

# STAYING WELL FOR THE EXAM SEASON



Staying well for the exam season means looking after yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. Some simple steps can keep you feeling well and help you to manage the pressure.

If you are unfortunate enough to be ill on the day of an exam, or have an illness when revising that you feel has genuinely impacted on your performance, it is vital that you get a doctor's note. The exam boards have very strict criteria and will not accept letters from staff or parents.

In the event of any illness make sure you communicate with us – Mrs Hannah Quinn is our examinations officer and can offer advice and support.

This booklet will outline staying well by:

- Mindfulness techniques
- Eating a healthy diet
- Getting some exercise
- Getting enough sleep
- Avoiding stress



## DIET

What is a balanced diet?

- 1) Eat carbs - potatoes in their skins, rice, bread and pasta.
- 2) Eat wholemeal - Wholemeal carbs are the best as they are thought to contain more vitamins and release their energy more steadily, as well as containing fibre.
- 3) Don't eat too much sugar - refined sugary food can cause tooth decay and cause fluctuations in blood glucose levels.
- 4) Eat protein (but not too much) - Protein is only needed in moderate amounts – eat a fist-sized portion at every meal. Go for lean meats, poultry, eggs, fish, beans, lower-fat cheeses, semi-skimmed milk, yoghurts, or soya products.
- 5) Eat fish - try to have two portions of fish a week.
- 6) Eat fat! - Fats are essential to health in small amounts. You need roughly equal amounts of saturates (e.g. butter), monounsaturates (e.g. olive oil) and polyunsaturates (e.g. sunflower oil).
- 7) Get your vitamins by eating loads of fruit and veg - Vitamins and minerals are best obtained from eating a wide variety of foods. Try to eat at least five portions of different kinds of fruit or veg every day to stay in top condition.
- 8) Drink water - You need plenty of water, to flush out waste products.
- 9) Don't skip meals - Eat breakfast and don't skip meals. You'll be more alert and your metabolism will be better.



## EXERCISE

Regular and frequent exercise is of great benefit to both your physical and mental wellbeing.

If you don't enjoy team sports, consider yoga, jogging, walking or swimming.

## SLEEP

Go to bed at the same time: Establish a routine.

Get up when you wake up: If you stir before your alarm then get out of bed.

Get into shape: Regular work-outs reduce sleep-stopping adrenaline.

Eat sensibly: Avoid eating last thing at night or going to bed hungry. If you're stuffed or starving, your stomach won't let you rest. It's thought that certain foods help sleep; turkey, milk, bananas, and walnuts all contain tryptophan, which the body uses to make melatonin.

Sleep is best with room temperature between 15-21°C

Relax before bedtime: Herbal remedies can help reduce stress and get you into the right mind frame: basil, camomile, lettuce and marjoram all have a calming effect.

Limit caffeinated drinks - try avoiding all sources of caffeine from 3pm. Remember caffeine isn't just in coffee – it's also in things like tea, chocolate, and fizzy drinks.

Make your bedroom a place of rest

Don't use your smartphone in bed - Electronic devices emit noise and light; both will stop you sleeping. LCD screens on phones and tablets emit light that is blue enriched. This light influences the body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) and delays the release of the 'sleep hormone' melatonin. Without melatonin, although you can sleep, the sleep you achieve will be light and non-refreshing. Light can also make you feel more alert, again training the brain to perceive the bed as a place of cognitive arousal.

Have a bedtime routine – for example, a warm drink, listen to 10 minutes of music or read a book for 10 minutes.



## STRESS

There's no medical definition of stress, and health care professionals often disagree over whether stress is the cause of problems or the result of them. But whatever your personal definition of stress is, it's likely that you can learn to manage your stress better by managing external pressures and developing your emotional resilience, so you're better at coping with tough situations.

How can I deal with pressure?

- identify your triggers
- organise your time
- address some of the causes
- accept the things you can't change

How can I be more resilient?

Taking steps to look after your wellbeing can help you deal with pressure, and reduce the impact that stress has on your life. This is sometimes called developing emotional resilience – the ability to adapt and bounce back when something difficult happens in your life. For example, you can:

- make some lifestyle changes – relaxation techniques, time management
- look after your physical health – sleep, exercise, diet
- give yourself a break
- use your support network – teachers, friends, family
- Laugh: four-year-old children laugh on average 400 times a day, whereas adults only laugh 14 times!

Exam stress could be caused by:

- Pressure from parents and relatives to do well
- The need to get high grades to get on track for the career you really want
- Uncertainty about what to do next – “There are so many options, what if I make the wrong choice?”
- The feeling of everything changing in your life

These fears and concerns are completely natural – your friends are probably feeling exactly the same, whether they let on or not.



What are the symptoms of exam stress?

Difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning, constant fatigue, forgetfulness, aches and pains for no apparent reason, poor appetite, social withdrawal, loss of interest in activities, increased anxiety and irritability, “flying off the handle”, increased heart rate, migraines/headaches, blurred vision, dizziness

Everyone has bad days, but if you’ve noticed three or more of the above symptoms and you’ve experienced them for some weeks you may need to do something about your stress levels. Visit your doctor (GP) who may be able to advise you.

How can I deal with exam stress?

- Try to make time for yourself away from your studies to wind down.
- Take time for your mind and body to relax. Chatting with friends, meditation, yoga
- Take time to exercise. Regular and frequent exercise is a good stress reducer.
- Eat well – skipping meals will deplete your energy and leave you drained.
- Talk to your family and friends.

Specialist websites and organisations:

The NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/reduce-stress/>

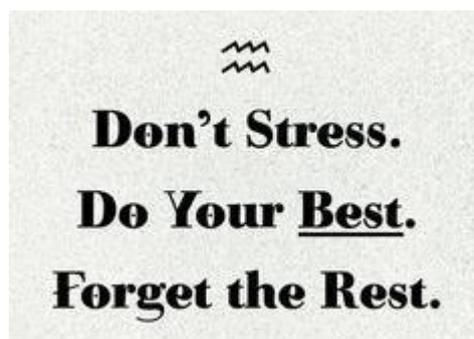
The Mind Tools website can help you with stress management and assertiveness techniques - [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN\\_TCS.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_TCS.htm).

The Be Mindful website provides guidance on mindfulness, including how to find a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course - <https://bemindful.co.uk/> .

The CALM App for phones has help with mindfulness and sleeping

Mind's Infoline can let you about support groups and mental health services in your local area - <https://www.mind.org.uk/> .

Your GP.



## **MINDFULNESS AND BREATHING**

## ORGANISE YOURSELF

It sounds obvious, but revision really is the key to exam success. Being well prepared for your exams is the best way to overcome stress and anxiety, and gives you the best chance of getting the best grades you can.

Before you start revising, the amount of work you have to do can seem overwhelming. You may have to study for lots of different subjects at once, and it's easy to feel daunted.

Make a realistic revision schedule. Work out how much you have to do and the time you have to do it in, then break it down into manageable chunks. Aim to do a few hours of revision each day, and mix up your subjects so you don't get bored.

Find a revision style that suits you.

Customise your notes to make them more personal. Experiment with colour coding, notes on postcards, diagrams or whatever helps you learn your topic.

Make sure you understand everything. If you come across something you don't understand, try to find a new source of information that will help you understand it. Just memorising it won't help you in your exam. Don't be afraid to ask your teacher or a friend for help if you need it.

Look at past exam papers. It means you can familiarise yourself with the layout and type of questions you'll be asked. Practise completing exam papers in the set time limit to improve your exam technique.



## THE EXAM DAY

It's natural to be nervous on exam days, but don't let your nerves take over.

Start the day with a good breakfast, and give yourself plenty of time to get to the exam hall. Remember to take everything you need, including pencils, pens and a calculator. A bottle of water and some tissues are also useful.

Once the exam has started, take a few minutes to read the instructions and questions so you know exactly what's expected of you. Ask an invigilator if anything is unclear – they're there to help you.

Plan how much time you'll need for each question. Don't panic if you get stuck on a question, but try to leave yourself enough time at the end to come back to it. Even if you're really stumped, an educated guess is better than leaving it blank.

When the exam is over, don't spend too much time going over it in your head or worrying about it. Resist the temptation to compare your answers with those of your friends. If you have more exams to come, focus on the next one instead.



## **PARENTS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

Watch out for exam stress - Children who experience stress may be irritable, not sleep well, lose interest in food, worry a lot, and appear depressed or negative. Headaches and stomach pains can also be stress-related. If you feel your child isn't coping, talk to their teachers at school.

Make sure your child eats well - a balanced diet is vital for your child's health, and can help them to feel well during exam periods.

Help your child get enough sleep - allow half an hour or so for kids to wind down between studying, watching TV or using a computer and going to bed to help them get a good night's sleep.

Try and find out as early as possible what is expected of your child - when their exams will be

Be flexible during exams - when your child is revising all day, don't worry about household jobs that are left undone or untidy bedrooms.

Staying calm yourself can help. Remember, exams don't last forever.

Help them to study - help your child revise by making sure they have somewhere comfortable to study. Help them draw up a revision schedule or ask the school for one.

Talk about exam nerves - Remind your child that feeling anxious is normal. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams.

Encourage exercise during exams - make sure your kids are active. Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress. Walking, cycling, swimming, football and dancing are all effective.

Don't add to the pressure - before they go in for a test or exam, be reassuring and positive. Avoid criticism.

Make time for treats - don't use rewards as bribes. Instead, encourage your child to work for their own satisfaction, offering small, frequent treats.

Accept this is going to be a stressful time for the whole family – expect outbursts and try to remain calm!



## *My plan to stay well*

1)

2)

3)