



Exam Stress

During the exam period students are likely to experience extra pressure. Pressure can be positive and useful to complete a deadline but prolonged pressure can become negative and can lead to the development of stress.

Symptoms of exam stress

Stress responses often differ for females and males. Females present internal symptoms, such as nausea, butterflies and feelings of inadequacy. Males tend to externalise their anxiety and can become irritable or angry.

Approaches for managing extreme exam stress can be developed to avoid stress having a negative result.

What you may expect with exam stress?

Increased pressures can lead to a 'fight or flight' response which releases increased amounts of adrenalin in to the body.

- Feeling cranky and irritable (increased yelling or crying, swearing, hitting).
- Indecisiveness and/or confusion.
- Problems with going to sleep or getting up in the morning.
- Strongly beating heart, sweating.
- Mild chest pains, back pains, nausea, trembling, shortness of breath.
- Minor stomach upsets.
- Possible skin breakouts.
- Teeth grinding, nail biting and fidgeting.
- Constipation or diarrhoea.
- Going blank in an exam.

What causes exam stress?

- Inability to accept failure or uncertainty.
- Pessimism or negative self-talk.
- Unrealistic expectations (either of the student or the parents).
- Unpreparedness.
- Life transitions.
- Family issues and/or relationship difficulties.
- Financial problems.
- Performance anxiety.

What influences a person's stress tolerance level?

Support network - A young person experiencing exam stress will have a better response to stress if supported by parents or other caring adults.

Sense of control - Having a sense of control about what to expect on the day, what to learn and ways to systematically revise will assist a young person to manage their exam stress.

Positive attitude and outlook - Assist them to see the bright side, to laugh at themselves and to appreciate the positives in life. People who are resilient to stressors have an optimistic attitude.

Preparation - The more a young person prepares for a stressful situation, such as an exam, the easier it is to cope. A student's stress level is often influenced by the amount of preparation and planning they have put into studying towards a particular exam and how confident they feel about the material they are to be tested on.

What can parents and carers do about exam stress?

Encourage healthy sleeping and eating habits.

Encourage a routine of going to bed at a reasonable time.

Help them cut back on coffee and tea and any other stimulants they may be using.

Encourage them to eat fresh fruit, veggies, cereals, grains nuts and proteins – they are all good for the brain and sugar levels.

Avoid junk food as they bring a sudden sugar high which will fall away leaving tiredness.

- Be as supportive and tolerant as possible.
- Help establish effective study and learning habits.
- Help in finding a quiet place to study without distractions.
- Encourage student to find out exactly what the test involves – look at past papers etc.
- Encourage student to ask for help from teachers if they feel unsure or confused.
- Help them make mind maps to summarise thoughts. Bright colours help
- Plan a study schedule early. Encourage manageable chunks and encourage breaks.

Relaxation ideas to help your child cope with exam stress

- Always encourage your child to relax before they go to bed after concentrating for long periods of time.
- Encourage them to go out for a walk, run or do some other exercise they enjoy.
- Teach them relaxation techniques such as listening to some gentle music, getting them to lie down, closing their eyes and taking a deep breath while visualising a calming scene such as a deserted beach.
- Help your child to develop a positive mindset by encouraging them to visualise success - this can really help with self-confidence.

Exam day tips

Eat a good breakfast.

Avoid rushing on the morning of the exam – plan ahead.

Keep away from people who agitate them.

Slow breathing at the start of the exam – take time to read the questions – workout how long they have for each section. Skim the exam paper, underline key words and instructions.

Take time to read questions; answer the ones that can be answered first to build confidence.

Don't worry about everyone else and what they are doing. Keep an eye on the clock to ensure time to answer the more difficult questions.

Re-read answers if possible and make any changes that are necessary – correct spelling – check workings.