

# Exam Anxiety Fact Sheet

For everybody who has to sit to exams

## What is Exam Anxiety?

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- It is appropriate to feel some anxiety around exams, as with other important events in life. **A little bit of stress can help to motivate and focus attention keeping the mind alert.** Exam stress becomes a problem if it reduces the ability to prepare for and perform in exams - too much anxiety can block clear thinking and make it more difficult to study.



- Some students experience mainly physical symptoms, such as headaches, feeling sick, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, getting sweaty palms, and/or heart racing.
- Others experience more emotional symptoms, such as crying easily, feeling irritable, or getting frustrated quickly.
- A major problem of test anxiety can be its effect on thinking ability; it can cause a person to **'blank out'** or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.

## What can you do to control test anxiety?

- Be **well prepared** for the test. Study regularly well before a test. Have a study plan over many weeks, not just days before a test.
- Include as much **self-testing** in your review as possible.

Maintain a **healthy lifestyle:**



- Get enough **sleep** (make sure you go to bed at reasonable time)

- **Eat well** - it is good to have at least three meals a day. A proper breakfast with whole grains, fruit and a source of protein will provide your mind with the energy it needs!



- **Exercise** - it is good to exercise, not only to stay physically fit but also... to keep the mind in good form! Our brain needs oxygen to work well and fast, and so a walk with a dog or a run might be a good idea after completing a block of work! Again, when exercise is regular it brings most of the benefits 😊



- **Personal "down" time** - studying takes plenty of energy! It is impossible to study all the time without having a rest. In fact, "cramming" without breaks

brings much worse results than studying at a balanced pace with more breaks and some time to yourself.

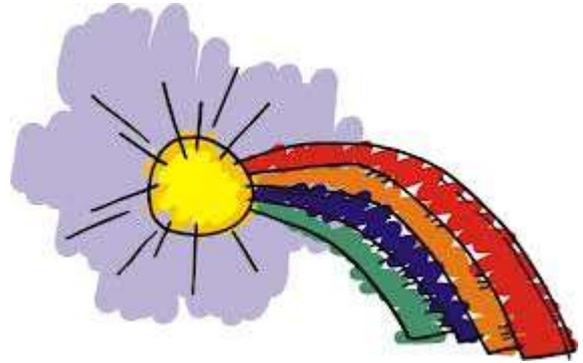
- **Practice relaxation and slow breathing** - Here is a breathing exercise you can practice at quiet times over the weeks before an exam:

- Put one hand on your stomach and one on your chest
- Take a deep breath through your nose that fills the bottom part of your lungs and makes your tummy move outwards - try to get the air into this lower part of your lungs. The hand on your tummy should move out, and the hand on your chest should stay quite still.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose while you count to 4
- Hold your breath for the count of 2
- Slowly breathe out while you count to 8
- Repeat this exercise for 5-10 minutes to help you take control of your body and feel more calm.
- When you are in a stressful exam situation, you can try some slow breaths to help you return to feeling calm

- **Reward yourself** - when you complete a big chunk of studying material do something that you like to reward yourself. It could be going to the cinema or having a chat with a friend. Knowing you have a reward planned can be a good motivator to work hard. Try to keep your rewards as special treats for when you genuinely do get a good block of work done

- **Socialise** - it is good to spend time relaxing with friends and family.

- As you anticipate the exam, **think positively**, e.g., "I can do OK on this exam. I've studied and I know my stuff."
- Engage in "**thought stopping**" if you find that you are worrying a lot, comparing yourself to your peers, or thinking about what others may say about your performance on an exam. When the worrying thoughts come to your mind you could tell to them the command, "Stop!" and then replace the negative thought with something more positive and realistic.



- Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, **organise anything that you will need** for the exam -- pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc. Double check the time of the exam and the location.



- Set the alarm clock and then get a **good night's sleep** before the exam - which means you should go to bed early! Cramming just the night

before is not going to help as nothing that you learn will stay in your head without a good night's sleep 😊.

- Get to the **exam on time** - not too late but not too early.
- **Be cautious about talking to other students** about the exam material just before going into the exam, especially if this will make you more anxious.
- Sit in a **location** in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.



- As the papers are distributed, **calm yourself** by taking some **slow deep breaths**.

- Make sure to **carefully read any instructions** on the exam.
- As you work on the exam, **focus only on the exam**, not on what other students are doing or on thinking about past exams or future goals.



- If you feel very anxious in the exam, take a few minutes to **calm yourself**. Stretch your arms and legs and then relax them again. Do this a couple of times. Take a few slow deep breaths. Do some positive internal self-talk; say to yourself, "I will be OK, I can do this."

- If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to **focus and just do your best**. It might be enough to get you through with a reasonable grade.

When the exam is over, **treat yourself**. If you don't have any other commitments, maybe you can take the night off. If you have to study for other exams you may have to postpone a larger break, but a brief break may be the "pick up" that you need

