

HOW TO SUCCEED IN EXAMS ...

1. Set yourself some goals ...

Create some targets to work towards - this will help motivate you and give you a sense of achievement rather than slogging through seemingly endless textbooks. These targets should be **positive, realistic** and **time limited**, e.g.

"To learn the names of chemicals in the periodic table and create a way of remembering this in the next hour before lunchtime".

Not *"try not to forget the names of the chemicals in the periodic table before the exam".*

Most people find that creating a revision timetable can help break down what you need to learn into bitesize chunks. Choose a method that suits you and avoid comparing yourself to your mates - everyone revises in different ways so don't get yourself wound up! Think about your own skills to help you plan a strategy. Once you have a timetable **stick to it**. If it doesn't work out first time, perhaps it was never realistic and achievable - try creating a new one that suits you better. Maybe ask a teacher/parent/Connexions Adviser to help you with this.

2. The importance of sleep ... Zzzzzz

Try to keep to a good sleep pattern and to get your 8 hours sleep. Sleep helps you to absorb what you have learnt. A good nights sleep before learning is also crucial as it helps to prepare your brain for the next days study.

Don't stay up all night studying and lie in bed until lunchtime - stick to your timetable and try to have some relaxation time (see below) before you go to bed to help you wind down. This way you will feel more in control and won't have to worry at night.

Sounds easier said than done huh? If you are really finding it difficult to sleep or you are stressing out try out point 6 below to help you get a better nights sleep. Have a chat with someone who understands the pressure you are under to help you get a better perspective. **Exam time will pass**, it won't last forever. Yes, exams are important, they can help you get a head start in your future but they are not the be all and end all. If they don't go to plan there are people on hand to give you advice about what next, such as a Connexions Personal Adviser.

3. Feed your mind ...

What you eat has a big impact on how you think and feel. A **brain friendly diet** includes wholegrain cereals, breads, pasta and other whole foods such as lentils, beans, nuts, seeds, fresh fruit and vegetables, eggs and fish, such as herring, mackerel, salmon or tuna. Yum! Have a proper breakfast and take breaks for healthy snacks. A few cups of coffee won't keep you going and too much caffeine won't help you sleep well. Another important factor is blood sugar levels so try to reduce your sugar intake and eat more unprocessed foods.

4. Reward yourself ...

Make sure you build in some breaks into your revision timetable. Have at 5/10min break every 30 minutes or so to help maintain concentration levels. If you start your timetable in the morning you will be finished your studies by evening and can then feel free to take some time out to relax and enjoy yourself - who says you have to lock yourself in your room for weeks before your exams? If you have stuck to your timetable you can see your mates without feeling guilty. Listening to music is also a good way of changing your mood and giving yourself a much needed boost!

Another good way to **take time out of your studies** is to do physical exercise. This increases blood flow to the brain and raises levels of chemical in the brain which have a positive affect on your mood making you feel good and creating a sense of **motivation**.

Imagine your success! Don't forget the greatest reward will hopefully be your exam results in August and getting that place at college or a job you want - but it's good to reward yourself along the way to give you something to work towards. This will help you keep up the good work. It's also important to be able to 'see' yourself achieving your goals - not just celebrating success. Try visualising yourself going into the exam hall feeling calm and in control, etc...

5. How to become more intelligent ...

You definitely will not be the only person feeling under pressure and a little bit of stress won't do you any harm - otherwise you would never motivate yourself to sit down and study! However, too much stress can stop you performing at your best, so learn to **recognise when you are feeling stressed**, you may feel:

- constantly tired and/or have difficulty getting to sleep or waking up
- forgetful
- unexplained aches and pains, headaches/migraines
- loss of appetite
- less interested in your usual activities/seeing friends
- increased anxiety/irritability and/or increased heart rate
- blurred vision and/or dizziness

So what can you do about it? The above suggestions in this factsheet will help you keep your stress levels under control and make all that revision seem manageable. However, if you still feel a bit overwhelmed then you need to do something about it before it impedes your performance. This is because stress and nerves/anxiety are emotions which can directly affect how our brains work, shutting down the logical, rational, thinking part of the brain called the cortex. In short, strong **emotions make us stupid!** This is not good if you're in an exam or trying to study! What you need to do is find a way to **calm yourself down**, relax and then you can put your thinking cap back on! The technique below is an excellent way to do this, but don't forget that exercise, whether running, swimming or just going for a walk is also a good way to de-stress.

- Settle comfortably somewhere that you won't be disturbed. Sit/lie with your hands by your side or resting in your lap and your legs uncrossed. Close your eyes. Concentrate on becoming aware of your feet, legs and arms wherever they are resting and your head against the pillow/cushion or back against the chair.
- Then begin to **make each out breath last longer than the in breath**. This works because the out breath stimulates the body's relaxation response, so by changing your breathing this way your body automatically begins to relax. A good way to do this is to breathe in to the count of 7 and out to the count of 11. Do this between 10-20 times knowing that you will relax more each time.
- Concentrate on counting, don't let your mind wander off and feel a welcome sense of calm flow in. Try and be aware of how less tense you feel just by relaxing your breathing and blocking out your worrying thoughts. If it's easier count to 3 and 5, the important thing is to make sure the out breath lasts longer than the in breath.
- You can make relaxing even more pleasant by creating a safe and special place when you close your eyes, such as imagining a beach or park, or if you relax through sports, imagine playing football or

swimming. Imagine yourself enjoying doing it - what can you *see, hear, smell and feel*? You can then re-visit this place in your mind when you want to relax quickly or when you begin to feel overwhelmed by your feelings.

Before or during the exam, if you feel like you're losing it just follow the breathing technique above, concentrating on breathing in to the count of 7 and out to the count of 11 to help you focus and think more clearly again. It's just a breathing exercise so no one will even know you are doing it!

Good Luck!