

The exam period is a time when stress levels are higher than usual. Stress can be positive, helping you to stay motivated and focused. However, too much stress can be unhelpful, it can make you feel overwhelmed, confused, exhausted and edgy. It's important to try and keep things in perspective and find ways of reducing stress if things seem to be getting on top of you. This factsheet gives you some suggestions of things you can do to maximise your study time and help you learn better.

Study area - Having a good study area can make a huge difference to how well you learn. Study in a well lit, quiet area, away from noises and people in the house. If this is impossible, it might be better to study at the library. Make sure your desk is tidy and organised - it means you can concentrate on studying and learning, not trying to find information.

To do lists - Make a to do list before each study session. Breaking tasks down into small, manageable tasks will make it less overwhelming. Cross them off as you go.

Past exam papers / textbook quiz - Ask your tutor for past exam papers. They can be a useful insight into what your exam will be like and can also provide a guide for what you know and the areas in which you need help. If possible, practice some under exam conditions. Testing yourself on the content, helps to cement your learning.

Study groups - Forming a studying group can be a helpful way to revise your notes and work through past exam questions (it can also help you feel supported, keep you motivated and focused). If you have questions about your work, a study group may be a good place to have them answered. Beware though, some study buddies may be distracting.

Switch the phone or email off! - If you find that you are being distracted by the

phone or emails, it might help to put the answering machine on or get others in the house to take messages for a while.

Revise and learn - (don't just re-read) - Sometimes reading through notes doesn't result in learning or understanding. Try to summarize what you have learnt or teach someone else.

Wallpaper - Write down key concepts you have to learn on small sheets of paper followed by examples of how they are used. Post these sheets around your house, (eg - your bed, the toilet door, on the CD collection. It helps with remembering things like equations, quotes and foreign languages.

Ask lots of questions of your tutor - Your teacher or tutor can help if you are having trouble developing a study routine or need help with understanding subjects or a particular topic. Asking for help doesn't mean you're a failure or stupid - it's smart to tap into their experience and knowledge to help you perform better.

Take regular breaks - Getting up, moving around and away from your desk at least every 50 minutes for 10 minutes makes you concentrate and learn better. Continue to engage in interests and hobbies, time with friends (in moderation).

Look after yourself - Regular exercise, a healthy diet (plenty of fruit and vegetables) and a good sleep routine (limit caffeine and all-nighters) help to reduce

your stress levels and improve concentration. Time you invest in these activities will result in better quality study.

Relaxation - Engaging in some slow breathing and picturing yourself in a nice, relaxing place, can help to reduce your stress.

Avoid procrastination - Procrastination is when you do everything else but the task you need to do. It is normal to procrastinate a little. However too much procrastination can just add to your stress and can result in you not giving yourself enough time to prepare. Managing your time and setting realistic goals for each study session can be helpful ways to avoid procrastinating and make tasks seem less overwhelming.

Make a study timetable - Write down all the things you need to do each day of the week, and how long you need for each, including time for enough sleep, relaxation, and exercise. Find out the date of each exam and work out a study timetable leading up to them. Include tests that will help you identify gaps in your knowledge. This can give you some direction and help you focus on what to study each week or day.

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