

# Self Help For Exam Stress



It is normal to feel a bit worried about exams and this may cause you to feel anxious or depressed, which might affect your sleep or eating habits.

If you are experiencing any of these feelings, or are worried that exam pressure is becoming too much, you are not alone, and there are things you can do:

## Symptoms

Increased heart rate, feeling sweaty or fidgety with butterflies in your stomach, feeling upset, annoyed, fed up and angry. Negative thoughts may include: **“I’m going to fail” or “I’m not good enough”**

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## Stress busting tips

**Be kind to yourself.** Think about all the things you have achieved so far and the things other people value about you too. If people around you are putting pressure on you, it can help to tell them what you feel able to achieve, and let them know that your expectations are different to theirs. Some people are better at doing exams and others have more practical skills, just look after yourself and try your best.

**Keep it in perspective.** Exams can help you take the next step in your academic or professional career, but results are not the only measure of success. Exam results do not define who you are. Make a list of all the things you want from life which don't involve exams!

**Talk about it.** Let your trusted friends and family know if you are struggling so they can help support you – you don't have to go through this alone. Talk to your Tutor or teacher – they can let you know what support is available and will have

spoken to other students like you. Confiding in someone is a great way to alleviate stress and worry.

**Interrupt negative thoughts with positive ones and actively challenge your irrational thoughts.**

**Plan your study time** with study sessions about 50 minutes long separated by 5-10 minute breaks. You may want to try using a Revision planner. Try breaking it up into chunks and creating a daily timetable so you know what you want to study when. This can make revision feel less overwhelming and much more manageable. Be realistic about what you can achieve in a day and don't compare yourself to others – not everyone studies the same way, so do what works for you.

**Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Tiredness increases anxiety. Resilience is helped by: exercise, positive thoughts, healthy diet as well as regular and adequate sleep.

**Get yourself into exam mode.** Get accurate information from your school about the exam date, time and location as well as what you can/should take into the exam. Practise on sample tests and look at past exams. Ask your teacher for advice. Plan. Rest well the night before and arrive at the exam location early. If you can pick your seat, choose one away from the doors, windows or other distractions. Plan to monitor the time during the exam 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.

**Avoid bad things.** Give coffee and other stimulants a miss. Avoid other people or things that may disturb your self-confidence, focus and level of relaxation.

## 7 Revision Techniques for GCSE and A-Level

- Flashcards, flashcards and more flashcards!
- YouTube tutorials
- Find out about the Pomodoro Technique
- Mind maps
- Practice on past papers
- Teach someone else
- Group revision



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## The exam

**Keep calm.** It's natural to feel some exam nerves, but there is no need to panic. Give yourself a mental pep-talk by repeating "I am calm" or "I know I will do fine".

**Breathe.** If your mind goes blank, focus on slow, deep breathing for about one minute. If you still can't remember the information, then move on to another question and return to this question later.

**The invigilator** is there to assist you (for instance with distracting noises, if the sun is shining on your exam paper, if you need a drink of water, etc.) Take a small bottle of water into the exam with you and some sweets (if allowed—find out ahead of time). If you are really stuck, you might consider getting up and taking a short walk outside the room to compose yourself or going to the toilet. When you are able, get back to work - remember that it is better to put something down rather than nothing.

**Read and re-read.** Quickly survey every page of the exam paper to understand what is expected of you. Re-read the instructions a second time (are you really being asked to answer either one or three of the questions?)

**Prioritise.** When surveying the exam paper, place a mark beside all questions you know you can answer. Divide up your time according to the importance of the questions and answer the easiest questions first to guarantee marks in the least amount of time.

**Pace yourself.** Do not rush through the exam and regularly check time left for the rest of the questions. Give yourself time to proofread; you should not still be writing at the invigilator's "5 minutes remaining" announcement.

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## Managing mental blocks

Mental blocks are a symptom of stress, tension and anxiety – so, relaxation is the key! You can try using relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises like the following:

- Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart and flat on the ground.
- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first. Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

### Assist memory recovery:

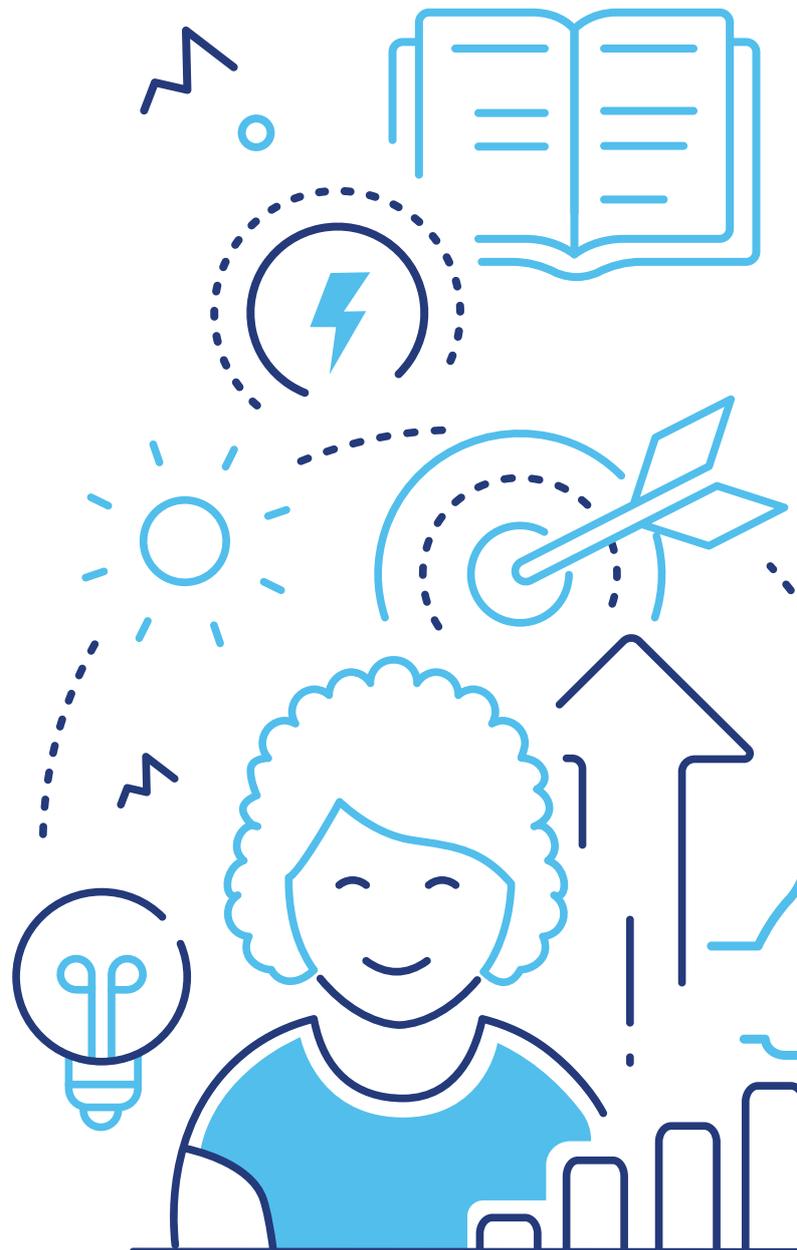
- Imagine you know the answer and see what comes to mind
- Try not to keep staring at the question – brain research suggests the position of the eyes is important: look up as you try and remember it
- Create a mind map of what you do remember – the power of association can trigger your memory
- Begin with questions you can answer – add anything you remember to your mind map while you are doing this
- Try and think of anything that is related to the question eg. Examples the teacher gave you in class
- Can you see your notes in your mind's eye?
- Try not to let yourself say/think 'I don't know this... I don't know this' – instead, replace this with: 'if I did know the answer, what would I write?' – see what happens.

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## After the exam

Whatever you do, don't spend endless time criticising yourself for where you think you went wrong. Congratulate yourself for the things you did right, learn from the bits where you know you could have done better, and then move on.

After the exam, do something you enjoy. If you are going to meet up with someone, you could agree with them that you will only talk about the exam for 5 minutes - or even not at all. It's important that you let the stress of the exam go, especially if you have more exams to sit.



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## Looking after your wellbeing

**Connect.** Picking up the phone or sending a text to a friend or family member can give your mood an instant lift. It doesn't have to be about your state of mind or how you feel, it could be something as simple as chatting about a TV show, sharing lunch ideas or asking where your loved one went on their daily walk. Connecting with people is what humans do best. Talking and especially laughing, releases endorphins, a natural feel-good chemical that promotes an overall sense of happiness and wellbeing.

**Be active.** As well as your physical health, being active can also have a positive impact on your mental wellbeing. When we exercise, we use up energy and increase blood flow and oxygen around our bodies. This in turn, strengthens our muscles, keeps our heart healthy and improves our joints. Physical exercise makes us feel good about ourselves, gives us confidence and improves our mood and alertness.

**Be mindful.** Being mindful of the present moment both in terms of what is happening in front of you and how you feel can have a really positive impact on your mental health. Taking a different route on your daily walk, for example, could help you uncover something new in your neighbourhood. It might be a community garden, a book exchange box or the perfect spot to watch the sun set. These new discoveries can instil a fresh sense of pride in your area and place a smile on your face.

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## Get support

If you're struggling with your mental health, or you're worried about one of your friends, there are lots of organisations and charities that offer help specifically for young people.

- **YMM.** You can ask your school to refer you to Young Minds Matter or use our Text service for a self-referral on: **07480 635723**. Find out more at: [www.ghc.nhs.uk](http://www.ghc.nhs.uk) and search for YMM
- **TIC+.** is a counselling service you can self refer to or have a text chat for support - Find out more at: [www.ticplus.org.uk](http://www.ticplus.org.uk)
- **YoungMinds** is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health. YoungMinds Textline: Text YM to **85258**
- **Childline.** If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small on: **0800 11 11**
- **Kooth** is an online mental wellbeing platform available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week provided by Gloucestershire County Council for young people aged 11 to 18 living in Gloucestershire experiencing issues with their emotional wellbeing, such as anxiety, low mood or stress: [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)
- **ChatHealth** Get advice and support from a school nurse by text message: **07507 333351**



