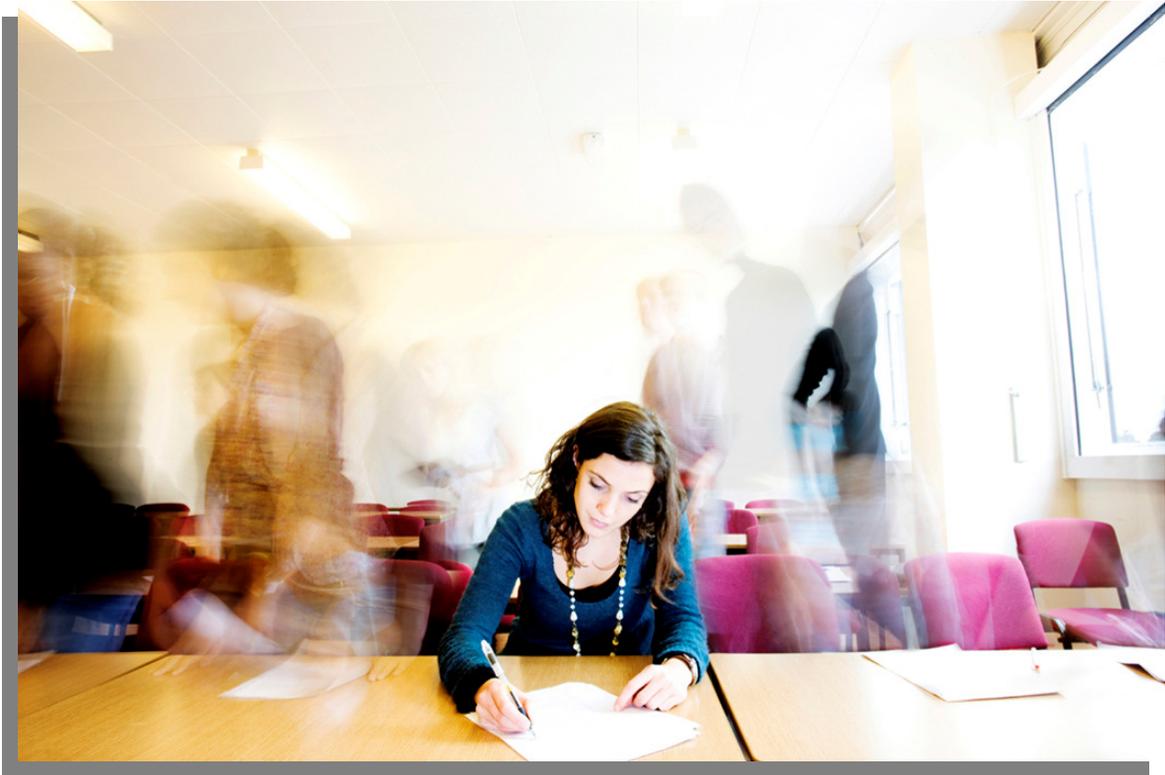


# STUDENT

## Stress Management Program



A guide to understanding  
and coping with stress  
during exams

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## Congratulations !

You have taken the first step in acknowledging and hopefully reducing the symptoms you feel from stress during exam time.

The *Student Stress Management Program* looks not only at the physical and behavioral stress-related problems during examinations, but the mental and emotional symptoms as well. In order for you to get the most out of this program, we need to work together to identify, what specific situations are causing you stress, and to find out how you are reacting to them.

Your reaction to them is what causes physical symptoms to show up in your body: for example, back and neck tension, or unhelpful sleeping patterns because you may be feeling overwhelmed by your study work-load.

Simply dealing with the physical symptoms, however, will not in the long term, reduce the stress in your life. You need to change your mental, emotional and behavioral reactions as well, in order for any long-standing benefits to occur.

Let's start with recognizing stress. Please answer the Yes / No questions below.

### Recognizing Stress During Exams

	YES	NO
<i>Are you tense? Do your shoulders and neck feel tight or stiff?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you lie awake at night worrying and planning the next day?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Are you smoking or drinking more than usual?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Are you eating less, or feeling less well than usual?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel guilty when relaxing and not doing things?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you start one task before you have finished another?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you experience a dry mouth or sweaty palms?</i>	[ ]	[ ]

	YES	NO
<i>Do you find yourself snapping or yelling at people?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel like you have too much to think about and too much to cope with?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel frustrated and let down by people?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you seem to get any illness that is around?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you have any difficulties thinking about, or solving problems?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you get recurring headaches or other recurring physical problems?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel fine until one small incident, like a low grade, makes your whole life unmanageable?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<b>Score:</b>		

These are physical / behavioral stress-related symptoms. If you answered YES to more than seven questions, your stress levels are high and implementing some coping strategies would be very helpful.

Now answer these questions:

	YES	NO
<i>Is your sleep erratic or disturbed?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you bite your nails or have other nervous habits?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you cry or feel like crying often?</i>	[ ]	[ ]

	YES	NO
<i>Do you have difficulty making up your mind or making decisions?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel unable to cope a lot of the time?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Are you constantly irritable and snappy to those close to you?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel a failure?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you have disturbing thoughts or dreams?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you worry too much over something which is in fact, unimportant?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Are you angered easily by events or people?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Are you impatient with any delays?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you dislike yourself?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel dissatisfied with yourself or your life?</i>	[ ]	[ ]
<i>Do you feel nauseous, faint or sweat, for no obvious reason?</i>	[ ]	[ ]

**Score:**

The questions you have just answered are related to mental / emotional symptoms of stress.

If the answer is YES to more than five of these questions, again, you could well benefit from some relaxation techniques.

# Dealing with Stress

## The Mental / Emotional Approach

The key to dealing with stress is to examine your mental and emotional attitudes to it. The better you cope with it mentally and emotionally, the less affect it will have on your physical body and behavioral responses.

Now that you have recognized some of the symptoms you have, can you **list the ‘triggers’** in your life that cause these reactions. For example, a teacher/lecturer you do not get on with.

(List them in order of how much stress they cause.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now list them in order of how important they really are to you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Study the different orders of the two lists, to help you become aware of how you may be feeling stressed over what could be relatively unimportant issues.

By becoming more aware of the triggers, you have more control over how you react, when they occur again. You can also use these triggers as a cue to relax, instead of the normal stressful response you are used to. For example, if you are stuck in traffic on the way to an exam, and you feel yourself getting up-tight, use the time to mentally rehearse being in the exam and feeling calm and relaxed. Try to stretch out any tense muscles and breathe deeply.

You may not be able to change the situation that's causing the stress, but you are generally in control of how you react to it.

## The Mental and Emotional Approach

Your thoughts influence and affect your reality. Your thoughts influence your decisions, which influence your actions, which in turn influence what happens to you in your life.

If you are constantly bombarded with stressful situations during exam time, change your thoughts about them and you'll change your reality!

### Thought Analysis

Here are a few problem attitudes to examine along with some helpful suggestions to reduce or eliminate them.

#### ***Are you the sort of person to hold a grudge?***

Holding on to unpleasant feelings is not going to change the situation, but it certainly changes the way you react towards it. Ask yourself, "Is it really worth it?"

#### ***Do you always think about the future, or the past?***

By holding on to an "if only" attitude, you will get stressed easily by unfulfilled expectations. Holding on to unsettling situations from the past will also lead to self-destructive behavior. Try to live in the present moment as much as possible, and embrace each new day as it arrives.

#### ***Do you have to deal with situations that make you feel nervous or uneasy?***

There are a number of ways to change your perceptions of the situation. Breathing affirmations are a good way. Take a deep breath, and on the out-breath state to yourself a positive affirmation. For example: 'I am clear, calm and confident!'

Visualization techniques are another good strategy. Re-program your mind, beforehand, by visualizing yourself in the situation as doing well.

If you have a chronic stress response that is causing a problem with sitting exams, for assistance, use **a personalized mental rehearsal audio to reprogram your subconscious mind**. Contact Patrick Sherratt at [patrick@passingexams.co.nz](mailto:patrick@passingexams.co.nz) for more details.

***Do you feel like there is never enough time?***

There is a visualization technique for changing your perception of time too. Try this now. Close your eyes and point to your future. Hold out your arm in front of you and put the imagined situation, in the palm of your hand. (This creates a time - line between where you are now, and the imagined situation in the future.)

Now ask yourself, "how close does it feel?" Move your hand closer to your face, until the time gap between you and the situation feels notably diminished. Acknowledge the new position and the relative stress it ensues. Now take a deep breath and move your hand away from your face, as far as it will go. Because your brain has associated time to a spatial movement, your arm, this simple action changes your brain's perception to the amount of time you have. By moving your hand away, and seeing the picture becoming smaller, you are increasing your time line, and automatically your brain / body will relax. This is very useful for retaining a relaxed attitude when those high-pressure assignment and exam deadlines are looming.

***Are you becoming short tempered with people?***

Try to modify your response to people you find annoying, or intimidating. Be patient. Remember that we all perceive the world differently, and although others might not see the situation as you do, acknowledge their point of view by active listening. It is important that you both state your case clearly and simply. Issues that go on unsaid, create a tense atmosphere. If it's too difficult to talk about, try to think of positive uplifting thoughts about the person - you may be surprised at how quickly their attitude changes as well - even if nothing has been spoken! This is because whatever you think about shows up in your non-verbal body language and people pick up on it.

Try to see difficult situations regarding others as an opportunity to learn. People mirror our attitudes. If there is something about someone you don't like, ask yourself - what is it about myself that I don't like? What is this person showing me?

***Do you dwell on negative thoughts?***

Try not to waste mental energy on the things you can't change. If you got a poor mark on an exam, for example, try not to dwell on it and let it affect the next exam. Consider this: Worry is negative goal setting. Take time to acknowledge your feelings and then move on. Thoughts and feelings work together so if you want to feel better, you have to change the focus of your thoughts to a more optimistic outlook. The other way is through your physiology. This means, get into some serious exercise.

If things continue to not go well, try a little trick called 'Act As If.' By ignoring your minds attempt to pull you down, act as if you are feeling great and notice if a more positive response begins to emerge.

***Do you acknowledge your feelings?***

Take the attitude that there are no good or bad feelings - they are simply, your feelings. Allow yourself to feel those 'bad' feelings. The mind is good at holding on to them, especially if you're not allowing them to surface. The best way to deal with them is to accept them and tell yourself that it's really O.K to feel...[insert feeling]. Repeat this statement a number of times... 'It's really

O.K to feel...' [insert feeling].; it's really, really O.K to feel...' [insert feeling].; it's really, really, really O.K to feel...' [insert feeling].

What will likely happen is, by allowing them to pass through your mind and not blocking them, the opposite feelings will begin to emerge. Feelings work through a unique paradox! Try and stop them and they get stronger. What you resist – persists. Acknowledge and allow them and they reside.

***Do you feel guilty for not doing something you feel you should or ought to do?***

Remove should and ought from your vocabulary. 'I should be doing this...' only makes you feel guilty because you may not be. Do you have a choice? If you want to do it, - do it! If you don't, maybe organize your time to doing it when you feel better about it. Your body has rhythms of when your energy is high or low. Learn to understand them and work your study commitments around them.

***Do you think multi-tasking is helpful?***

Try to always work through and complete one thing at a time. Having many different uncompleted assignments on the go, clutters the mind unnecessarily, and creates the perception that there is too much to do and too little time to do it. This is a major cause of stress

.... and remember,

Try not to be too hard on yourself. Control that critical voice. Stress is a fact of life: we need a little stress sometimes. By recognizing this, and taking positive steps to cope with it, you are showing yourself and others that you can get the results you want in an easy relaxed way.

## **The Practical and Behavioral Approach**

There are a number of great relaxation exercises that you can employ to help you relax during your day. The following information, gives some easily learned practical examples, but if you feel you need something more structured, you could consider joining a Udemy course or a night-class with some friends to learn say, Yoga, or Tai-chi.

### **Juggling**

Buy some juggling balls, and teach yourself this enjoyable hobby. The process of juggling brings in hand/eye co-ordination, as well as mind/body co-ordination. By being totally focused in this way, it frees your mind from thinking about stressful thoughts or worries. It also slows your brainwaves down, which helps you relax. Be conscious of maintaining a steady breathing style when you concentrate on juggling. It has a tendency to slow down considerably.

### **Stretching / Breathing:**

How often do you consciously stretch and breathe when you get up in the mornings. By gearing your body up in this way, you feel brighter and more alert - ready to face the day.

**The Five Minute Morning Stretch:**

- Sit down on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you.
- Take some deep breaths, right down into the pit of your stomach. Put your awareness into your breathing through out the exercises, to help you stay focused in the present moment. Try not to let the day's thoughts about work start to creep into your mind.
- Move your ankles about; stretch them forwards and backwards.
- Bounce your knees up and down.
- Bounce your shoulders up and down, then loosely move your arms about.
- Turn your hands around to stretch your wrist joints.
- Raise your arms above your head and clasp your hands. Feel the stretch in your shoulders, then release.
- Now move your head from side to side; then up and down - stretching your neck.
- Massage your face and scalp with your hands. Open your eyes wide and move them from side to side and up and down. Move your jaw about; try making some noise while you do this.
- Now bring your left foot up to your groin and lean forward over your right leg. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds then do the same on the other side.
- Spread your legs wide out in front of you and lean slightly forward stretching the inner thighs.
- Now return your legs out in front and lean forward over them gently stretching your lower back.
- Twist your back now. Bring your right leg up by bending your knee and placing the foot over your left leg. Turn your upper body around to the right, increasing the twist by placing outside of your left arm against the outside of your right knee. Then do the same with the left twist.
- Now release, relax and turn over, lying on your stomach. Arch your back by raising your upper body up with your arms.
- Then stretch your back the other way by raising your back-side up; now standing in an inverted "V" on your hands and feet. Feel the stretch in your calves. Let your head hang loosely between your shoulders. Breathe deeply, lower, relax, then repeat three times.

- When you have finished, sit quietly on your knees for a few moments, breathing deeply again and being aware of your body.
- You don't have to limit stretching and breathing exercises to being at home. Find a moment at school or work, to shake out your arms and legs, or stretch your neck and back. You can do it even while you're sitting down, at a desk or in the car,( provided it's stationary!) Try to become more in tune with your body, and what it needs.

### **Breathing Awareness**

Have you noticed that when you are concentrating, feeling nervous, or afraid, you reduce your breathing? Conscious breathing is a vital tool to help reduce stressful situations.

A good breathing exercise you can try is to register the in-breath and the out- breath. Pay attention to the rhythm and flow of your breathing. Where does the air fill first - the chest or the stomach region? How long is the gap between breaths? Is it longer on the in or the out breath? When you're in a stressful situation, always take a number of deep breaths – in through the nose and out through the mouth. On the out breath let the tension, and emotion, you are feeling go with it. Make some movement and noise too, if it feels appropriate.

### **Meditation**

Many people have misconceived ideas that meditation is about spending hours sitting in serious contemplation, or humming "OM" for some mountain guru in India. For some people it can be; but for others, it can be a walk in the countryside. Any quiet time that frees your mind from thoughts and worries can be classed as meditation. Even only for a few minutes, try to clear your thoughts. Being totally focused in the present moment calms the mind and brings in a stillness that can help alleviate stress.

One simple exercise you can do, when you need to relax, is to place the palms of your hands over your eyes to create darkness. Now repeat to yourself a relaxing affirmation, I.e. 'relax... relax... relax....' Remember to always breathe deeply, and feel your body relax.

How long can you keep your body still? Lie on your back with your arms and legs slightly apart. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and imagine your whole body relaxing. Move in your mind's eye through your body from your feet to your head, relaxing each part as you go. When you feel as relaxed as you can get, stay lying there as still as you can, for at least 3 minutes. If your body becomes tense or fidgety, stop the exercise and try again later.

Another exercise you can try is to help you realize just how much time you spend thinking thoughts you may not even be aware of. Take your watch and look at the seconds turning. Concentrate on them only. See how long you can go before your mind thinks about something else. Can you make 30 seconds - a minute or even two minutes?

There are many meditative exercises you can do that will help you to relax. Find out about meditation classes from your local library or book- shop.

**Movement to Music**

This exercise is free creative movement to music. Put on some music that feels appropriate to the type of mood you are in. Close your eyes and let your body move with the music but not to it. Your body knows how it wants to move, and that may not be to the beat or rhythm of the music. Let your soul express itself. It may be just lying on your back, moving a hand. Anything you want. Get creative!

**Regular Body Relaxation Sessions**

Treating yourself to regular relaxation sessions such as Therapeutic Massage or Aromatherapy can do wonders to your self-esteem, confidence and general outlook on life. Because the body and mind are so integrated, keeping your body relaxed and at ease, in turn has a positive effect on your mind.

Finally, it is important to give yourself plenty of time for fun and pleasure. Ask yourself; How much joy do I have in my life? Do you have this balance, or are you spending all your time being serious about study? Find new ways to enliven and entertain yourself. What did you do for fun as a child? Fly kites or play sports? Would you like to get into them again?

Start a night-class or take up a new hobby, just for fun, – it's a good way to meet new and interesting people. Treat yourself to regular relaxation sessions. Get out into the parks, countryside and beaches more. Learn to appreciate your surroundings. Buy a pet. Having a dog or cat brings out the playful side of you. Invite friends over more often, or go out dancing. There must be plenty of ways, if you take time to think about it.

The holistic approach to stress that this *Student Stress Management Program* offers, is a simple guide for you to begin to bring more balance back into your life. A lot of stress is caused because we are too active - too busy becoming HUMANDOINGS instead of HUMANBEINGS.

I hope that this program will help alleviate the symptoms of stress that you are experiencing, and bring you more into living a happier and ultimately more relaxed lifestyle.

Keep smiling,

Patrick Sherratt

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Please visit any of the websites below or browse Youtube under my name.

[www.passingexams.co.nz](http://www.passingexams.co.nz)

[www.innervate.co.nz](http://www.innervate.co.nz)

[www.inform-mentoring.com](http://www.inform-mentoring.com)