

# Managing Exam Anxiety

Brought to you by the Counselling  
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## An overview of the session

- What do exams measure?
- How do you personally experience exam stress/anxiety?
- What is exam stress/anxiety?
- Not all stress/anxiety is bad!
- Why does stress/anxiety occur?
- What can you do about it?

## What do you think exams measure?

1. The **quantity** of revision I've done.
2. How intelligent I am.
3. The **quality** of revision I've done.
4. How much practice I've had at answering exam questions.
5. How well I can spot exam questions.
6. How much I know.
7. How quickly I can write in exams.
8. How good I am at managing time in exams.
9. How good I am at addressing the questions in exams.
10. How much I managed to learn the night before.

## What exams actually measure...

Exams are designed to measure:

- The **quality** of revision you've done
- How much **practice** you've had at answering exam questions
- How good you are at **managing time** in exams
- How good you are at **addressing the questions** in exams.

So...

...the things that make the **most difference** are skills that you can work on developing and improving!



How do you experience exam stress/anxiety?

What is your personal experience of exam stress/anxiety?

Do you experience most difficulty in the lead up to exams?

In the exam room itself?

# What is exam stress/anxiety?

Exam anxiety can manifest in several ways:

- **Pre-exam stress/anxiety** (intense worry, tension, disturbed sleep, uneasiness and agitation in the lead up to exams)
- or
- **Within-exam stress/anxiety** (feeling anxious in the exam, going blank or being unable to recall information that you know , having difficulty breathing or panicking when you don't know the answer to a question)

Or both!

## Symptoms you might experience...

- Physical Symptoms
- Behavioural Symptoms
- Emotional Symptoms
- Cognitive Symptoms



## Not all stress/anxiety is bad!

### **Good stress/anxiety:**

- Motivates us to stay focussed on study

### **Bad stress/anxiety:**

- Interferes with us preparing for exams and conveying what we know in the exam room

### **REMEMBER:**

- Anxiety is unpleasant but it can't hurt you
- Accepting anxiety helps you to cope better with it.
- If you focus on relaxing, anxiety recedes

## Why does exam stress/anxiety occur?

Lack of confidence or low self-esteem.

Pressure from family or teachers in your past or present

Having perfectionistic expectations of yourself

A general fear of failure.

A fear of getting anxious, in other words, you have developed a fear of fear.

## Why do exams seem especially stressful?

They are **time limited**. Less time to plan, write, edit and check your work

They require **recall** of large amounts of information. We usually worry that we won't remember under pressure

# The role of the Cognitive-Affective Behavioural Cycle

This means that the way we

**THINK**

Affects the way we

**FEEL**

And this influences how we

**BEHAVE**

## So, unhelpful ways of thinking...

### **Self critical thoughts:**

- I know I've messed up
- I am not ready
- I must be stupid
- I can't do this
- It's not going well

### **Helpless and hopeless thoughts:**

- What's the use?
- Why am I doing this?
- I have no future in this
- I don't have enough time
- There's too much to cover
- I'll never pass

## Managing pre-exam anxiety...

- Relaxation
- Healthy lifestyle
- Time management
- Down time
- Practical preparation
- Get a good night's sleep the night before
- Get there in good time
- Visualise success
- Make positive self-statements

## Managing within-exam anxiety...

- Relaxation/deep breathing
- Use a mantra
- Focusing
- Thought stopping
- Creating mild pain
- Bridging objects
- Positive self-statements

## Application of these ideas:

### **Thinking now about your own experience of exam stress/anxiety:**

- What do you recognise as the strongest contributing factor to your anxiety?
- Which aspects of your anxiety do you think are most manageable?
- What is your personal plan or approach to minimising your experience of exam anxiety?



## Relaxation exercise...

When you are feeling stressed and anxious, it is likely that your breathing will also become shallow, rapid and high in the chest. This only serves to aggravate your anxiety.

**Deep abdominal breathing** can reduce tension and negative emotions, increase oxygen supply to your brain, help to rid the body of toxins and help you to think more clearly.

## Some final thoughts...

- Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday.
- The time to relax is when you don't have time for it.
- The time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time.
- The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time. (Abraham Lincoln)
- **The Serenity Prayer**  
Grant me the serenity to accept the things  
I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

**Source: [www.bergen.org/AMST/pc/stresspr/quiz.htm](http://www.bergen.org/AMST/pc/stresspr/quiz.htm)**