Making stress your friend at exams

By

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Very few people like doing exams, and most feel stress doing them. Exam stress itself isn’t a problem – it can spur you on to prepare well and be focused, before and during the exam. Too much stress, though, can lead to getting stuck – “it’s all too hard and overwhelming to do anything”; or doubting yourself – “I can’t do anything”; or other “freaking out” ways of coping that get in the way. Here are some ideas to reduce stress, and make it your friend at exam time

Prepare
Use that stress to motivate you to regularly take notes, practise, read, discuss, revise and do homework in the weeks and months before the exam. In doing this you often repeat what you learn, and more deeply understand it – and this greatly helps with memory and coping in the heat of the exam

Reduce stress
Study can be stressful enough but if you have extra stresses going on, of course that makes it harder. Is it possible to get rid of some of those stresses? Can you get help and support with these? Also look after yourself with good diet and sleep, and take some time each day and week to unwind and reverse the effect that constant stress has on the body and mind – to keep everything working as well as it can.

Watch out for the “I’m hopeless and can’t do it stress monster”
This stress monster is on the lookout for any sign of “weakness” - e.g. a mistake, a blank mind or moment of confusion – and will pounce on you: saying “you are hopeless and you may as well give up now!” If you believe this you will feel worse, more stressed, and probably have more “weakness.”

Don’t believe this monster. Instead tell yourself that it is normal to feel blank and confused at times in an exam, particularly in a challenging exam (and some are designed to be just that!) Reassure yourself that what you have learned and your problem solving skills haven’t simply disappeared from your brain – you just need to relax and take a little time or thought to find and use them. Maybe take some slow breaths and write down on scrap paper whatever thoughts you have – and the answers will start to come. Or go to the next question and come back to the challenging one, and you will be more ready to tackle it.

Need more help?
Different things work for different people, so if the advice here isn’t enough or not quite right for you, contact the TAFE Counselling and Career Service at your campus. Check their hours of operation, there is a service at every campus! We will work with you to find solutions that work. Please also be aware that in cases of disability (including mental health, ADHD, and learning disabilities) and misadventure at the time of the exam, special allowances can sometimes be made in how and when you do the exam, and how your exams are marked. You are welcome to discuss this with the Counsellors or Disability staff.