How to cope with exam stress?

"Brain cells create ideas. Stress kills brain cells. Stress is not a good idea."

Remember at the end of the day you can only do your best. Nobody can ask for more than that! Effective exam strategies can help you achieve better results and, in doing so, can also allow you to learn the material more efficiently with better retention.

General Exam Stress-Busting Tips:

Before the exam

Predict what will be on the test. Check the syllabus for the general goals or purpose of the test, and any comments regarding the exam. Think what your teacher has emphasized in class. Look through your notes to see what was emphasized. Think over how much time you will have, what materials are allowed in the exam room, and in which order you will do the tasks.

Believe in yourself. You wouldn't be sitting in the examination room if you didn't have the ability to do well. Therefore, if you prepare for the exams properly you should do fine, meaning that there is no need to worry excessively.

Keep things in perspective. The exams might seem like the most crucial thing right now, but in the grander scheme of your whole life they are only a small part.

Don't drink too much coffee, tea and fizzy drinks. The caffeine will 'hype' you and make your thinking less clear.

Eat healthy and exercise. This seems like a no-brainer, but it's a wonder how many people forget it. Skip the sugar, which will make you crash, and go for snacks like granola bars, healthy cereal or fruits and veggies to keep your blood sugar stable. If you're studying for a long period of time, eat some protein too. Also, try to get some form of exercise. Even a 10 minute walk will leave you calmer and more focused. The better shape you are in physically the more alert you will feel and less stressed

Avoid stressful people. Stress actually is contagious. During exam week, resist the urge to have a study session with your super-tense friend, especially if she's complaining about all the work she has to do and breaking pencils all over the place. Her stress will only add to your stress.

Force yourself to take breaks. For every hour or so that you work, take a 10 or 15 minute break. Let yourself do whatever you want (check Facebook, check out that guy sitting nearby, stare off into space, call a friend, etc.) for those 10-15 mins, then start working again. This gives your brain a little rest and will help keep you more focused when you are actually doing work.

Be as well-prepared as possible . As well as thinking about the subjects you are revising, it can be useful to pay attention to practical aspects of the exam. Find out where it is scheduled to take place and how long it will take you to get there. It's a good idea to go and look at the room/building so that it feels more familiar. Make sure you know the rules and regulations about what you can take into the exam room etc.

Don't work to the last minute on the night or morning before the exam. Last-minute revision may leave you feeling muddled and anxious.

Think positive "Everything's getting on top of me", "I can't cope", "My life feels out of control". Most of us find ourselves having thoughts like this from time to time, but it is possible to take control of these negative tendencies. Just a bit of positive thinking can turn you back onto the path of happiness and healthiness. According to research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, negative thinking can make you sick. Tests on volunteers showed that those who focused on bad times had weaker immune systems and also displayed increased activity in the part of the brain associated with mental problems such as depression.

During the exam

Don't try to be perfect. It's great to succeed and reach for the stars. But keep things in balance. If you think that "anything less than 95% means I've failed" then you are creating mountains of unnecessary stress for yourself. Aim to do your best but recognise that none of us can be perfect all of the time.

Avoid panic . It's natural to feel some exam nerves prior to starting the exam, but getting excessively nervous is counterproductive as you will not be able to think as clearly. The quickest and most effective way of eliminating feelings of stress and panic is to close your eyes and take several long, slow deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system. Simultaneously you could give yourself some mental pep-talk by mentally repeating "I am calm and relaxed" or "I know I will do fine". If your mind goes blank, don't panic! Panicking will just make it harder to recall information. Instead, focus on slow, deep breathing for about one minute. If you still can't remember the information then move on to another question and return to this question later.

If you've studied all you can, get up your confidence! When test-time rolls around, it's time to get yourself into confidence mode. You've prepared as much as you could, and now it's time to ace the test. The tip here is to do whatever works to convince yourself you are going to do really well. This tip might sound a little crazy but you just have to try it for yourself. I think you'll like the results.

If you are stuck on a question, go on to the next. You can always come back to it later. If you are really stuck, try to make an intelligent guess anyway.

Leave time to read through and check your answers before the exam finishes. Good time management will surely take away some of the stress.

Take in a bottle of water, some chocolate and tissues. This will ensure you don't feel thirsty or hungry during the exam and will ensure you can concentrate fully on the tasks.

After the exam

 After the exam don't spend endless time criticising yourself for where you think you went wrong. Often our own self assessment is far too harsh. Congratulate yourself for the things you did right, learn from the bits where you know you could have done better, and then move on.

Rremember, there's life beyond exam results even if the results are not what you have expected them to be. Disappointing grades are not the end of the world, even if it does feel that way at the time. You might decide to resit, and in any case, there will be lots of other opportunities to express yourself and succeed later on in life.