

Minimising Stress and Improving Exam and Assessment Performance

SI DEUS NOBISCUM



**Virtues:
Compassionate
&
Loving**

Article 29

Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.



Prayer For The Forthcoming Assessments and Exams

Lord, thank you that you are with me right now. Your love surpasses all fear. I give you the anxiety I feel and I surrender all my worries to you. Clear my mind, calm my heart and still my Spirit. Relax my being that I may always glorify you in everything

I write, speak and do. Amen

St Joseph... Pray for us





Minimising Stress and Improving Exam and Assessment Performance

Bella is feeling confident. She made a plan a while back to minimise her stress levels prior to her exams – and it’s worked. The first Maths, English and History exam have been sat, it seemed to go well (though it was challenging), and Bella is almost looking forward to the second.

Discuss: What kind of things do you think Bella included in her plan?



Why can a little bit of stress actually be a positive thing?

I think a little bit of stress can actually be a positive thing because...



Learning outcomes:

Recognise signs of change in mental health and wellbeing and demonstrate a range of strategies for building and maintaining positive mental health, including managing stress and anxiety in relation to exams.

Identify positive associations between physical activity and promotion of mental wellbeing, including as an approach to combating exam stress.

New key terms:

Stress Management - Stress management is defined as the tools, strategies, or techniques that reduce stress and reduce the negative impact of stress.

Exam performance – How well you perform in exams. This is down to many factors, most of which are completely in your control.





Take a couple of minutes now with a partner, using the clues to identify some common mistakes teens make in the lead up to their assessments and exams. Discuss your findings with your form tutor.

Class discussion:



What common mistakes are made in the lead up to exams and assessments?



- Leaving it until too close to the exam to start revision
- Eating junk food and not nutritious food in the lead up to the exam
- Not getting enough sleep in the days leading up to the exam
- Letting stress overwhelm them and not taking measures to keep calm and focused.
- Revising for long sessions at a time instead of as many smaller ones but with breaks.



Reflection:

What is stress anyway – and how can a little bit of it be a good thing?

<https://youtu.be/-RZ86OB9hw4>

What is stress?

How can a little bit of stress be a good thing?



Reflection: responses

Let's go through some points



What is stress?

Stress is a physical and emotional response to pressure.

Stress is something which can be negative and cause sleep problems

Stress is our body's way of protected us from harm and can feel different for everyone.

Stress is when we have changes in our body that make us feel more alert – there can be physical symptoms such as heart racing or lack of concentration in cases of too much stress.

How can a little bit of stress be a good thing?

You can have a challenge response – which is when your brain gives you maximum focus.

The challenge response (when there is not overwhelming stress) can give you more blood flow to your brain.

Your senses can be more opened to the information available to you. If your stress bucket is not filled to the top, then it can be used as healthy stress.

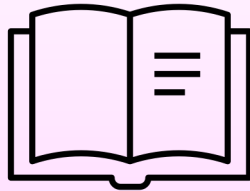
You can shift from a threat response to a challenge response by re-framing your response and thoughts about the stress, positively and embracing the energy.



Minimising stress and improving exam performance

Task Two:

Let's now take a few minutes to read carefully some top tips on how we can reduce stress and improve exam performance, as well as why these methods work.



❑ Get enough sleep.



As a teenager, you may think that staying up late to study or cramming for exams is the best way to get good grades. However, it's important to understand that getting enough sleep is just as important as studying.

When you sleep, your brain is able to consolidate the information you've learned throughout the day.

This means that your brain is processing and organising the information, which helps you retain it better. Lack of sleep can make it harder to remember what you've studied, as well as affect your ability to concentrate and think critically.

Top tips to improve exam performance and reduce stress levels

In addition to improving your memory and concentration, getting enough sleep can also help reduce stress and anxiety, which are common before exams. When you're sleep-deprived, you may feel more stressed and anxious, making it even harder to focus on the task at hand. When you sleep, your body and mind are able to relax and recharge. During this time, your body produces less cortisol, which is a hormone that's associated with stress.

Cortisol levels are naturally higher in the morning, which is why waking up can sometimes feel stressful. However, when you get enough sleep, your cortisol levels can be better regulated, leading to less stress and anxiety during the day. In addition to reducing cortisol levels, sleep also helps your body and mind recover from the stressors of the day. Your brain is able to process and organize the information and experiences that you've had, which can help you better cope with stress in the future.

Get enough sleep.

Lack of sleep can actually increase stress and anxiety levels. When you're tired, it can be harder to concentrate and think clearly, which can make even small stressors feel overwhelming. So, in summary,

- getting a good night's sleep before an exam is just as important as studying. It can help you retain information better, improve your concentration and critical thinking skills, and reduce stress and anxiety.



Top tips to improve exam performance and reduce stress levels

Eat well and Healthily

You may be tempted to rely on fast food or other unhealthy snacks while preparing for exams. However, it's important to understand that what you eat can have a big impact on your cognitive performance and overall well-being.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet can provide your body with the nutrients it needs to function at its best. This includes vitamins, minerals, and other important nutrients that support brain health and cognitive function. In contrast, junk food and other unhealthy snacks can be high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, which can leave you feeling sluggish and tired. As well as providing your body with the right nutrients, eating healthily can also help regulate your mood and energy levels.

❑ Eat well and Healthily

Eating healthily can also help reduce inflammation in the body, which has been linked to a variety of health problems, including depression and cognitive decline. By reducing inflammation, you may be able to improve your mood and cognitive performance, which can be especially helpful during exam season.



Top tips to improve exam performance and reduce stress levels

❑ Eat well and Healthily

So, in summary, eating a healthy, balanced diet is important when preparing for exams because it can provide your body with the nutrients it needs to function at its best, regulate mood and energy levels, and reduce inflammation in the body. It's important to prioritize healthy eating habits as part of your overall self-care routine to help you perform your best on exam day.

❑ Make sure you still get some exercise

You may know that exercise is good for your physical health, but did you know that it can also improve your exam performance? Here's how:



Top tips to improve exam performance and reduce stress levels

- 1. Improved blood flow to the brain:** Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which can help improve cognitive function. This means that you may be able to think more clearly and remember information better during exams.
- 2. Reduced stress and anxiety:** Regular exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety levels, which can be especially important during exam season. When you're less stressed and anxious, you may be able to focus better and perform better on exams.
- 3. Increased energy levels:** Exercise can also help increase energy levels, which can be helpful when you need to stay alert and focused during long exams.
- 4. Improved sleep quality:** Exercise has been shown to improve sleep quality, which is important for consolidating information and feeling refreshed and alert on exam day.
- 5. Boosted mood:** Exercise has been shown to release feel-good chemicals in the brain, such as endorphins and serotonin. This can help improve your mood and overall well-being, which can be helpful when dealing with the stress of exams.

❑ Stop worrying about stress itself



You may have experienced times when thinking about stress can make you feel even more stressed. This can happen because of the way our thoughts and emotions are connected. When we think about stressful situations, our brain may trigger a stress response, releasing stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline.

These hormones can activate the body's fight-or-flight response, preparing us to deal with a perceived threat. However, this response can also make us feel even more stressed and anxious, leading to a cycle of negative thoughts and emotions.

Additionally, our thoughts can influence our emotions and physical sensations. If we dwell on negative thoughts and stressors, we may begin to feel more anxious and tense, leading to physical symptoms such as muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue. The good news is that we can learn to manage our thoughts and emotions to reduce stress levels.

Overall, it is important to be aware of the connection between our thoughts and emotions, especially when dealing with stress. By practicing stress-management techniques and focusing on positive, realistic thoughts, we can break the cycle of stress and improve our well-being.

Still feeling that stress? Here are some practical ways of taking back control:

- ✓ **Create a study schedule:** Creating a study schedule can help you feel more in control of your exam preparation.
- ✓ **Break down the material** into smaller, manageable chunks and schedule regular breaks to help prevent burnout.
- ✓ **Visualisation techniques** can all help reduce stress and anxiety levels. Try to practice these techniques regularly, especially in the days leading up to your exams.
- ✓ **Create a strong mental** image of completing an exam successfully.
- ✓ **Take breaks:** Taking breaks can help improve focus and prevent burnout. Aim to take a 5-10 minute break every hour or so.
- ✓ **Pray and meditate:** Talk to God and pass over all your worries and stress.

MOST IMPORTANTLY

- ✓ **Talk to someone:** Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or teacher about your exam stress can be helpful. They may be able to offer support or advice on how to manage your stress. **YOU ARE NOT ON YOUR OWN!**

Task Four: De-stressing exercises

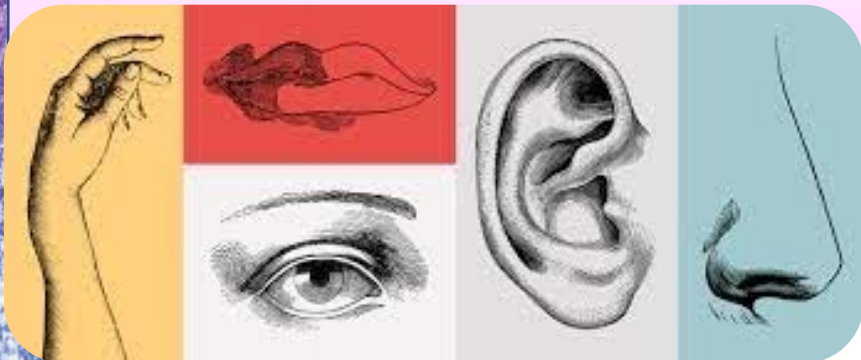
Let's try one.

This exercise is particularly useful if your stressful emotions come out of nowhere, and you need to quash them quickly. You can do this anywhere, and you do not have to be sitting down.

This is commonly used by people who have anxiety or panic attacks as it works immediately, so it's a great one to remember all through life, to help both yourselves and others around you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30VMIEmA114>

Now, how do you feel?





Minimising Stress and Improving Exam Performance

Creative Task:

TikTok Top-Tips...

You now have five minutes to create a 30 second TikTok with a partner (in real life not on your phone), explaining five ways every student can decrease stress and improve exam performance.

You can be as creative as you like with this – a rap, a dance (if there's room), changing the words to a song you like or just a 30-second info-blast of the main points is all great.



Minimising Stress and Improving Exam Performance



Signposting support:



Useful, legitimate and appropriate helplines and charities:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/feelings-and-experiences/exam-stress/>

Young Minds. Child and adolescent mental health charity for teens struggling with any subject. Call: 0808 802 5544

Teen Line | Teens Support hotline - Connect, talk, get help! Teen Line's highly trained teen listeners provide support, resources and hope to any teen who is struggling.

SANE. National out-of-hours mental health charity offering emotional support, guidance and information. Call: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm to 10.30pm)

Mental Health Foundation. Information and support for anyone with mental health problems.

**Do not let exams pressurize you. God will help you through it!
May the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit rest upon you to guide you
on areas that are relevant to the forthcoming exams in Jesus' name.
May God soothe your nerves and allow you to achieve your desired
results. You are a child of God - perfectly and wonderfully made!
Good luck!**