

a guide to managing and coping with stress



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# stress



**“identify negative stress”**

## introduction

**Stress is the body's normal response to a challenge, threat or excitement. Not all stress is bad. Without stress we would have little motivation and energy. Stress helps athletes break records. It also helps us meet deadlines, generate new ideas and keeps our mind alert by pumping adrenaline through our body.**

Negative symptoms of stress, for example muscle tension, upset stomach, sweating, shortness of breath, heart palpitations and irritability, develop only when we experience excess stress.

This booklet is designed to give you some ideas and suggestions on how to manage and cope with stress. The first section is on coping with exam stress and the second on workplace stress.

Please note these are guidelines. Thorpe Molloy would recommend any person to seek medical or other professional advice if they feel they are unable to deal with the stress they are experiencing.

# examSTRESS



**“believe in yourself”**

# coping with exam stress

## exam stress - busting tips

**Believe in yourself.** You wouldn't have been given a place on the course if you didn't have the ability to do it. Therefore, if you prepare for the exams properly you should do fine, meaning there is no need to worry excessively.

**Don't try to be perfect.** It's great to succeed but keep everything in balance. Aim to do your best but recognise that none of us can be perfect all of the time.

**Take steps to overcome problems.** If you find you don't understand some of your course material, getting stressed out won't help. Instead, take action to address the problem directly by seeing your course tutor or getting help from your classmates.

**Don't keep things bottled up.** Confiding in someone you trust and who will be supportive is a great way of alleviating stress and worry.

**Keep things in perspective.** The exams might seem like the most crucial thing right now, but in the grander scheme of your whole life they are only a small part.

# examSTRESS



**“take a walk round the block”**

## 10 tips for the revision period

1. **Leave plenty of time to revise** so that you don't get into a situation of having to do last minute cramming. Revise at times you know YOU will work your best. This approach will help to boost your confidence and reduce any pre-exam stress, as you know you have prepared well.
2. **Develop a realistic timetable** so that you can track and monitor your progress. Make sure you allow time for fun and relaxation so that you avoid burning out.
3. **Take a break**, as this is really important. By giving yourself plenty of short breaks as you revise, this keeps you fresher for longer, so you will learn more.
4. **Stay healthy:** get enough sleep, at least 6 hours a night. Eat healthily and regularly. Don't drink too much caffeine and avoid caffeine tablets, no matter how tempting as they can make you feel agitated and stop you sleeping.
5. **Get some exercise.** It's a fantastic stress buster. Go running, play a sport or just take a walk round the block. You will feel more relaxed. If you are not sleeping very well exercise can make a real difference. Top tip – make your own play list to keep yourself motivated and to stave off boredom.
6. **Be positive:** stop thinking about the future and failing.
7. **Do your best:** no one can do more than this.
8. **But don't be too relaxed!** Some stress over exams makes you work hard for them.
9. **Be sensible:** if it upsets you to talk to your friends about an exam when it is finished, don't do it! In fact, don't even think about the exam you have finished. What is done is done. You cannot change what you have written!
10. **Bedtime:** if you are studying in the evening, don't go to bed straight afterwards. Your mind will still be going 'round and round' – thinking too much. Choose something that will relax you, and make you think of other things.

# the exam

**"watch the time"**



## tips for the exam itself

**Plan** to get there early.

Ensure you have all the **necessary equipment**.

Take a **deep breath** before you start to read the paper.

**Read the paper** through, before you decide which questions to answer.

Work out the time allocation for each question, and stick to it. Write a plan for your answer.

**Start with an answer you are confident about.** If you feel yourself panicking take a slow deep breath.

The quickest and most effective way of eliminating feelings of stress and panic is to close your eyes and take several long, deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system. Simultaneously you could give yourself a mental pep-talk by mentally repeating **'I am calm and relaxed'** or **'I know I will do fine.'**

If your mind goes blank, **don't panic!** Getting excessively nervous is counterproductive as you will not be able to think as clearly. Panicking will just make it harder to recall information. Instead, focus on slow, deep breathing for about a minute. If you still can't remember the information then move on to another question and return to this question later.

After the exam don't spend endless time criticising yourself for where you think you went wrong. Often our own self-assessment is far too harsh. **Congratulate yourself** for the things you did right, learn from the bits you know you could have done better, and then move on. If you are worried about how you did talk it through with someone, such as a friend or a tutor, don't bottle things up.

Failure is not the end. Try to remember that although you want to do well, **failing is not the end** of your chances. Many of the world's most successful men and women have survived many failures. If it really matters to you, you can always resit.

# workstress



**“managing stress is the key”**

## work – related stress

Stress in this context is a reaction to continual excessive pressure or responsibility when you feel inadequate or unable to cope. In the 21st Century we are confronted with a seemingly endless stream of ‘stresses’ such as financial pressures, fear of redundancy, over-work, deadline pressures, important business presentations etc. Sometimes the constant, ongoing pressure resulting from these comes to a point at which our bodies cannot recover and we begin to experience stress.

Major life events can also cause stress. Divorce, family deaths and periods of illness for example can also make it harder to deal with stress at work. While stress at work and major life events are obvious stress causes, don’t forget that day-to-day stressors can make a significant impact on stress levels. Traffic jams, bill payments, family tensions, flat tyres, dentist’s appointments, and an infinite number of minor causes of stress all add to your stress level.

Stress is an individual response. What causes stress in one person may not cause stress in another. Typically it is the point at which the pressure of dealing with all the issues facing us gets beyond our ability to cope, that the effects of stress begin to appear.

## learning how to manage stress is key to prevention

Managing stress is a continuous process. Before you can start managing stress you have to understand your own reactions to potentially stressful situations. Determine what causes you stress and how you react. Once you can identify this then you can start managing your own stress.

# top tips

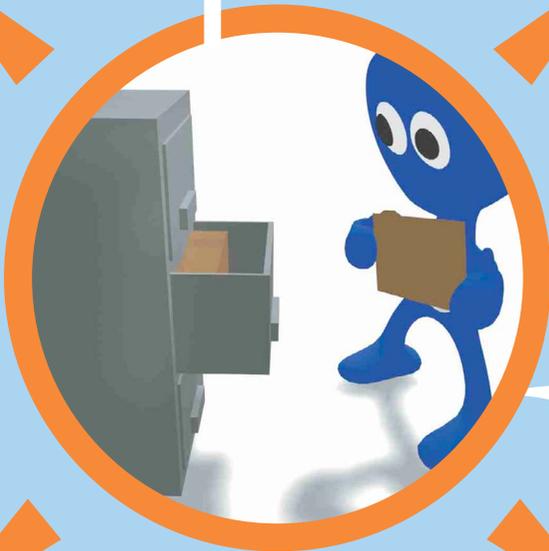
**“learn to relax”**



## 10 top tips for busting stress

1. **Perspective.** A large part of managing stress lies in looking at situations literally. Is the situation as important as you think? Realistically visualizing the long-term consequences of the situation can help you put things into perspective.
2. **Learn to say NO!** Recognize your own limitations and say no before you become overwhelmed.
3. **Manage your time.** Make a 'to-do' list and check off items as you complete them. Prioritise tasks and then work on the most important ones. Delegate less important tasks and schedule extra time for tasks, in case of interruptions.
4. **Healthy lifestyle.** Make every effort to eat healthy food. Studies indicate that the body's ability to store key nutrients drops by up to a third when it's under stress. Get plenty of sleep and rest. Being tired simply adds to your stress level.
5. **Exercise regularly.** Exercise provides the body with an opportunity to burn off accumulated stress hormones. It is also one of the most powerful relaxation tools. You do not have to be a gym freak to gain the benefits, even 20 minutes of walking three times a week will help to reduce stress as well as promoting restful sleep.
6. **Learn how to relax.** Practice deep-breathing techniques such as slowly inhaling while counting to five; hold your breath for five seconds then breathe out slowly. Repeat this 10 times when feeling stressed, concentrating on nothing but your breathing. Take time out. For five minutes every hour try to 'shut down' and think of nothing but your perfect situation. This could be a dream holiday or simply about thinking about doing nothing at all. You will be surprised at how effectively this can lower stress levels.

# top tips



**“tidy up and file work”**

## 10 top tips for busting stress

7. **Plan breaks in your day.** The aim here is to allow time for the unexpected (which, as we all know, will happen!). Get up 15 minutes earlier than you think you need to and prepare for the day without rushing. Even better, get things ready the night before. Try to have 20 minutes in the morning and afternoon that is exclusively 'your' time, in which you can do whatever you want, even if it is simply doing nothing. Look forward to these times when things get busy and if you are unable to use them always remember to 'catch up' later on.
8. **De-clutter.** Mess creates confusion and a sense of loss of power. If your desk/home/car is messy and disorganised, have a good clear out and tidy up. You'll instantly feel more in control.
9. **Change the habit.** Many stresses are habitual. If you start to feel anxious or stressed out, do something out of character. Stop what you're doing and do something else. Or take a minute to take stock and work out why you're feeling uptight.
10. **Think positive.** Repeating positive sentences about yourself can work wonders.

**AND ONE THING NOT TO DO** is to use alcohol, drugs or smoking as crutches to help you cope – these may appear to promote relaxation but in the long run they simply make stress worse.

# you are what you eat

**"eat your greens"**



**Eating 'good mood food' and taking supplements can help with stress and also can help brainpower for those under exam stress.**

## **good mood food**

- **Water** – aim for 8 glasses/2 litres every day.
- **Protein** releases brain chemicals for self-esteem, optimism, calm/good feelings and good sleep. Combining (complex) carbohydrates, see below, with protein enables the feel good serotonin to work. Protein includes meat, rice, oats, fish, eggs, tofu and cheese.
- **Complex carbohydrates** – 'brown' and 'green' things should form the basis of a good mood diet. They keep energy levels stable.

**brown** – whole-grain bread, brown rice, beans, potato (with skin), almonds, porridge.

**green** – all vegetables – fresh and frozen.

For good sleep eat porridge or baked potato an hour before bedtime.

To stay awake during the afternoon eat protein with complex carbohydrates for lunch.

- **Fats** – Good fats/oils – we need small amounts of these essential fats several times a week. Olive/sesame and sunflower oils, oil rich fish, unsalted nuts and seeds (sunflower and pumpkin).

you are what  
you eat



**“drink a cup of camomile tea”**

## supplements and food for those exams nerves

- **Sage** can improve memory.
- **Camomile** tea is better than coffee during exams and does not prevent your mind from being sharp and recalling facts.
- A few drops of **valerian tincture** can help you sleep without making you feel drowsy in the morning.
- **Oats** are one of the best foods for treating nerves. Adding honey will help fuel your brain to perform on the day of the exam. To keep alert it's important to feed the brain; after all it uses 20% of all the calories we consume.
- **Eating regular meals** will help feed the brain – poor concentration is a common symptom of low-blood sugar levels.
- **Rhodiola root** enhances the memory over long periods, regulates stress and helps the body maintain fuel reserves to cope. It is also an effective anti-depressant.
- The fats essential for optimal brain activity are the **omega-3 fatty acids** for example certain nuts and seeds such as flax seed.
- **Beansprouts** are a powerhouse of nutrition. Mung beans equal oranges and tomatoes in Vitamin C and a generous meat portion in protein.
- **Magnesium**, commonly found in apricots, is nature's tranquilliser. It helps relax nerves, relieves tension and assists digestion. When you are busy your brain uses up to 50% more magnesium than someone who is not.
- **Vitamin B** – karoshil is a vitamin B complex supplement. This product also provides the only sugar your brain can directly assimilate which in turn assists in releasing energy throughout your body.

**'I've learned that you can't have everything and do everything at the same time.'**

**Oprah Winfrey**

**'A day without laughter is a day wasted.'**

**Charlie Chaplin**

**'Do not anticipate trouble, or worry about what may never happen.'**

**Benjamin Franklin 1706–1790**





**'Sometimes when people are under stress, they hate to think and it's the time when they most need to think.'**

**Bill Clinton**

**'Stress is when you wake up screaming and realise you haven't been to sleep.'**

**Anonymous**

**'If a man insisted always on being serious, and never allowed himself a bit of fun and relaxation, he would go mad or become unstable without knowing it.'**

**Herodotus (484BC-430BC)**

**'Those who do not have time for exercise will have to find time for illness.'**

**Carol Voderman**

**'A vigorous five-mile walk will do more good for an unhappy but otherwise healthy adult than all the medicine and psychology in the world.'**

**Anonymous**

**'Brain cells create ideas. Stress kills brain cells. Stress is not a good idea.'**

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Contact our office for a free **interview techniques guide**



*making a good impression*

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