

## Exam anxiety

Very few people enjoy exams – for most of us they are a source of apprehension and anxiety. Sometimes the anxiety can be quite paralysing and stop people performing well. This leaflet offers some suggestions which may help you reduce or cope with anxiety. Some may seem obvious, but when we are under pressure we can forget basic ways to lessen our fears.

### Anxious feelings you may have about exams

The way in which you think and feel about exams can increase or reduce your levels of anxiety. Many people feel some of the following:

- my future depends on getting good grades
- everyone else knows the subject – I know nothing
- my family, friends and teacher will be let down if I fail – I'll let myself down
- I just can't face sitting down to revise
- I think I do a lot of revision but I always end up feeling I know nothing
- I am frightened my mind will go blank in the exam room
- I hate the idea of being judged.

Dwelling on these thoughts can increase our anxiety. We can end up feeling powerless and useless in the grip of some 'monster' which knows all our weaknesses and failings and can destroy us in the exam room.

### What you can do to lessen anxiety

Some of the suggestions mentioned below can help you put things into perspective and give you a structure to start to regain some sense of control when facing exams.

### Question negative or circular thoughts

The way to start dealing with these feelings is to understand something of where they come from, examine them realistically and finally try to put them to one side so you can concentrate on getting on with your work. You can allocate a time later to think about them, if you feel it is important to do so.

### Understand yourself as a learner

- be aware of the time of day, and the place, where you work best
- be realistic about how long you can work productively – break your revision up into small chunks
- understand the type of learner you are – do you respond to visual or oral presentations, does it help to work with other people?
- if you constantly find yourself getting distracted, ask yourself why you're allowing this to happen.

### Organise your revision

- make a revision programme well in advance of your exams
- be realistic in judging how much time you can spend covering the syllabus
- build in free times to either relax or to catch up if you fall behind
- when revising, start by planning how much of the subject you are going to cover at any one time
- it is better to study in short concentrated bursts and have short breaks, than to study for long periods
- if you find yourself daydreaming, say 'stop' to yourself and try to refocus and concentrate; if you can't, take a break
- separate the place where you work from the place you relax, removing distractions, such as the TV
- try to actively engage when revising, making notes and then cut these notes down to 'trigger' words or phrases; this can help you recall a great deal of information in the exams; absorbing information passively will make it more difficult to remember
- use different methods of revising to keep your mind active; don't just read on your own, try revising with friends, explaining to each other different topics; try doing 'mock'

exams, under exam conditions to get used to them. Look at past papers to see what questions come up

- be honest with yourself; if you don't understand some aspect of your work, ask for help

### When it comes to the exams...

- prepare yourself in advance – check where the exam room is; you'll be less likely to panic
- it may help to remember, when eaten up with fear and loathing, that you may have a choice as to whether you do these exams; deferral could be an option; check with the achievement officers for details
- try not to wind yourself up by detailed discussions with other students before or after the exam
- remember that most people get an initial 'rush' of anxiety when they enter the exam room and see the paper. This will pass if you let it – try to stay as calm as possible and then focus on beginning to deal with the exam
- keep in mind that some stress can help you perform better

### Other ways of helping yourself

- make time to socialise and take exercise, walking, sport, swimming, dancing, etc; this can help you manage anxiety
- take care of yourself – eat properly (lots of fruit and vegetables); try not to live on coffee and cigarettes!
- avoid excessive use of alcohol, which is a depressant and can affect your memory
- read our 'Relaxation' leaflet!

### SilverCloud – Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

SilverCloud is available to all registered students and staff, a free online self-help service to help anyone experiencing a variety of emotional challenges.

SilverCloud offers secure, immediate access to online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) programmes tailored to your specific needs to support you in setting yourself goals, problem solving and building up your life skills. These programmes have demonstrated high improvement rates for depression and

anxiety.

There are currently four programmes available to students and staff:

- Anxious thoughts and feelings
- Depression and low mood
- Stress
- Body image

Sign up to SilverCloud today at: **mdxwellbeing.silvercloudhealth.com/signup**

### Additional help

If you find that you are still extremely anxious about your exams, that you cannot get started and feel gripped by fear, or if you are worried about having other symptoms, such as not being able to sleep, eat or suffer from severe headaches, then don't suffer alone, help is at hand. You may find it helps to talk to someone about your difficulties. Friends and family can help, or it may help to talk to a counsellor (see below).

If you are worried by physical symptoms or continue to find eating and sleeping difficult, it may help to see your GP.

You may find it useful to attend an 'Exam Anxiety' workshop, which are held on most campuses before the exam period and are jointly run by the Counselling Service and the Learning Enhancement Team.

You can also contact **LET** (Learning Enhancement Team) can help with study skills and developing your written and spoken English. For more information please see: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/let>

### How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:  
<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:  
**cmh@mdx.ac.uk**

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