

5. Action Plan to Counter Exam Stress

- **Expect the presence of stress hormones:** we need them to be attentive and ready for the challenge of exams. However, if stress stays around for long periods, you can do something about it.
- **Physical exercise** is often one of the first victims of the exam period. Keep going to the gym, walking, cycling etc. Exercise helps switch off the production of the stress hormones, relaxes tense muscles, enables us to think more clearly, and provides time when you are not concentrating completely on exams. It doesn't have to be strenuous or overly time consuming; try walking vigorously from your accommodation to university.
- **Get as much sleep as you can.** Try to resist working late into the night fearing there are not enough hours in the day to study effectively. It is important to protect your sleep hours as the right quality and quantity of sleep is essential for our physical and emotional health. Leave space between revising and going to bed so you don't take exam pressures with you. Have some time for yourself before going to bed – talk to friends, listen to calming music, use relaxation techniques, read a book.
- **Find a relaxation technique that works for you.** Consider attending our Meditation group, you might also want to try the MP3 downloads on our website.
- **Spend time on interests not related to your course or exams;** allow yourself a night out with friends or a few hours at the weekend to relax. This will allow you to realise there is life beyond exams and help you return to study feeling more refreshed.

- **Reward yourself;** exam preparation is tough – give yourself a reward every few days like watching your favourite programme or eating your favourite food – try including it as a part of your revision timetable!
- **Create support networks;** take time out to talk with friends and family. Arrange to meet in natural breaks such as during lunchtimes or evening meals. Agree to not talk about exams. This will allow you to think about other concerns and interests.
- **Know how you study best** and plan accordingly. Be honest and realistic about how long you can effectively concentrate for, 45 – 60 mins, and allow short (10-15 min) breaks between each period of study. This helps build a ‘wall of knowledge’ with each study period being a brick in the wall. Or try the Pomodoro Technique: cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique
- **Time management skills;** training available from Skills@Library library.leeds.ac.uk/skills
- **Avoid large quantities of alcohol and caffeine** as a means of dealing with stress or keeping going.
- **Eat a good diet;** often during stressful periods we are tempted to reach for the fast food like pizzas, chips and chocolate. Your body, however, needs the restorative power of proteins, complex carbohydrates, vitamins and fibre. See also Card 7 on Food and Mood.

See the Counselling and Wellbeing website for helpful online resources on Exam Stress: students.leeds.ac.uk/counsellingandwellbeing