

Worrying about exams is normal. You need some level of worry or stress to motivate you to study and to strive for your aspirations and goals. However, too much stress can limit your motivation and stop you from performing at your best, or at all!

It is important to be aware of your personal stress response, your triggers and warning signs, and have strategies to manage your stress. This is particularly important in the lead up to and during exams.

Having a “toolkit” of coping strategies pre-planned and ready to use is a great idea. Your toolkit may include a range of mental or physical activities that work for you in reducing your stress response. Be aware of your stress triggers, notice and monitor your stress response, and implement strategies that will help you manage.

If you are struggling to manage your worry and stress levels then you should think about seeking help. There are links to further information and support below.

Signs that you are not managing your worry and stress may include:

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Persistent negative thoughts
- Aches and pains, persistent rapid heartbeat
- Irritability or short temper
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Not sleeping well
- Procrastinating
- Isolating yourself from others
- Using alcohol or drugs to relax

Manage worry and stress during exams

Exam Tip 1 – Stay connected. Talk to other students, or study with others if this works for you, and make time for friends and family. Avoid too much time with others who are showing signs of stress!

Exam Tip 2 – Take control of your day. Get up and go to bed at the same time each day and plan your day and your weeks in the lead up to exams. Have a good Exam Plan!

Exam Tip 3 – Work hard, stop, and recover. Plan your study in ‘shifts’ that are no more than two hours long. Thirty-minute shifts are good! Let your brain and body have a complete break between shifts.

Exam Tip 4 – Schedule ‘me’ time every day. Do something every day that makes you feel good and helps you relax. Listen to music, watch a funny movie, have a nice bath, or play with your pet.

Exam Tip 5 – Be physically healthy. Eat well and regularly, and get eight hours of sleep each night. Take care of any health issues – the GP is your friend! Schedule time for exercise.

Exam Tip 6 – Believe in yourself. Expect the best of yourself. Have high expectations of your memory and recall. Act as if you have a good memory, tell yourself, “I have a good memory”. Do what is needed to make it happen!

Exam Tip 7 – Notice your thoughts. Observe how your thoughts are linked to your feelings. Write your thoughts down. How important are they? Schedule ‘worry time’. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones!

Exam Tip 8 – Be present. Notice the sights and sounds around you. Take your attention from your thoughts and focus on the here and now. Let your thoughts drift by. Just a moment of ‘being present’ will give your mind and body a much-needed break from worry.

Exam Tip 9 – Focus on your values, strengths, and goals. What’s important to you? What are you good at? What do you want to achieve? Remind yourself of your values and goals regularly!

Exam Tip 10 – Energise. What sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and movements give you energy and help you concentrate? Have a sensory plan for study and create associations that may be useful during exams.

Exam Tip 11 – Relax. What sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and movements help you relax? Try relaxation and breathing techniques. Practice these before and after study sessions, and use them during exams.

Exam Tip 12 – Be kind to yourself. Encourage yourself, don't criticise yourself. Treat yourself the way you would treat a friend. Take care of you!

Exam Tip 13 – Focus on what you can control. Focus on exam preparation and stress management. Let the other stuff go!

Exam Tip 14 – Get help. In the first instance, you can contact JCU Student Equity and Wellbeing. Alternatively, you could contact your GP, a mental health professional, Lifeline (phone 13 11 14) or *headspace* (if you are under 25, phone 1800 650 890).

Further information and support

- The JCU Learning Centre website offers advice for preparing for exams and managing stress <https://www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre/exams>
- JCU Careers and Employment has a dedicated learning module for managing stress and pressures <http://www.jcucareers.info/module/workplace-resilience/>
- Stress Study Busters information sheet https://www.jcu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/202717/Study-stress-busters.pdf
- How not to cope with exam stress <https://www.topuniversities.com/blog/how-not-cope-exam-stress>
- reachout.com 'Coping strategies for exam stress' <https://au.reachout.com/articles/coping-strategies-for-exam-stress>
- Look for the most current Exam Plan booklet on the JCU website.

Student Equity and Wellbeing

James Cook University

Web <https://www.jcu.edu.au/student-equity-and-wellbeing>

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