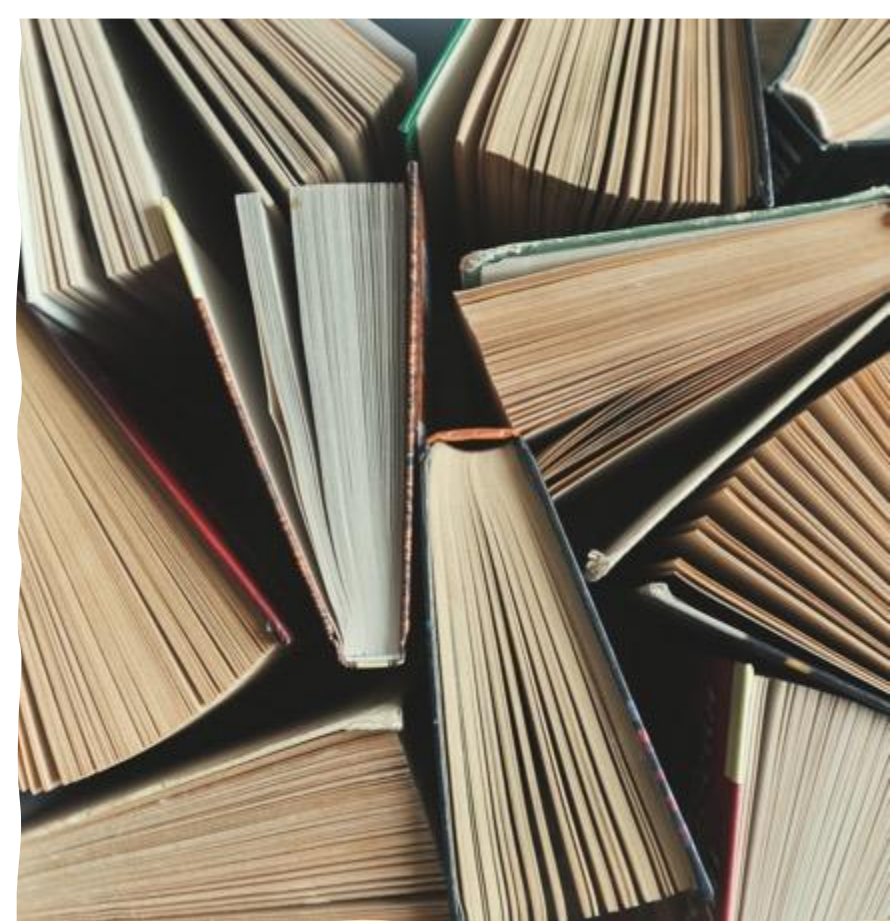


Coping
with Exam
Stress,
a
workbook:



What's inside:

- What is exam stress?
- How does stress affect us?
- Why do we worry?
- What can help?
- How do you learn?
- Fighting back...
- Looking after your mental health.



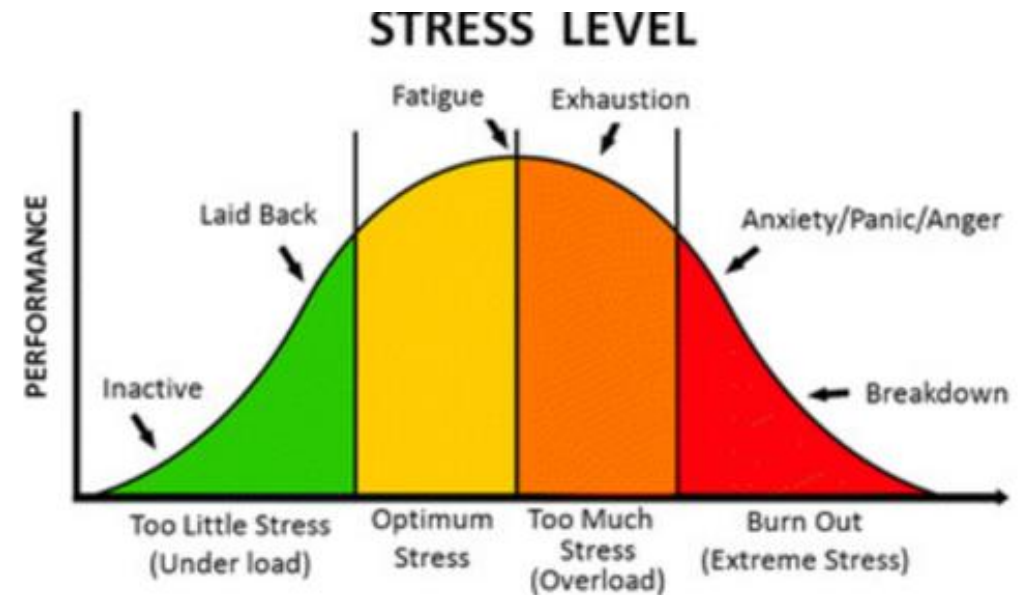
Exam stress & worrying about exams is normal, and it can affect us in different ways:

- We are supposed to feel stressed about exams. Some stress and anxiety (fears about the future) is important to improve our exam performance. Feeling an optimum level of stress helps remind us to revise, it increases our energy, motivation and ability to focus better on what we need to do.

- However, too much stress or worry can have the opposite affect. It can trigger a 'fight/flight/freeze' fear response in our brains and bodies, and instead of being able to focus on our work, we can become frozen and feel stuck, or unable to think clearly, find it harder to remember or concentrate, and/or we can avoid doing the work we need to do and procrastinate.

- This kind of stress can make us feel lots of other feelings at the same time - like feeling irritable and angry, sad, tired, low, or even a change our appetite. It can increase our negative thoughts about ourselves or others, and increase our anxiety about other things not related to exams.

- Schools use exams to measure students progress, but it's important to remember exams are a blunt tool to measure ability! They are not easy for everyone, we all learn in different ways. People can be very smart and not be good at exams.



(Stress & Pressure Performance Curve, Delphi)

On a scale of 1-10, rate your anxious feelings about your exams. Is this the same for all subjects or just a few?

When you think of your exams what thoughts come into your head? Write them down quickly here. Are there any positive comments (for instance, I'll be able to show what I know)?



Most people worry at some point during the day, at least 1 or 2 worries per day is common.

Why worry 

People have different reasons - here are some common examples. Tick which ones apply to you or add your own:

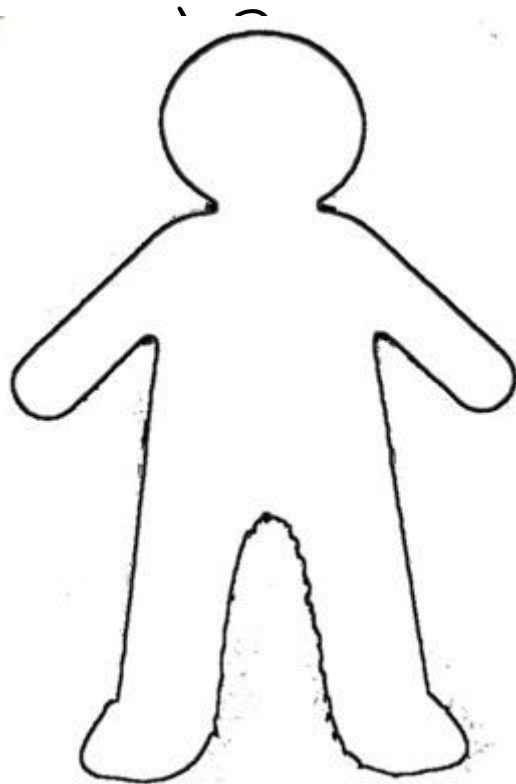
- Worried about failing
- Worried about not getting the mark you want
- Fear of disappointing yourself, teachers or loved ones.
- Worried about the impact on future"My whole life depends on this"
- Fear of embarrassment or shame.
- Worried about not meeting expectations.
- Fear of being seen as not smart.
- Hate making mistakes.
- Fear of not being perfect.
- I worry about everything anyway
- I don't know why I'm worried
- Fear of not being loved
- Fear of others being better, competing with my friends.
- Everything else is going wrong so this will too
- When other people are stressed, I get stressed too.
- Other worries like.....

- _____



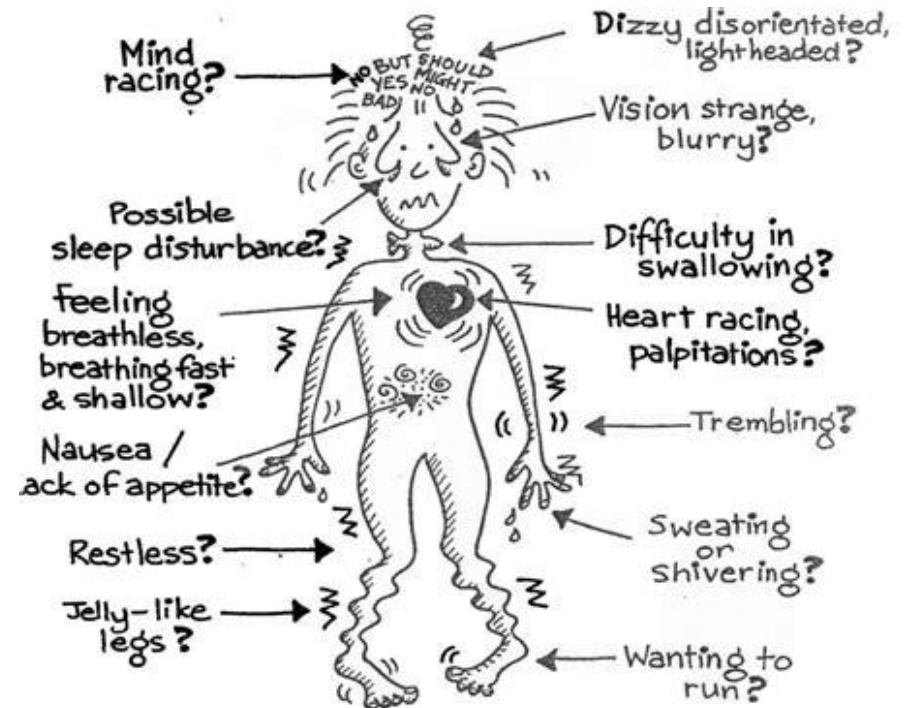
If your exam stress was an image or a character, what would it look like?
Draw it below:

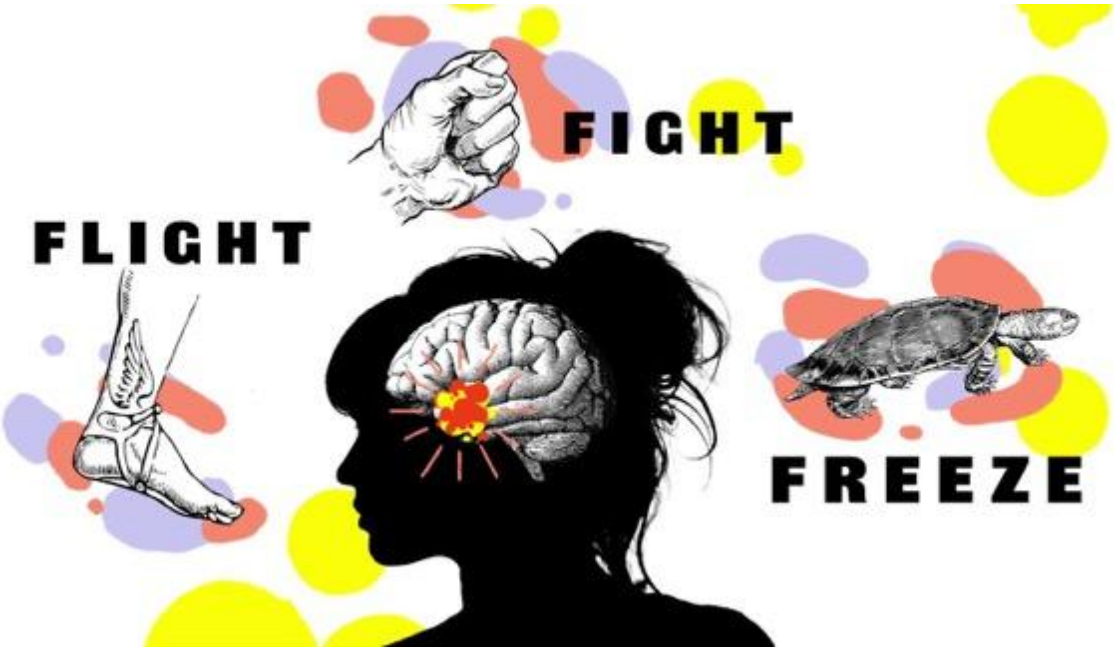
What does stress feel like in your body (add to this diag



What stress can feel like:

- **Breath:** Shallow, quick breathing, shortness of breath, holding your breath. Pain in chest. Feeling like you can't breathe.
- **Heart:** Racing/Pounding/Tight Chest
- **Hands/Feet:** Clenched/sweaty/cold
- **Legs:** Jiggly, wanting to run, restless, numb
- **Stomach:** Nausea, pain, constricted, bloated, wanting comfort food or sugary food.
- **Head:** Headaches/Migranes/Dry Mouth/Light-headed or dizzy
- **Body:** Tight muscles/Exhaustion/trembling/Needing toilet more
- **Brain:** Foggy, hard to concentrate, forgetful, confusion, exhausted, mind racing.





A worrying thought can act as a 'false alarm' and impact your body by making it think you are in danger. For instance - making your breath shallow and more frequent and your heart beat faster. This then sends an alarm message back to your brain that there is something wrong, increasing your anxiety and triggering your fight, flight, freeze response. The fight, flight, freeze survival response is really useful when you are faced with a tiger in the wild: The 'thinking part' of your brain (the frontal cortex) is turned off so that you put all your energy into dealing with the tiger as quickly as possible. But it is not useful when it is a 'false alarm', a stressful thought or worry, and you are not actually in immediate danger.



False alarms can create a body/brain spiral which can make you feel worse.



You can STOP the stress cycle by using your body to help alleviate the symptoms and to send a message back to your brain to STOP. Breathing and grounding techniques, or just moving your body, can all help your brain relax and understand you are OK and not in danger, bringing your frontal cortex or the 'thinking part' of the brain BACK online.

3 Ways to overcome the Freeze Response:

1. Breathe	2. Ground	3. Shake
Take long, slow, deep breaths	Ground yourself in reality	Move your body
In through the nose, out through the mouth.	Who am I? Where am I? What can I see? What can I hear?	Practise TRE (trauma release exercises)
4-7-8 pattern	Hold a familiar object	Shake it out!
This tells your brain it is safe to relax.	This helps you to stay present and mindful.	This helps your body release the trauma.

What can help?



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL:
Revision Techniques. Being organised. Planning ahead. Think what works best for you so you feel prepared. Asking teachers for support if needed.



Taking time out. No brain can work all the time. Taking brain breaks is very important. What helps you relax? Imagine being in a safe calm space.



Making time to do things you love. Hugs/connecting with loved ones/watching your favourite tv show/listening to music.



Use strategies to calm yourself down: Breathing techniques/5/4/3/2/1 grounding techniques/walking or other exercise/meditation/speaking to someone you trust/drawing or journaling your thoughts.

What does your calm/safe space look like? Sketch it here:



What kind of learner are you?

Visual

You learn by looking. Make posters, notes, colourful flash cards.

Use colour coded timetables. Draw maps and spider diagrams.

Auditory

You learn by listening. Record yourself reading notes and listen back. Listen to podcasts. Listen to music playlists.

Kinesthetic

You learn by doing. Try lots of practice papers. Have movement breaks while you work.

Use flashcards.

Verbal

You learn by talking. Go to group revision sessions or create study groups with friends where you test each other. Read notes aloud.

'Teach' friends or family about your subject.

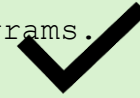


When or where do you revise best?
Make a routine!

Top tips to beat procrastination:



• **Prioritise Tasks:** make a list of everything you have to do and put the most important at the top. Use charts/checklists/colourful diagrams.



• Avoiding things that are hard usually makes them worse. Dip a toe in the water. Try a little bit (say 5 mins) at first. Sometimes a small step forward can help you feel more positive.



• Break things into smaller chunks and do a little bit at a time. Start with something you find easier.



• Get into the ring & have your boxing gloves on. Think of times where you've had a challenge and overcome it. Visualise yourself getting it done and how it might feel to WIN against that part of you who is using delay tactics.



WORDS MATTER: Positive self talk...versus unhelpful self talk (or learning to ignore your inner critic)

Unhelpful inner critic talk - what do you say to yourself that's unhelpful?:



Positive affirmations - what could you

say to yourself to be kind?

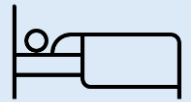
- *Feelings come and go - this shall pass
- *I'm a good person. I can do this. I'm OK.
- *I'm really good at _____
- *I've already achieved the following_____
- *Everyone is different, I do not need to compare myself to others.
- *I'm going to do my best.
- *This is a challenge and I am brave.
- *
- *

Strategies for calm:

- Focus on what you can control...not what you can't.
- Practise your breathing.
- Relaxation exercises like the body scan: Lie down in a relaxing space and tense and release your muscles in turn while you take deep breaths, start at your feet & finish with your head.
- Do physical activity to help release happy chemicals into your brain - dancing, walking, running....
- Use your senses to ground yourself in the moment - press your hands onto the table/feet into the floor/notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can



Top tips for
looking
after your
mental
health:



SLEEP at least
8/9hrs a night.
Keep to a regular
schedule.



EAT healthy food,
at regular times
to optimise brain
power!



EXERCISE
regularly -
physical fitness
impacts on your
mental fitness!



CONNECT with
friends and
family.

BIG PICTURE THINKING....How much will these results matter in 2yrs, 5yrs, 10yrs?... It can be hard to remember to put exams into context. People can be successful in life without getting good grades. Exams are not a good measure for everyone.

REMEMBER TO PRACTISE your positive affirmations and relaxation techniques. Practise helps to develop good habits. Remember other positive things that you are good at, that do not depend on exams. Your exams do not have to define you.

Sometimes our feelings
overwhelm us, but it's
important to remember, they
come and go - like waves.
Your anxiety or your feelings
are just a part of you...they

Other helpful resources:

- Try apps to help schedule revision times/revise
- Apps to stop you checking/using your phone which may be a distraction: Forest
- Can't sleep - try <https://teensleephub.org.uk>
- Kooth <https://www.kooth.com>
- Youngminds <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/exam-stress/>

Watch other young people talking about their experiences here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLIYlmSh6r4&t=1s>

