The exam period is a time when stress levels are higher than usual. Stress can be positive and help you stay motivated and focused, however, too much stress can be unhelpful and it can make you feel overwhelmed, confused, exhausted and edgy. On this page, you can find resources to help you prepare for and manage the stress around exams. You can check out some more Mind Smart Guides for resources on navigating uni life here: https://student.unsw.edu.au/mindsmart

Students on exams

Students share their stories and strategies on exams stress. [Duration 2:18] Transcript

Understanding exam stress

Laura Kampel, a counsellor from Counselling and Psychological Services, UNSW, discusses the impact of exam stress on your work. [Duration 2:56] Transcript

Expert strategies

Laura provides some helpful strategies to help manage exam stress. [Duration 2:20] Transcript

Student strategies

Tom and Carolyn share the ways in which they manage their exam stress. [Duration 2:13] Transcript

Summary

To build resilience in times of stress, you need to reflect on what you already do and what areas you could change. Areas to consider are lifestyle, study skills and self-regulation strategies.

A balanced lifestyle with a good diet, sleep, exercise and social activities are the key to a healthy brain and body. Students that push themselves (e.g. by cramming and staying up late) don't realise that this can result in an increased sense of anxiety and an inability to retain the information and concentrate. Cramming also doesn't help with the retrieval of the information in the long-term.
In addition to a balanced lifestyle, you can improve your performance in exams by adopting strategies that help you calm your body and centre your mind, like mindfulness or relaxation techniques. Also, monitor how you talk to yourself. Identify unhelpful and helpful self-talk and try not getting caught in negative talk-loops. Practice and learn these techniques before the exam.

After the exam, make sure you reward yourself, and consider what worked and what didn't in helping you keep on top of the stress. If things didn't go to plan, check out the 'After the exam' section in the resource page of this module.

If you'd like more information, please phone UNSW Counselling and Psychological Services on 02 9385 5414.

Resources

Coping strategies for exam anxiety  (PDF)

Resilience

Stop breathe and think  (meditation app)

Self reflection space

Reflect on these questions or look at the attached document: Coping strategies for exam anxiety.

1. Do you find yourself feeling stressed or anxious around exam time?
2. On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you in managing exam anxiety?
3. What increases your confidence and ability to cope with exam stress?
4. What decreases your confidence and ability to cope with exam stress?
5. What changes could you make that would make a difference in coping?
6. What steps do you need to take to implement those changes?

- lifestyle/wellness, e.g. sleep, nutrition, exercise
- study/time management, e.g. chunking tasks, turn off social media
- relaxation/stress management, e.g. controlled breathing, body scan, mindfulness apps
- cognitive/thinking strategies, e.g. recognise unhelpful thoughts, use positive self-statements.

Feedback

Please give us some feedback on the module

Contacts and urgent help

If you'd like more information, please phone UNSW Counselling and Psychological Services on 02 9385 5414 or find more help here.

See next
Self-help videos and guides
Mind smart

Find exam dates, timetables, rules and location maps
Exam details

Tips for your exams
Exam study tips

Mind Smart guide to exams with less stress
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https://student.unsw.edu.au/exam/stress