

Managing HSC Stress **A Guide for Students**



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The 3 Steps to Managing Stress

Step 1: Master Your Mind

Remember, your mind is often your worst enemy!

Think of a recent time when you felt a strong emotion – now see if you can make the ABC links:

A = The activating event (what just happened? Was it a real event or an imagined event?)

B = your belief or thought about that event (what exactly did you say to yourself?)

C = the consequence (what were you feeling? What did you do?)

If your thoughts were making it harder to handle the situation, then it's time to **Challenge and Modify** your thoughts!

Some Common Negative Thought Patterns:

(Which of these do you get caught in? Tick the ones that apply most to you)

Black & White

You think about things in extremes. Things are either good or bad- there is no in-between.

“I suck at maths”

“She is so perfect, I am pathetic”

Catastrophising

You always predict the worst outcome

“I’ll never get a good job”

“I won’t be able to answer any of the questions on this exam”

Unfair to Compare

You compare yourself to other people’s strengths

“Why can’t I do as well at sport as him?”

Filtering

You tend to focus on all the negatives in the situation.

Focus on the “B” grade amongst all “A” grades

Labelling

You label yourself and others

“He is a loser”, “I am an idiot”

Mind Reading

You assume that you know what other people are thinking

“They think my talk is bad”



Challenging Unhelpful Thinking:



Ask yourself:-

- Where is the evidence for AND against my theory?
Is there another way I can think about this?
- What would I say to a good friend in this situation?
- Is it really that bad?
- What else might happen instead?
- Is this way of thinking helpful to me? Does it help me get on and achieve my goals?

Some examples:

Unhelpful thoughts	Helpful thoughts
I can't do this	I can do this, I just need to get started
If I don't do well, my life will be ruined	It's not the end of the world, I just need to do my best
I must do well in every subject to get a good overall mark	I'd prefer to do well in everything, but that's not always possible
I won't be able to get a good job	I don't know that that is true
If I get a bad mark, people will think I am stupid	Even if someone did think that, it's probably their problem, not mine
Nobody understands what it is like	There are lots of other people in the same situation that probably feel the same way I do

Step 2: Take Action!



Action is the opposite of Avoidance!

Build good study habits. Do something to reduce the stress – the longer you put it off the worse the stress!

- Set clear goals that are meaningful to you. Put reminders where you will see them
- Manage your use of Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, etc
- Write a to –do list and prioritise tasks (A=must do today, B= need to do in next few days, C=can wait)
- Study smarter:
 - Plan, plan, plan!!
 - Only study for a set number of hours per day
 - “Work smart” on the right things. E.g., Keep weightings of assessments in mind
 - Have a 2 hour catch-up each week
 - Be organised: Have a filing system
 - Keep your folders up-to-date
 - Use study buddies
 - Practice doing exam papers
- Create a study timetable and use it
- Have good exam day techniques:
 - Have a routine
 - Review realistic thoughts, e.g. “It’s not going to kill me” “I’m not expected to know all of the answers”
 - Have something to eat
 - Have a personal motto
 - Talk to friends (if it helps)
 - Don’t get caught in the pre-exam frenzy

- Reward yourself with study breaks or pleasant activities. But only after you have worked on your goals



Time Tabling Study & Fun – it's all about balance!

- First you need to work out all the available time that you have
- Then, list all the things that you want to achieve - possibly in a step-by-step way e.g., Maths study, English exercise, soccer, party
- Then, write in when you will do which activity

HINT: Schedule in some rewards (like going to a party or going to the movies with friends) that you get **ONLY IF** you work the study hours **FIRST!!**

My Time Table:

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
7.00							
8.00							
9.00							
10.00							
11.00							
12.00							
1.00							
2.00							
3.00							
4.00							
5.00							
6.00							
7.00							
8.00							
9.00							
10.00							
11.00							

Step 3: Look after yourself

Treat yourself as if you are an elite athlete – the HSC year is your marathon!



To maximise your chance of doing well and getting across that finish line you need to ensure that you are eating well, sleeping well, doing regular exercise, having fun and finding time for relaxation....

Eating Well:

If your brain is going to work well, it needs the right fuel.



Remember, garbage in = garbage out!

Teenagers who have a well-balanced diet have more energy and better concentration and memory than those who eat a lot of junk food. You need a diet rich in proteins (meat, fish, cheese), veggies, fruit, dairy and wholegrains (bread, brown rice, pasta) – these are your ‘brain foods’!

It’s also important to eat regularly and not skip meals. Eating small amounts more often (“grazing”) helps your metabolism and energy levels.

Make sure you eat breakfast – for those of you who can’t stomach food first thing in the morning, try having a smoothie or a piece of fruit, or take a healthy snack with you to school that you can have when you arrive.

Have plenty of healthy options in the fridge and pantry for when you feel like a snack between studying. Here are some ideas:

- Wheat crackers and low-fat cheese
 - Low-fat yoghurt
 - Fruit
 - Nuts
 - Multigrain muffin with cheese/peanut butter/vegemite
 - Carrot or celery sticks with low-fat dip
 - Hard boiled egg
 - Low-fat sliced turkey breast
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- Remember to drink plenty of water to keep you hydrated

- Eat something before you go into the exam room!
- While it may be tempting to get an instant 'hit' with caffeine, energy drinks or lollies, these only give you a temporary boost, and often leave you feeling more tired and irritable. Here are some facts about the amount of caffeine contained in common foods:

Short black coffee	110mg
Instant coffee	70mg
Tea	10-50mg
Coke	49mg per can
Energy drinks	80mg per can
Milk chocolate	20mg per 100g
Hot chocolate	10mg

Sleeping Well:

- Aim for at least 8-9 hours a night
- Get into a good sleep routine- aim to go to sleep the same time each night and get up the same time each morning. The most beneficial sleep you get is before midnight.
- schedule busier activities earlier in the day
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid daytime naps
- Have a 30 min wind-down time before bed:
 - Turn off electronic devices (computer/TV/phone)
 - Have a warm shower or bath
 - Make yourself a sleep-inducing drink (warm milk, herbal tea)
 - Minimise anxiety- write worries down on a piece of paper
 - Listen to quiet music
 - Do some relaxation or slow breathing (instructions page 11)
- Avoid drinks with caffeine (see above)



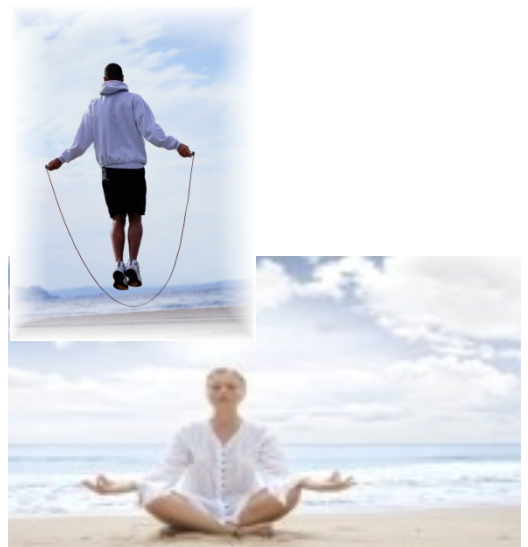
- Take the pressure off getting to sleep by turning the clock face away

Regular exercise

- Try and do at least 30 - 60 mins per day of:
 - Moderate activities like brisk walking, bike riding with friends, skateboarding and dancing
 - Vigorous activities such as football, netball, soccer, running, swimming laps or training for sport

Relaxation

- Give yourself regular rewards and time out
- Do yoga or meditation
- Practice slow breathing (see next page)



Instructions for Slow Breathing Technique

- Initially when you're learning this technique it's best to find a quiet place and either sit in a comfortable chair with good back support or lie down.
- Close your eyes and spend a short time letting your body settle. Focus your attention on any sounds you can hear, either inside the room or outside. Move your attention from sound to sound without getting caught up in any one particular sound. Then bring your attention back to your body and notice where your body is touching the chair (or bed).
- Keeping your eyes closed; place your hands on your diaphragm (the triangular space just below your ribcage). Practice breathing from here, rather than from your upper chest. Imagine you have a balloon in your diaphragm – as you breathe in you're inflating the balloon and as you breathe out you're deflating the balloon.
- Breathe in and out (through your nose) slowly and evenly in a 6-second cycle. Breathe in for 3 seconds. As you breathe in say to yourself (in, two, three). Then breathe out for 3 seconds. (Say "relax, two, three). Do not hold your breath at any point, you want a nice steady and slow rhythm.
- On each out breath, when you say 'relax' to yourself, try and consciously relax your body and imagine that you are breathing out the stress and the worry.
- To start with, do as many cycles as you feel comfortable with. This could be as short as two or three breaths, or anywhere up to two minutes. You do not need to practice for longer than two minutes. If at any time during the practice you feel uncomfortable, stop and revert to your normal breathing. Then try again when you feel more comfortable.
- Once you become familiar with the technique, you can use it anywhere, anytime you feel stressed or worried. You don't need to close your eyes or sit down, just remind yourself to 'breathe' and take a few slow breaths to calm you down.
- REMEMBER – THIS IS A SKILL. You will only improve with regular practice, so try to do brief practice at least 2-3 times per day. If you practice regularly, it will be easier to remember this technique when you do feel stressed.

And Lastly...Some Motivational Quotes To Help You Succeed!

(If you connect strongly to any of these quotes, feel free to write them out and stick them somewhere in your room to keep you motivated and focused)

- “Change your thoughts and you change your world.”—*Norman Vincent Peale*
- “If you can imagine it, you can achieve it; if you can dream it, you can become it.”—*William Arthur Ward*
- “The best way to finish an unpleasant task is to get started.” ~ *Anonymous*
- “Try not. Do or do not, there is no try.” ~ *Yoda*
- “The most important thing is to keep the most important thing the most important thing” – *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- “It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with problems longer” – *Albert Einstein*
- “Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal, nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude” – *Socrates*
- “The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack in will” – *A. Branson Alcott*
- “Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out” – *William Shakespeare*
- “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”—*Winston Churchill*
- “Successful and unsuccessful people do not vary greatly in their abilities. They vary in their desires to reach their potential.”—*John Maxwell*
- “If we did all the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves.”—*Thomas Edison*
- “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.”—*Wayne Gretzky*
- “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”—*Winston Churchill*

If you need further help...

Talk to your school counsellor or parent

Consider group or individual counselling

You can find us at:

The Kidman Centre, UTS, 174 Pacific Highway, St Leonard's

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- 9514 4077 or kidmancentre@uts.edu.au

Kids Help Line

- Phone 1800 55 1800
- or email counselling www.kidshelp.com.au

Reading:

- Surviving Year 12 – Dr Michael Carr-Gregg

Websites & apps:

Reachout.com.au Breathe and Sleep apps

Smiling Mind Smiling Mind app

Mindshift app