

Managing Exam Stress



Sitting exams at school, college and university can be a very stressful time, so we've created some top tips to help you feel calm and in control.

Below are some tips for dealing with the stress and anxiety that can occur:

- Write down your worries - then throw the paper away or give it to someone you trust
- Go for a walk or do some exercise
- Listen to calming music
- Play a game to take your mind off your worries and stress for a bit
- Remember that everyone's different - try not to compare yourself to your friends.

Having TS can be especially difficult when it comes to exam time – that's true of school, college and university! We'll use school as example but any of the suggestions below might help at school, college or university.

There are things your school can do to help you at exam time when stress may be high and tics may be more frequent or perhaps more severe. You and your parents should speak with the school (as much in advance as possible) and work out which suggestions are possible for the school to provide and which ones suit you. Some of these suggestions may not work for you or you may have your own suggestions – please share them with us!

Suggestions you might like to think about using:

- Make sure the school staff have some personalised information about your needs and that you have TS and how they should respond – this would be especially important if you are going to be having exams where there might be invigilators (someone who oversees the exam). Sometimes invigilators are from outside your school and they don't know you and may not know anything about TS!
- Make staff aware of your tics and how you prefer them to respond (e.g., ignore tics)
- Ask the school if they can provide extra time and/or a separate room for examinations or assessments
- If you think it would help before being in an exam room/hall find out if it's possible to sit to the side of the room. Some people with TS find being at the front or centre of the classroom/exam hall makes them feel their tics are more noticeable and embarrassing
- If you have tics which are socially inappropriate (e.g. spitting) it may be necessary to brainstorm possible solutions; e.g., a spitting tic could be resolved by having a tissue to spit into. Having a fiddle toy/squeezy toy - you would need to make sure that the school would allow you to take something like this into the exam hall
- Tics can get worse when tired, take regular breaks if possible, get up walk around – get the blood pumping around your body – and back to the brain!
- Talk to your parents and teachers very frequently to tell them how you are feeling and if there is any worsening of tics or any new tics that have appeared

- The school should agree a named person as point of contact for you to go to discuss your needs, especially if you felt stressed or anxious
- If you found it helpful, could the school provide a safe area for you to go to release tics?
- Make sure you eat well (not too much junk food!) during exam time – your body needs fuel and will burn up more calories through stress – eat healthier if possible – lots of fruit and vegetables, protein and drink enough water!
- Sleeping. If you can, get rest and sleep as well as you can. Have a break from Facebook and social media – avoid screen-time (phones, TV, laptops, ipads, consoles) into the evening/night when your body needs to rest.
- Exercise – take the dog for a walk – fresh air, being outside – all reduce stress.
- Before going in to the exam hall and during the exam – if you feel stressed try and slow your breathing down and try and reassure yourself with a phrase like ‘relax, concentrate - it’s going to be okay’

You can read Charlotte Rushton’s blog about school and exams in ‘Testing Tics’, available on our website:

<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/blog-32-.html>

With regards to general advice for revision and exam time you can find lots of information:

Childline have produced a video with advice and a booklet about dealing with exam and revision stress.

Remember, exams are important – but they’re not the only way to a successful future. Lots of people achieve success in life without doing well in school exams.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=eLe43tUgGkA

Booklet: <https://www.childline.org.uk/globalassets/info-and-advice/school-work-and-college/school-and-college/exam-stress/beat-exam-stress.pdf>

The CALM website also has the advice below:

- Give yourself a break – you can only absorb information for so long before it becomes confusing. You’re much more likely to remember stuff if you cut in plenty of breaks, even if it’s just making a cup of tea.
- Try not to eat too much junk food and don’t drink alcohol, but do plan something you love to do when the exams have finished.
- Stress messes with people’s sleep patterns. Take time to relax before going to bed, that way, when you do hit the sack, you’ll fall asleep, rather than lie there worrying about all the work you’ve got to do.
- Keep yourself busy. When you’re not studying, do things you enjoy. Treat yourself.
- Visit their website for more information: https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/exam-stress/?gclid=CJ2A4_ylzECFSPItAodU3wAEA

Useful resources:

The Mix - The UK’s leading support service for young people: <http://www.themix.org.uk/work-and-study/study-and-exam-tips/exam-stress-1241.html>

Young Minds - The UK’s leading charity committed to improving the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blogs/exam-self-care/>

BBC - Advice on helping you get through life: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1HsY1X8ySjKBMVXPVCbP4qH/exam-stress>

Ultimately, don’t lose sight of the fact that there is life after exams. This level of stress is NOT going to last forever, once exams are over you may find that many of the tics reduce and you should congratulate yourself for getting through a time which EVERYONE finds stressful!