

Food Suggestions and Other Tips for Minimising Stress Before Exams

When researching how to manage exam stress we found an interesting article on foods that help our brain study. Within this article there was a helpful 'Swap this food for that' food chart. The following might help to simplify some eating habits for our students in the midst of the upcoming, intense study time:

Swap this	For this
Processed cereal	Porridge topped with fruit and walnuts
Biscuits or a muffin	Wholegrain crackers with cheese and tomato
Pizza	Vegetable omelette
Burger and fries	Steak and salad
Chocolate and lollies	Fresh or dried fruit
Ice cream	Yoghurt and berries
Potato crisps	Handful of nuts
Energy drink	Fruit smoothie
Coffee	Water

Source: <https://au.reachout.com/articles/foods-that-help-our-brain-study>

Giving your brain the best nutrition means eating from a variety of food groups. The key elements being proteins (meat, fish, poultry, legumes, nuts, seeds, dairy and soy products), fruits and vegetables, including berries and pomegranate juice, Omega 3s (oily fish, flax seeds and flax oil, eggs, chicken and beef), monounsaturated fats (avocados, nuts, olive canola and peanut oil), moderate amounts of caffeine (tea, coffee and dark chocolate) and, of course, one to two litres of water per day.

If our food is not feeding our brains, it can lead to low mood and aggression, poor quality sleep, poor memory and impaired problem solving. Naturally these are not things we want to feel at the best of time and especially close to exam time.

Eating the best foods possible goes a long way to good coping skills at exam time and, coupled with the following 10 tips, can help to reduce some of the stress:

1. Some stress can actually motivate us to get things done. This includes some intensive study. Recognise when stress has tipped over from being motivating to an overwhelming emotion. If/when this happens encourage your child to take a break, eat something healthy, do some exercise, or do something fun.
2. Break study time into 20-30 minute chunks, then have a break. Build on this amount over time, incorporating regular breaks.
3. Engage your child in conversation about what they are learning, help them by encouraging them to say out loud what they have learned. Teaching someone else can reinforce the learning and reflect how well they are learning.
4. Put distractors out of sight and ear shot. Research shows that it can take up to 20 minutes to refocus on a task once distracted.
5. Getting good sleep before exams is scientifically proven to assist with retaining more of what has been studied the days before than if staying up to cram.
6. Use a marathon as an analogy with your daughter. For example, if you were planning to run a marathon, you wouldn't wait until a couple of days before to start preparing.

Developing a plan will give her a feeling of being in control as she progresses towards her goals; she needs to invest time and effort, just like the marathon runner.

7. Use an app that helps with relaxation methods, e.g. 'ReachOut's Worry Time or Smiling Mind.

8. Physical activity relieves stress and helps clear the mind for study. The days are starting to get longer (just); if regular sport isn't part of your daughter's routine encourage a 20-minute walk after tea. Go together. Take the dog.

9. Build in and allow for social time – encourage your daughter to be selective about the number of parties and the timing of them too. Perhaps this is a time to cut back on sleepovers knowing that they mean very late nights and disrupted routines.

10. Help your daughter believe in herself by being realistic about your expectations for her, be supportive, organised, encouraging and for Year 12s and cheer her over the finish line.

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