

REDUCING EXAM STRESS

Whether it's a quiz, a midterm, or a final, taking exams fills many students with anxiety. This is particularly the case in college, where your entire course grade may be comprised of two or three midterms and a final exam. Although the stakes are high and stress may be unavoidable, reducing the stress and anxiety you feel will likely help you do better on exams, especially during finals week. These strategies will help you perform at your best and reduce final exam stress. If you still find yourself feeling uncomfortably anxious, make an appointment with an OAR staff member to develop an individualized approach to reducing test-taking anxiety.

TIPS FOR REDUCING EXAM STRESS

- **Manage your environment:** Stress is like sneezing – it's contagious! During finals week, you may need to avoid those people in your dorm and in your classes who are very stressed and tense; their stress will only add to yours.
- **Just say NO!:** Be protective of your study time; getting behind on your study schedule or caving in to distractions can ratchet up stress levels. Sometimes, you just need to say No! Say NO to people who may get you off your study schedule during finals week and say NO to distractions. Turn off your phone or disable your social media accounts for certain blocks of time if that's what you need to do to stick to your study schedule.
- **Eat, sleep, exercise:** Some students completely forget about their health and well-being during the end of the semester, thinking that doing nothing but studying is the best way to accomplish their goals. However, if you're not taking care of yourself, your stress levels will be higher and you may not do as well on your exams.
 - + *Don't forget to eat.* Your brain needs glucose to function, so be sure to have snacks on hand while you're studying, especially if you're staying up later than usual. Choose healthy snacks like nuts or yogurt to keep your blood sugar stable; for longer study sessions, eat protein-rich foods to keep you satiated.
 - + *Exercise, even a little bit.* Just a small amount of exercise, like a brisk walk around the nature trail, will leave you feeling calmer, more focused, and reenergized when you return to your studies.
 - + *Avoid all-nighters.* Sleep deprivation causes fatigue and confusion. Scientific research has demonstrated time and time again that sleep deprivation will leave you physically exhausted and unable to concentrate or perform at your best academically. Make sure you're getting the sleep you need to perform at your best.
- **Take breaks:** Find a system that works for you – consider taking a 5-minute break for every 30 minutes of studying, or a 10-minute break for every hour of studying. Use your breaks as an opportunity to completely de-stress – this will help you stay focused and remain productive!
- **Visualization:** Athletes often use visualization techniques to improve performance during competition – this is applicable in academics as well! Imagine yourself taking the exams and feeling confident, prepared, and relaxed. Visualizing the situation over and over will help change your mindset.
- **Mind over matter:** The way you approach an exam is more important than you think – remind yourself that you've prepared as much as you could, and now it's time to rock that exam! Do whatever works to convince yourself that you're going to do really well – it sounds crazy, but it works!

Cited and adapted from: Pauk, W. & Owens, R.J.Q. (2014). *How to study in college*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning | The University of Pittsburgh – Bradford