



In the last couple of weeks before my final IB exams I blocked myself from my Facebook account. This felt so long and was really hard for me but to be successful I knew I had to do it.

➔ **Ayesha**

Coping with exam stress



By Gabrielle Turner

Many households at the moment will have experienced increasing levels of stress and tension in the run up to exam time. Whether it is an entrance exam to school for a young child, a teenager appearing for final school exams or university exams or an adult studying later in life, some stress before and during exams is totally normal.

In fact a certain level of stress is even beneficial as it gives us a boost to our motivation and energy levels and helps us to achieve

peak performance. However, many people experience extended periods of extreme stress that can have a detrimental effect not only on their exam performance but also on their physical and mental wellbeing.

So how do you recognise whether you or your son or daughter is experiencing excessive stress and how can you reduce levels of exam stress?

Indicators

There are many different indicators of too much exam stress. These can range from changes in

moods such as irritability, sadness and tearfulness; disturbed sleep patterns or increased tiredness; an increase or loss of interest in food; excessive worrying even about normal everyday routines and negative thought patterns to head and stomach aches, skin conditions and increased susceptibility to colds, flu and other illnesses.

There are also more serious and frightening panic attacks, which need to be assessed (by your doctor) and treated by professionals.

How to reduce exam stress ...

There are four main contributing factors which affect levels of exam stress:

- Lifestyle eg healthy eating and sleeping habits, regular exercise and enough water.
- Exam preparation eg starting revision in time, having a realistic revision timetable.
- Studying style eg having efficient and effective study skills.
- Psychological factors

Today we are focusing on the psychological factors affecting our

levels of exam stress with some short exercises to help reduce that stress.

During revision and exam times we can feel huge amounts of pressure both from within and outside ourselves, from family, school or university and even from friends. As our stress levels increase, it becomes easy to lose perspective and to forget that these exams are only a part of our life, a part that will not continue indefinitely.

It's important at these times to surround ourselves with those who support and encourage us, those who remain calm and don't increase our stress levels and those who can give us constructive advice and help. This help can be as straightforward as listening to our worries, helping us devise a realistic revision timetable or testing us over and over again until we recall the facts that we need easily.

An environment that provides us with a comfortable and calm work place with few distractions is ideal at this time, maybe this can be in our own home or maybe we have to look further afield such as a school

library which can be used after hours.

Our level of preparation and the importance of the exam will both have effects on our levels of stress, however, the level of preparation is at this point more in our control. As we increase our level of preparation our sense of control can increase reducing levels of stress. If you have left yourself short of time to revise then make sure you prioritise important sections of your subjects.

Set yourself measurable goals for each chunk of revision to maintain your motivation and give you a real sense of achievement. After each exam, plan a small reward or yourself to acknowledge your achievement.

You will notice that the two exercises below both focus on your breathing. This is because our breath has a natural ebb and flow to focus on giving our mind a calming distraction. At the same time as we slow down our breath we are rebalancing our oxygen and carbon dioxide levels and so calming our body. Both exercises only take a few moments but when practiced regularly can help you to maintain a healthy level of relaxation and calm.

Relax while revising

- It's useful to practice this several times a day. This can help you clear your mind and calm yourself.
- Sit comfortably with your eyes gently closed.
- Start to become aware of your breathing.
- Continue to be aware of each breath in and each breath out for a

few moments.

- Allow your breath out to become a little longer and slower.
- Notice how being aware of your breathing and slowing it down helps your mind and your body become calmer.

Calm yourself and refocus

In an exam it's perfectly normal for you to have moments when your mind may go blank or you feel confused by a question. If this happens ...

- Pause for a moment and put down your pen.
- Sit back in your chair.
- If you need to, close your eyes for a moment.
- Become aware of your breathing.
- Start to slow your breathing down a little.
- Reassure yourself.
- Imagine any upsetting or worrying thoughts either drifting out or being pushed out of your mind.
- Refocus on your breathing.
- Then focus on the exam in your mind.
- Open your eyes.
- Pick up your pen.
- Focus and write your answer.

And finally good luck!

● *Gabrielle Turner is the founder of Oasis Hypnosis. A British Clinical Hypnotherapist, Occupational Therapist and Hypno-Doula, she enjoys helping people to feel empowered by using their own inner resources to make positive changes in their lives. After living for many years in Thailand, she is now happily settled in Qatar with her family.*



Coming up to exams I get stressed, frustrated and feel under pressure from myself. Last time I came out in shingles which is stress related. This made me even more stressed and I got annoyed at myself as it was the wrong time to get sick.

➔ **Jessica**

I had to be very quiet and played outside with my friends so I didn't disturb my sisters when they were revising. If I made too much noise they would get stressed and shout at me.

➔ **Rhianna**



When I'm studying for exams and feeling stressed I like to have hot bath for a break as it calms me down.

➔ **Tamara**

