



Exam Wellness

Taking exams can be stressful, but looking after your wellbeing can help you feel calmer, which may help you perform at your best. This factsheet offers strategies to help you prepare effectively, manage exam anxiety and take care of yourself throughout the exam period. Remember, exams are temporary and this challenging time will pass.

In the build up to the exam

Make an exam timetable: Write down your exam dates and plan your revision by working backwards to create a timetable. Spreading your revision over time allows you to prepare at a steady and realistic pace.

Take time to relax: Make sure to schedule regular breaks during your revision. If you notice your stress levels rising, take a short break and do something that helps you rest and recharge.

Set realistic goals: Long-term goals can be motivating, but they may also feel overwhelming and unachievable. Instead, break your revision into smaller, manageable tasks that you can complete, monitor and celebrate as you make progress.

Form a study group: Meeting up with people on your course may make revision feel more manageable. You can quiz each other, explain topics aloud, and check your understanding together.

Worried about forgetting information?: It's common to worry that your mind will go blank during an exam, particularly if you're feeling anxious. Anxiety can make it harder to retrieve information, even when you know it. Strengthen your memory and improve recall with our [Exam Revision: Memory and Recall](#) factsheet.

Keep perspective: Exams matter, but it's important to see them within a broader perspective. Alongside your studies, make time for what also brings value to your life, such as hobbies, wellbeing, family and friends. Remember that exams are not the only



measure of academic success, and there will be many other opportunities to demonstrate your knowledge.

Talk to someone you trust – Sharing how you're feeling with a friend or family member can really help. They might even be going through something similar, which can make you feel less alone.

Challenge unhelpful thoughts – Notice self-critical thoughts and try replacing them with more balanced ones. Instead of thinking, *"I'm terrible at exams,"* try, *"I've prepared for this, and each question is an opportunity to show what I know."* This can help build confidence. You might also find it helpful to visualise yourself staying calm and working through the exam successfully.

Avoid catastrophising – If your mind jumps to the worst-case scenario, gently question those thoughts. Ask yourself, *"How likely is this?"* or *"What evidence do I have for this?"* Writing your worries down and considering alternative outcomes can help you stay grounded in the present.

Practice breathing exercises: Breathe in slowly through your nose for four seconds, hold for four seconds, then breathe out gently through your mouth for six seconds. Repeat this a few times to help reduce feelings of anxiety.

Night before the exam

- Avoid studying too late into the evening. Give your brain time to rest and unwind.
- Don't try to learn new or difficult material at the last minute. Instead, keep things light by reviewing familiar content or practicing recall.
- Have a balanced meal and stay hydrated throughout the evening.
- Pack your bag with everything you need, or sort out your work station. Visit [Attending an exam](#) to check you have everything you need.



- Go to bed at a reasonable hour to get 7–9 hours of sleep. Avoid screens and caffeine in the hours leading up to bedtime.
- Set an alarm and a backup alarm to ensure you wake up with plenty of time.

Day of the exam

- Give yourself plenty of time to set up or go to the location; it is best not to feel rushed.
- Eat a nutritious breakfast, and drink plenty of water. Slow energy release foods such as oats or fruit can help your energy levels. A piece of dark chocolate can also be good!
- Avoid caffeine or other stimulants if they tend to make you feel more anxious.
- Wear something comfortable, or something that makes you feel positive.
- Try not to revise anything new.

During the exam

- Plan your time wisely: will you allocate more time to high-mark questions, or divide your time evenly?
- Keep an eye on the clock throughout the exam to stay on track.
- Read each question carefully, underlining or highlighting key details.
- Sketch out a rough draft, either mentally or on paper, before diving into your answers.
- If permitted, use any rough paper provided to jot down ideas or create a brief plan before answering.
- Reserve a few minutes at the end to review your answers and ensure you've included everything you intended.
- If you start to feel overwhelmed during an exam, close your eyes for a moment and picture a place that makes you feel safe and calm; it can be real or imagined. Engage your senses to think about what you can see, hear, feel, smell, or taste in that space. This can help bring you back to the present and steady your mind so you can continue.



After the exam

- Take a moment to congratulate yourself! You did it!
- Treat yourself to something enjoyable as a reward. Whether it's spending time with friends and family, or a hobby, make time to celebrate.
- Reflect on the experience. What went well? Is there anything you'd approach differently next time?
- Comparing answers with others can increase anxiety and cannot change the outcome. It's okay to step away from these conversations if they aren't helpful. Instead, acknowledge the effort you've put in and focus on looking after yourself. Remember, you've done your best.

For support with exam skills, please [access the Study Development Team](#)

If exams are affecting your wellbeing, please [access our wellbeing and welfare services](#)