



East London
NHS Foundation Trust

Exam Season

**TIPS FOR YOUR
WELL-BEING TO
MANAGE EXAM STRESS**

By

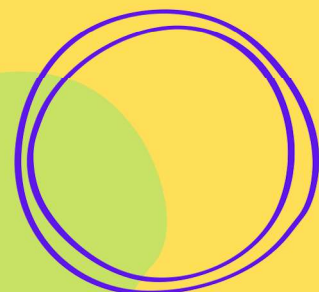
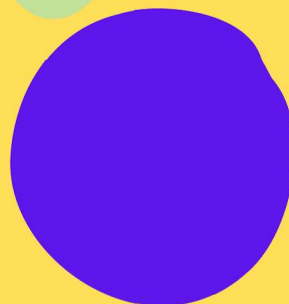
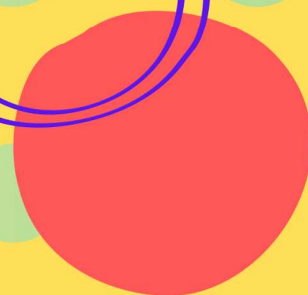
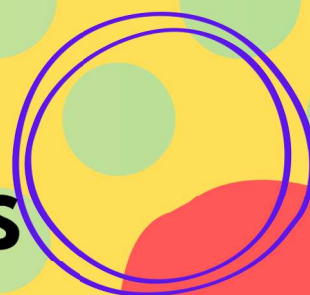
Mental Health Support Team

Dunstable

&

Mental Health Support Team

Leighton



Who can help me to manage stress?

This booklet is designed to help you understand stress and find some healthy ways to cope through the exam season.

Some people like to try apps to help themselves, others prefer to work with someone or attend a group. All options are great, as long as it helps you through your exams!

If you are experiencing any signs of poor mental health, you can;

- Speak to a teacher or adult that you trust - they might have some support you can access in school that you can try.
- Ask your school's pastoral team to refer you to the CAMHS Practitioner that comes regularly to your school for advice, resources and 1:1 or group sessions.
- On your web browser, Search "**CAMHS Bedfordshire**", complete the self-referral form on our website and send this back to our email on the form.



What causes Exam Stress?

Stress is a natural response to pressure. Some of your worries around exams could be around;

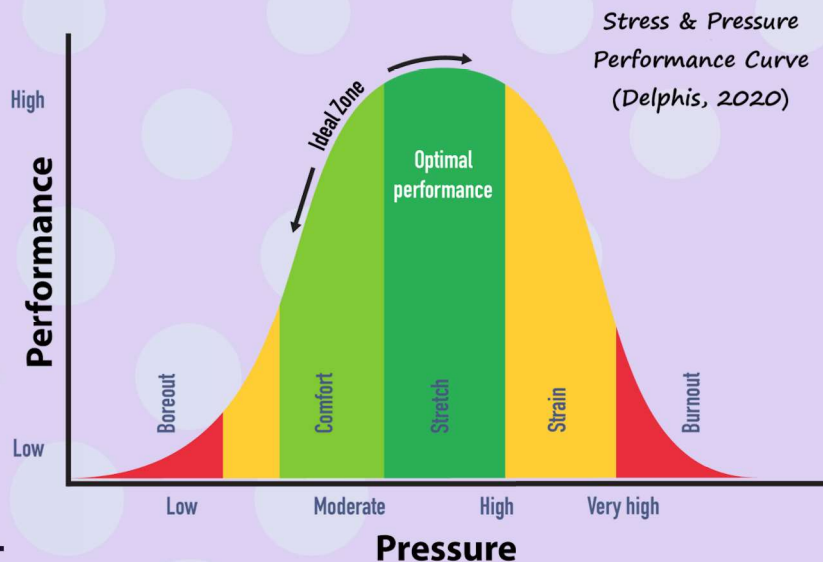
- **Fear of Failure** - we may see our self-worth as our test score, therefore put more pressure on ourselves.
- **Lack of preparation** - if we are anxious, we tend to avoid studying and become more distracted, which then increases our stress more.
- **Previous poor test scores** - we may already think we will fail so our negative mindset means we stop trying to do our best.
- **Pressure from others** - we may want to please others important to us or see their encouraging comments or ways to help us as more pressure.



Is Exam stress bad for me?

Experiencing some anxiety about your exams is common.

A small level of anxiety can help us to perform our best. But too much anxiety can do the opposite and affect our performance too.



Too much anxiety can cause us to feel emotionally uncomfortable, unwell in our bodies and behave in unhelpful ways.

Panicking

Headache

Feeling Dizzy or fainting

Confusion and forgetful

Increased breathing

Tense Muscles

Sadness

Heart Racing

Feeling sick

Exhausted

Needing to be alone

Overwhelmed & Helpless

Frustration

Sweating



What's the point?

What happens if I don't manage the stress?



If we don't manage our stress levels, we can get stuck in an unhealthy coping cycle. The more we begin to spiral downwards, the less we feel in control of our thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

How can I spot the signs of Stress?

TIP!
Use Daylio app to keep track of any signs you think cause you stress



If you notice these signs, then you might be feeling stressed. Spotting the signs early can help you to make changes to your lifestyle so you can manage better. The next few pages will give you some ideas to try.

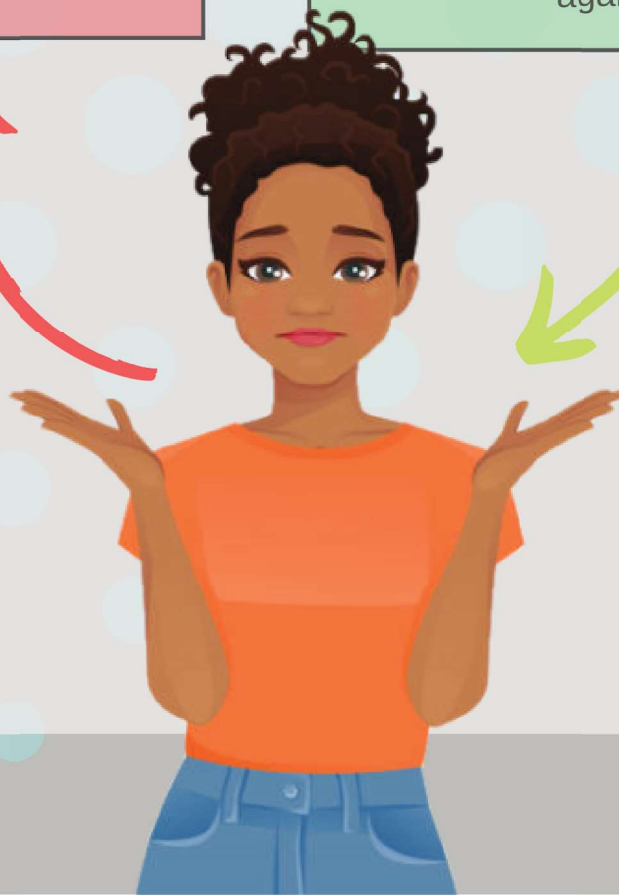
| Stress Checklist | |
|---|--|
| Worrying a lot | |
| Feeling tense | |
| Getting lots of headaches and stomach pains | |
| Not sleeping well | |
| Becoming irritable | |
| Losing interest in food or eating more than normal | |
| Not enjoying activities you previously enjoyed | |
| Negative and low in mood | |
| Feel hopeless about the future | |

I am worrying a lot

Anxious thoughts can make us think the worst is about to or will happen. Try to work through these thoughts in a different way by replacing your anxious, negative thoughts with positive helpful ones.

| Anxious/Negative |
|---|
| I'm going to fail |
| My mocks show I can't do it and won't achieve my result |
| If I don't pass, I'll be worth nothing |

| Positive/Helpful |
|--|
| I'm going to do my best |
| My mocks show what I already know and where I need to revise |
| If I don't pass, I can always try again |



TIP!

Download Clear Fear for more help on managing Exam anxiety



CLEAR FEAR

I'm getting lots of anxious thoughts

Anxious thoughts can be **hypothetical** (might happen) or **practical** (something we can problem-solve).

| Hypothetical | Practical |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| What if I fail? | I don't have time to study. |

To manage these thoughts, write them down and sort them into hypothetical or practical worries.

Hypothetical worries are harder to solve because they are in the future and may not yet have a practical solution. We can try to control hypothetical worries by planning "Worry time."

Worry time can help us to prioritise our important tasks by making time and space for our worries later in a planned and time-controlled way.

TIP!

Use Worry Tree app to help you schedule worry time



My Worry Is.....

What if I forget in the exam?

I will worry about this at _____ am/pm for _____ minutes

6pm for 20 minutes

Now I will focus on the present time by doing.....

Finish my lesson

I'm getting lots of anxious thoughts (cont...)

Practical worries are easier to work through because we can try to come up with solutions and make a step-by-step plan. For example, if you don't have time to study, you can organise your evening routine to fit this in and prioritise which subjects you need to revise for.

TIP!

You can try the Pomodoro Focus timer app to schedule your focus time and breaks



MAKE IT HAPPEN

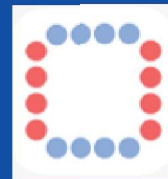
I feel sick, panicked, tense and get headaches

Physical symptoms of anxiety can be uncomfortable and a sign that the nervous system in our body is preparing us for the "fight" or "flight" response.

We can help our bodies slow down and relax again by taking, slow breaths to help us through panic and keep our thoughts calm.

I am okay,
this will
pass.

Use this Worry
Breath app to help
control and slow
your breathing



Practice relaxing
your muscles

You'll tense each muscle group



Try to visualize the muscle
tensing and relaxing



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ9PHsbt-m4>



I can't sleep and my appetite has changed

Feeling stressed can change our normal eating and sleeping habits. Focus on trying to improve these areas in your life.

Teen
Sleep
Hub

Good sleep might help improve your mental and physical health and can help the brain to retain information. Therefore try not to force yourself to revise more if you are tired - get a good night's sleep instead.

Take the **sleep quiz** and find advice and tips on improving your sleep at: <https://teensleephub.org.uk>

Eating regular meals, even if you are not hungry can help you to feel well and have energy during the exam period. Sometimes too many foods and drinks that are high in fats, sugar and caffeine (such as cola, sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips) can increase hyperactivity, irritability and mood swings.

Where possible eat a variety of foods and choose some healthy snacks.



I feel irritable and not enjoying anything right now

We might feel like this if we don't have a good life balance. Revising for your exams is important, but too much revision can leave you missing out on the activities you enjoy.



You can revise **and** do activities you enjoy, if you keep these activities well balanced throughout your week. If you are struggling to study or are overdoing it, take regular breaks to recharge your brain.



I feel low and depressed. I'm not coping.

TIP!
Download Mood Move to help you make some goals.



When the pressure gets too much, we can easily fall into a place where we just stop everything. If you have noticed changes for 2 weeks or more, such as;

- No longer socialising with family and friends
- Spending more time alone
- Feeling tearful and helpless
- Not enjoying activities you usually like to do
- Not eating regular meals
- No longer going to school or doing your work
- Sleeping too much (or too little)
- Not looking after yourself (not brushing your teeth, getting showered or dressed)

It's important to try and get back into a routine to build up your emotional strength. Work on the small things you can do and try activities that help you to smile, laugh, care for yourself and connect with others to feel those positive emotions again. And lastly, try some gentle exercise to release natural happy hormones.



What if my fear of failure actually becomes true?

Failure might provoke a strong negative emotion inside of you. Once these feelings pass, try to capture the positives as there will be plenty of these too.



**Fail =
First
Attempt
In
Learning**

Some positives of failure is;

- We learn more about ourselves and can focus on what we can do better
- We recognise who emotionally supports us
- We build resilience (the ability to bounce back mentally stronger after tough times)
- We can become inspired to look at all of our other options available to us

What if my fear of failure actually becomes true? (cont...)

Some people will not pass their exams or get the grades they need. But this doesn't mean that's the end of their career plans. There are always options, even if it takes us a little longer to achieve.

If you are really worried about failure, it might be helpful to sit down with family member or trusted adult to make a plan. This can help you to keep all of your options open.

| Describe the situation that causes your stress | |
|--|---|
| What is the worst outcome? | I fail my maths and English GCSEs |
| What is the best outcome? | I don't get to do any of my chosen courses. |
| What is the likely outcome? | I pass my exams go to 1 st choice college. |
| Using your worst and likely outcome, describe your | |
| Irrational thought | I will pass my exams and go to either my 1 st or 2 nd choice college |
| Rational thought | If I fail, my career choice will end before it starts. If I fail, I will look for a college that will accept my grade and resit my GCSE exams. |

MHST Dunstable & MHST Leighton CAMHS

**BEECH CLOSE RESOURCE CENTRE
5 BEECH CLOSE
DUNSTABLE
BEDFORDSHIRE
LU6 3SD**

TEL: 01582 707635

EMAIL: ELFT.MHST-DUNSTABLE-CAMHS@NHS.NET

EMAIL: ELFT.MHST-LEIGHTON-CAMHS1@NHS.NET

