

Five tips for stress-free exams

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(PhysOrg.com) -- It's exam time, and for many students that means long days, late nights and lots of coffee. It's easy to let the anxiety get to you, so what can you do to cope with exam tension?

"Stress is normal, it's a natural response to the demands that are placed on you," says Kathy Patterson, health educator at the McMaster University's Campus Health Centre. "But negative stress - that which prevents you from focusing or maintaining a [healthy lifestyle](#) - can be quite harmful."

Signs that you are too stressed can range from physical symptoms, such as head and muscle aches, to emotional and behavioural symptoms, such

as eating too much or too little and feeling irritable. They can also include difficulty concentrating, [forgetfulness](#) and disorganization.

Patterson has five tips to help combat negative stress and ensure you have the best chance at acing your exams:

1) Study smart - Cramming is a sure way to send anxiety through the roof, and you generally don't gain much from last minute studying. If you don't understand your course material, get help from a classmate or talk with your professor. "Time management is key," says Patterson. "Structure your study time, set priorities and prepare study notes."

2) Catch some Z's - Sleep has major effects on learning, memory and efficiency, but it's often overlooked during [exam](#) season. Be sure to get between seven and eight hours of rest each night, and avoid common sleep stealers: caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

3) Eat right - There is a link between food and [stress](#), but most people find their eating habits worsen during times of tension. "The brain doesn't store glucose, so we need to eat to keep it running effectively," says Patterson, who recommends maintaining a well-balanced diet, keeping hydrated and making breakfast a priority.

4) Exercise - It's hard enough to keep up an exercise regimen at the best of times, let alone during exams, but physical activity can actually help reenergize the body and keep you from burning out. Patterson recommends anything that gets you moving: going to the Pulse, jogging, dancing or organizing a game of pickup hockey or basketball.

5) Take some "me" time - It's easy to forget about yourself when you're trying to memorize the periodic table, but you can't neglect your own needs. Take a few minutes to listen to music, take a walk or watch that hilarious video on YouTube. "Laughter is your body's natural stress-

release mechanism," says Patterson. "It relaxes your muscles, helps you breathe deeper and lowers your blood pressure."

More information: There are a number of useful resources on campus that can help you de-stress. The Campus Health Centre offers free access to [yoga, pilates and meditation videos](#), the Centre for Student Development is available for personal and academic counseling as well as disability support and the Chaplaincy Centre is running an exam drop-in every night during the exam period in MUSC 230, complete with free cookies and warm drinks.

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Provided by McMaster University

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