

Exam Tips

With the College exams coming up, many teenagers are facing what is, for most, the biggest challenge yet. Everyone's individual reactions to it will be different. Many students, however, may be panicking. Consider this our advice on taking exams and finishing assessment, and reduce stress along the way.

Plan your time

Meeting deadlines for exams and assignments can be overwhelming because you may worry about not having enough time. It can be helpful to create a timetable so you can balance study and other commitments (e.g. sports/work). A good way to do it is to draw up a timetable at the start of each week to plan ahead and create to-do lists each day. To-do lists work well because you can break each task down so your workload becomes more manageable and less overwhelming.

It's important not to deny yourself a break because it seems like wasting time. Breaks help you relax and stay motivated when you are studying. Try to get away from your desk at least once an hour for 10 minutes. Taking a break can help you to concentrate, be more productive, and has the added benefit of protecting your body from potential 'study injuries' like poor posture, headaches and stiff muscles.

Don't be unrealistic

You've spent most of your life at school, and you have a good idea of what you're capable of. Being realistic will help prevent you (and your parents!) from being disappointed when the results come in. The key thing is to do your best.

Coffee/caffeine

Try not to drink too much coffee — the caffeine won't help you to concentrate. Drinking plenty of water will keep you hydrated and your brain functioning at its best.

Revise methodically

Simply reading long swathes of text is not going to help you to remember facts and figures. Write out important dates, facts or passages, use lots of coloured pens and underline key phrases. Go back over these notes a day later, and then a week after that. Your memory will be better and you will feel more confident about your exams.

Test yourself

Test yourself or get someone to test you on your notes. Perhaps ask a brother or sister to do it for you, or ask your parents. Testing yourself regularly means that you remember facts better and any gaps in your knowledge can be picked up in good time — making the actual exam a lot less stressful.

Stick notes around your house

Buy cardboard stars in bright colours from newsagents, or make some out of card. Write key facts and phrases on each and stick them around your bedroom (preferably on items where they won't leave a mark!) in places where you'll often see them, for example, on your mirror or inside a cupboard that you often open. After a while, these facts will sink in without any extra effort on your part.

Ignore your friends...

Not entirely, of course! But when your friends say how much revision they've been doing, be circumspect. Don't use others or what they say as a benchmark — they might not want to be perceived a certain way for doing lots of revision, or they might not be doing enough. Know yourself and know what you have to do — you're in this for yourself.

Get some exercise

Exercise is a great way to give yourself a break and to max out your concentration span. While there may be pressure during intense periods of study to put other activities on hold, a balanced approach to study can help to keep you energised, healthy and motivated. Swimming, walking, yoga, cycling, dancing or going to the gym are good ways to reduce the tension in your muscles and your mind and will help you keep a clear head. Relaxation exercises that slow your breathing and relax your muscles can also help to relieve tension.

Sleep

Difficulty getting to sleep, waking up too early or not being able to sleep throughout the night can affect your general well-being. This can be a problem when you need enough sleep to be rested in order to study effectively. As well as feeling tired, you may feel irritable, have no energy and find it harder to concentrate or to remember things.

Some tips to help you get sleep:

- try not to go to bed too early or too late, and try to go at a regular time
- make sure you are not hungry
- allow yourself time to wind down - if you are studying, stop at least 30 minutes before bedtime and do something relaxing and away from your study space (e.g. have a shower or bath, listen to some music)
- if something is playing on your mind, write it down and leave it for the morning.

Diet

The type of food you eat can make a difference to your mental and physical health. Eating well means having a wide variety of healthy foods including plenty of vegetables, fruit and cereals (like bread, rice and pasta), some lean meat, chicken or fish, dairy products (milk, yoghurt, cheese) and lots of water. It's a good idea to avoid fatty foods and foods with lots of sugar in them. While you may be tempted by caffeine or sugary foods, keep in mind that while these may provide a boost in the short-term, they can make you feel tired and unable to concentrate a little later on.

Ask for help

There are great sources of support available if you feel that you need it. Ask a teacher if you don't understand a particular topic now that you're revisiting it — it doesn't always have to be the one who taught you either. The school counsellor and even family or family friends are also great for getting worries "off your chest". You're not alone, so don't feel that you have to be.

Based on Jenny Maynell's article *Tips for Dealing with Exam Stress*

You can get more help and support from these online sites:

<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/factsheets-and-info/fact-sheet-19-making-the-most-of-studying/>

<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/2009/10/19/looking-after-yourself-at-exam-time/>

www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/exam-stress.php

And remember, if you need to talk to someone urgently about something that's troubling you, call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or Lifeline on 13 11 14.