

MANAGING EXAM STRESS

If you feel nervous before an exam, you're not alone. Most of us have anxious thoughts - 'have I done enough revision?', 'will I be able to answer all the questions?'

In some ways, a little anxiety is a good thing - it helps to focus the mind and get the adrenaline going. Too much, though, is not so good. Fortunately, there are a couple of simple things you can do to control your exam anxiety, and reduce the stress.

Before the exam

A healthy body means a healthy mind. Although study may be taking up time you would otherwise use for relaxation, it's important to eat well, sleep well, and exercise. Try some of the following tips:

- ✓ Eat regular, nutritious meals - this will keep your energy levels up, and avoid caffeine wherever possible.
- ✓ Get lots of rest, so you can concentrate and exercise regularly - this will help oxygenate your brain, as well as allowing your mind to focus on something other than study
- ✓ Try to relax when studying - A good, comfortable chair and a welcoming study environment will help
- ✓ Be positive - Instead of thinking that you are going to fail, imagine that you're not.
- ✓ Replace anxious, negative thoughts with positive ones - like how it'll feel to pass with flying colours.

During the exam

Once you're in the exam room:

- ✓ Take deep breaths to reduce your anxiety. Take a deep breath in, then a deep breath out. As you're breathing out, think positive thoughts such as 'I CAN do this'

- ✓ Take the time to read the questions properly. Five extra minutes at the start may save a lot of stress-producing panic later
- ✓ As you read, plan which answers you can do, the order in which you'll do them, and how long you think you'll need for each. Planning your exam time will make it less scary
- ✓ Finally, don't panic if others start handing in their papers early. Go at your own pace, and don't worry about anyone else.

After the exam

First of all, it's really important to stay positive. Don't reflect back on where you had issues, think of where you didn't. And while it may be tempting to talk to other candidates about how they went, this can make you more anxious.

You should also give yourself time to recover. An exam can take a lot of concentration, so allow yourself a 'cooling off' period to relax once more.

Finally, remember that exams are not designed to make people fail. They are simply a standardised way of finding out what you do, and don't, know.

Good luck!