

Do you ever feel like this?



Like a constant, overwhelming presence in the weeks leading up to an exam, dominated by anxious thoughts of preparation, panic and self-doubt – Pippa, 18



A short period of your life but it can feel so long and consuming – especially with other things in the background like growing up, friendships and other changes – Megan, 17



What is Exam Stress/Anxiety?

- Exams can come with a lot of pressure. And it's easy to feel overwhelmed by them.
- Lots of us know what it feels like to be stressed. But there's no one way to describe what stress is.
- Stress feels different for everyone.
- Feeling stressed, worried or anxious around exams can be difficult to manage. But there are things that can help – it's about finding what's right for you.

What causes exam stress?

- Exam stress can be more than feeling nervous on the day of an exam. It can also be how you feel leading up to exams, during exams and when waiting for results. Other things might make us feel worse too;

Not feeling ready or prepared

Comparing yourself to others

Worrying about how you'll do

Pressure from others

Putting pressure on yourself

Worrying about the future

Being neurodivergent

Struggled with exams before

Having Physical or mental health problems

Young Carer

Coping with life changes

Problems at home or in a relationship

What does it look/feel like?

Emotions

- Embarrassed
- Anxious or worried
- Upset
- Confused
- Panicky
- Irritable
- Exhausted
- Guilty
- Overwhelmed
- Frustrated or angry
- Bored or Fed up

Physical Feelings

- Feeling Sick
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Stomach pains
- Change of eating habits
- Struggling to concentrate
- Forgetful
- Feeling tense
- Restless
- Feeling Tired
- Changes in breathing/breathing fast

What does it look/feel like?

Thoughts

- Fear of failure
- Comparing ourselves to others
- Feeling like we can't cope
- Feeling like things are pointless
- Thinking we are stupid
- Doubting ourselves
- Feeling like we need to be perfect
- Believing everything is wrong
- Fear of disappointing ourselves or others

Behaviours

- Avoiding Things like revision
- Working too much like taking breaks
- Saying negative things about ourselves
- Not doing things we usually enjoy
- Using unhealthy ways to cope
- Finding it harder to look after our wellbeing
- Not spending enough time with people we care about

What can you do to cope?



- Make time for things you enjoy...

- Talk to others about how you feel.

Connect with other people, especially people who are going through the same thing.



- Find Balance.

Be realistic about what you can do in a day or a week and try to balance studying with breaks. A revision timetable might help with this.



- Work in a way that is best for you. Revision is not one size fits all.

Some people work better visually, watching videos, drawing diagrams/mind maps/flash cards.

Some people work better reading, highlighting, making notes or listening to podcasts, etc

Find what works best for you.

- Revise in the best place for you.

Some people like to revise alone, some like to revise in groups. If you don't have a quiet space at home, you could revise in a library.



- Be Kind to yourself. Practice positive self-talk; “I can do this” “I am competent and capable” “I work hard and do my best”

Positive thinking can go a long way in helping you manage your stress/anxiety.

- Take care of your wellbeing.

Both your physical and mental wellbeing are important.

Get enough food, water and exercise.

A good sleep routine is important.



- Reframe those anxious thoughts.

Identify negative thoughts;

E.g. "I am going to fail" "If I fail I am worthless"
"Everyone else is going to do better than me"

Challenge these thoughts –

- De-catastrophising "I probably won't fail, but if I do it's not the end of the world"
- Questioning – Is this thought accurate? Is it helpful?
- Where's the evidence for this thought? Put the thought on trial





If you have an anxious negative voice in your head like me, one of the best things to manage exam stress is to practice positive self-talk and mindfulness – Pippa, 18



The best thing I did while revising was to take breaks and go for a run with my friend. Getting active made me focus better and I didn't feel so alone. Also stretching and yoga at the end of the day signalled to my brain it was time to rest – Megan, 17



Exam Day

- Restful night sleep – don't sit up cramming
- Healthy breakfast – no hunger distractions and avoid caffeine as this can make anxiety worse.
- Make sure you have everything you need
- Arrive on time to avoid lateness anxiety
- Use calming techniques if anxiety hits – Box breathing, visualisation (5,4,3,2,1 method)
- Listen to some music beforehand to relax you

After the Exam

- Try not to compare yourself to others.

Some people might find it helpful to talk about the questions, compare answers or look answers up after an exam. But for many of us, this can be stressful and it may help to avoid these types of conversations.

Remember – you can only try your best. Each day is a new chance to start again

- You are surrounded by people that want you to succeed!
- Please reach out for help if you need it.