

SLEEP AND EXAMS

How students manage exam-time stress can have a huge impact on their ability to perform under pressure. Exam time has always been stressful, but loss of sleep, increased caffeine consumption and unhealthy snacking are sure-fire ways to create a less than optimal exam-time performance.

Lack of sleep can end up clouding judgement or increasing the number of mistakes made. Students should try to get at least seven to nine hours of sleep a night, particularly on the night before an exam.

Here are The Sleep Charity's tips to surviving the exam season:

- **Be prepared:** The best way to manage stress and anxiety around exam time is to be as prepared as possible. Draw up a rough 'revision timetable' of what you need to revise when to ensure every subject is covered – and stick to it!
- **Sleep well:** Most people need at least six to eight hours of sleep every night – so no pulling an all-nighter to cram for an exam! Lack of sleep results in poor coping strategies for managing stress and 'fuzzy' thinking. The best bet by far is to study often and in advance and build in a good rest before the big day. Sleeping on a comfortable, supportive bed can really help with a good night's sleep.
- **Get physical:** Physical exertion provides an outlet for mental stress. Let off some steam by walking, running, getting involved in a sport etc. It helps you to sleep better.
- **Prioritise:** The sheer amount of revision to be done can sometimes seem overwhelming. Set priorities and work on the most urgent first. Break tasks down into manageable chunks and set goals that are reasonable.
- **Practice a relaxation technique:** Relaxation techniques can help to create a sense of calm and are simple to perform in the bedroom without any special equipment. Deep breathing with your eyes closed is a simple way to remedy stress. Focus on your breath as you deeply inhale and exhale.
- **Ditch the devices:** While it's important to stay connected to friends during a stressful time, make sure to factor in a digital detox every evening. Turn off devices at least an hour before bed so you're not tempted to talk about exams, revision or stay mentally stimulated by watching videos etc.
- **Change the scenery:** Persistence is key when it comes to studying, but a change of scenery can reduce stress levels. Head outdoors to breathe in some fresh air and, if possible, take a walk to a picturesque place with trees, flowers or other comforting surroundings. Sprucing up your space is another way to change the scenery when you can't break away. Hang new pictures on the wall, or add some new cushions to the room.
- **Socialise – a little:** Getting together with friends is another healthy way to blow off steam and chat with others who know just how you feel. Sometimes just being around other people who understand is enough to feel better – at other times, talk about your stress and ask for help from family and friends.

- **Eat well:** Stress eating can seriously disrupt healthy eating habits. Keep healthy, easy-to-eat snacks around such as nuts or fresh fruit and don't overload on caffeine to try to stay awake.
- **Positive self-talk:** Thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are connected so it's important to monitor self-talk, focus on the present, set realistic goals, and remain appropriately optimistic.

Our Teen Sleep Hub is aimed at young people and can be found at teensleephub.org.uk

For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at
thesleepcharity.org.uk or contact us on **info@thesleepcharity.org.uk**