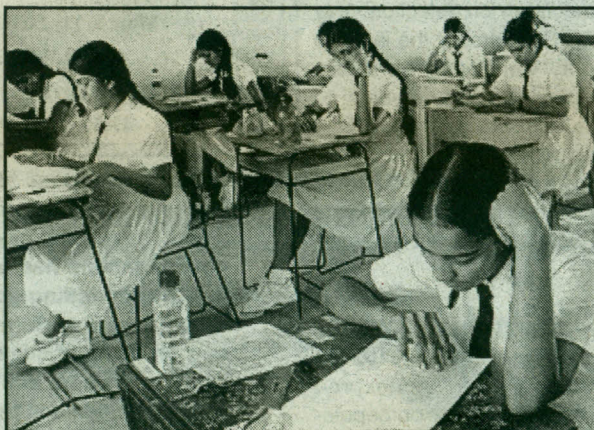
Poor Studying Styles include inefficient and inconsistent content coverage; trying to memorize the textbook; binge studying; all-night studying before examinations and ineffective: reading without understanding; cannot recall the material; not making revision notes; not revising.

Psychological Factors are feeling little or no control over the examination situation rather than knowing and applying examination strategies, negative thinking and self-criticism, irrational thinking about examinations and outcomes, irrational beliefs like "If I don't pass, my family and friends will lose respect for me, I will never get a Degree, irrational demands like I have to get at least a 2.1 or I am worthless. And catastrophic predictions such

each examination with a fresh and clear mind.

Study to learn, not for high marks: Avoid focusing on the end result, and what grade you need to get on the examination while you are studying. Education is about learning; if you put your focus on the experience of learning, then the pressure to achieve a certain result diminishes. As pressure diminishes, productivity increases.

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



Get yourself into examination mode: Practise with sample tests in the textbook or study guide. Look at question papers of previous examinations. Ask for suggestions from your teacher: what to expect in the examination, what course materials should be emphasised, how to prioritise study time for the course. Get accurate information about the examination procedure. If you don't understand, ask. Well before the examination, 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 teacher any questions like when the marks will be available, what material can or should be brought into the examination room

Plan: Rest well the night before the examination. Plan to arrive at the examination location early. Plan to monitor the time during the examination 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

school textbook—and try counting the words in any single paragraph. When you get better, start upping the ante: count the words on an entire page, then two pages, then five pages, then finally, count the words in an entire chapter. Take note that you must do the counting entirely mentally and using only your eyes—do not use your finger in pointing at each word.

Observe: Get any physical object—a fruit, a small furniture, a toy—and examine it closely and carefully. Take note of its characteristics and features while keeping your mind from straying away and starting to entertain other thoughts—keep your complete attention on the thing you currently have in your hands. Take note of its colour, shape, texture, even the smell.

Focus on a single word: Find a nice quiet spot where you can stay for at least five minutes without anyone interrupting you. As in the previous concentration exercises, this also requires you to laser-point your thoughts on a single target—this time, a single word of your choice. It doesn't matter what word as long as it's inspiring. "Love," "courage" "happiness," or "success" are good examples. Repeat the word mentally in your mind for five minutes. When you feel your concentration is improving, you can increase the duration to 10 minutes.

Observe and conjure: After observing your chosen object for a few minutes, close your eyes and mentally picture the object as you've seen it. Visualize it by "examining" the object mentally: turn it around in your mind and take note of its features and physical characteristics while shutting out any irrelevant or stray thought.

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 examination stress.

Take more consistent breaks: Psychologists suggest that we can only concentrate properly for about 45 minutes at one stretch, while neuroscientists tell us that the longer we try and focus on one thing, the less our brains are able to deal with it effectively. Take a 10 to 15 minute break after

control over the examination situation rather than knowing and applying examination strategies, negative thinking and self-criticism, irrational thinking about examinations and outcomes, irrational beliefs like "If I don't pass, my family and friends will lose respect for me, I will never get a Degree, irrational demands like I have to get at least a 2.1 or I am worthless, And catastrophic predictions such as I'll fail no matter what I do—there's no point.

Some tips on how to deal with examination stress

Be Prepared: Make sure you know what you are supposed to have learned and that you have all your notes, books and essays to hand. Do you know what format the examination takes and how the marks are allocated? If not, ask your teacher and/or study the marking scheme, which is often on the examination board's website. 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 97] 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 the time.

Make a Study 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 examination stress. What seems to be a big or a difficult task, break it down into small manageable parts. Perhaps you need to spend more time on some subjects than others? Map out what subject you will study on which day and for how long. Vary the timetable so you don't get bored. You can always update the plan, if necessary, as you go along. Don't worry if you don't follow the plan, the plan is created so you can feel in control of your studies.

Focus on one thing at a time: Keep your mind focused on what you are studying in that moment, avoid multi-tasking or studying multiple subjects at the same time.

Revision Tips: 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-examination stress as you know you have prepared well.

Experiment with alternative revision techniques: so that revision becomes fun and your motivation to study is high. Try mind-mapping, use multi-coloured index cards, get yourself an assortment of highlighter pens

Avoid cramming: Last minute cram sessions can create a sense of nervousness and panic which leads to more stress and can cause you to forget what you have studied. Try approaching

your teacher any questions like when the marks will be available, what material can or should be brought into the examination room

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Making a Time-table: Make a time table, in which you have time for every subject of your course as well as time for refreshment and other daily activities. Some subjects needs comparatively more concentration. Assign them the time in which you are more active and alert like in morning you are more fresh. When you make your time table, paste it on wall in front of your study chair so that you can see it and follow it. More important than making time table is, to follow it. Try to adhere to your time table. In beginning you may find it a little hard to follow your time table but if you follow it for a week then you will like to follow it forever.

Procedure: Assign time to every subject and other activities like game and exercise. You may allocate the last hours to the subjects which are easy and need less concentration because you may be exhausted and feel sleepy in last hours. Make a table having three columns and rows and write time in one column, subject name in other column and what you will study in the third column. Then, start following it.

Study times vary for different students. Some students like to study till late night while some others prefer to study early in the morning. It depends on individual student. Make a time table according to your preferred study time.

Avoid Distractions: Turn off cell phones, try to limit surfing the web while you are studying (unless needed for what you are studying) and avoid any other distractions that may shift your focus from what you are studying.

Few Concentration Exercises

Count backwards: Find a comfortable spot where no one can disturb you and start mentally counting from 100 to 1. Feel free to increase that number—500, 1000—depending on what you feel you're capable of doing.

Count backwards with variations: This is similar to the first one, but you vary the count by skipping numbers. For example, you can skip by threes (100, 97, 94 and so on) or by fives (100, 95, 90 and so on). The additional mental load of calculating the numbers as you skip can further increase the intensity of the concentration required to keep the numbers right.

Count words: Get any book—a novel or a

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 examination stress.

Take more consistent breaks: Psychologists suggest that we can only concentrate properly for about 45 minutes at one stretch, while neuroscientists tell us that the longer we try and focus on one thing, the less our brains are able to deal with it effectively. Take a 10 to 15 minute break after every 60 minutes of studying. Taking breaks helps to stay refreshed.

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.

Eat well-Practise healthy eating: Avoid foods with large amounts of sugar, eat a breakfast that is high in protein, eat green vegetables so that you don't have energy dips during the day. Sleeping well at night is a vital way of dealing with examination stress. Avoid processed, sugary foods like cereal, biscuits, sweets and chocolate. Lean protein, plenty of vegetables and carbohydrates that release their energy slowly like wholegrain bread, rice will keep energy levels steady. Pulses like chickpeas and lentils are great for vegetarians (and others), since they contain both protein and slow-release carbohydrates.

Drink well: Staying hydrated with lots of water, low-calorie sodas or herbal teas is a key to feeling alert. Juices or sugary drinks can make you feel jittery and disturb your energy levels. Caffeinated tea and coffee pep you up, but don't drink too much of them, and if you feel jittery or have problems sleeping, drink your last one in the late afternoon. Colas, energy and sports drinks may all contain a lot of sugar and caffeine. For increased energy and hydration try coconut water.

Do some exercise- Get your body moving:

Anything from taking a walk to going for a swim, run or bike ride helps reduce physical tension that can lead to aches and pains, and releases natural feel-good brain chemicals. If you can't get motivated, rope in friends – it's much harder to make excuses. Dance, workout at the gym, practice yoga, or go for a run. By moving your body, you are increasing the blood flow to your brain and melting away stress from your mind and body.

Sleep well: Get a good night's sleep every night, ideally 7 to 8 hours per night. Tossing and turning the night before an examination 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 only makes matters worse but there are many