

UWE Wellbeing Service

Exam Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to stressful situations. Exams are designed to test our performance under pressure and can therefore cause anxiety. Some anxiety can be helpful with focusing attention and improving performance under pressure. Anxiety can be negative when it interferes with activities of daily living (such as sleep and self-care) and revising. Anxiety can also lead to panic attacks which create additional barriers to effective revision and performance in exams.

Panic attacks

A panic attack is a rush of intense physical and psychological symptoms and can present with a rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, feeling dizzy, sweating, nausea, chest pain, shaking and a feeling of choking. When having a panic attack people can fear that they will die or suffocate, and feel detached from the world. Panic attacks can last between five and 20 minutes and although frightening are not dangerous to a person's health. See handout on panic attacks for more information.

Helpful ideas in relation to managing exam anxiety before the exam:

- Relaxation techniques – deep breathing, mindfulness, physical posture and exercise
- Positive self-talk and affirmations – “I will be fine”, “I have coped with this before and can do it again”
- Achieving a balance of activities – diet, sleep, exercise, fun, do things that make you feel relaxed
- Effective revision – practice past papers under timed conditions, rework notes to help remember etc.
- Preparation – plan how you will get to the exam, check the room before, allow enough time

On the day and in the exam:

- Take a moment to pause before you start the exam
- Read through the questions carefully
- Plan your time accordingly
- Attend to your self-care needs
- Avoid too much caffeine
- Avoid people who are anxious
- Utilise relaxation techniques
- Come back to a question if needed

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Websites

- **Anxiety UK:** <http://tinyurl.com/hxjqes3>
- **CALM:** <http://tinyurl.com/zouvodv>
- **Education Corner Study Skills:** <http://tinyurl.com/bwvx8fp>

Local Organisations

- **Off the Record** – provides free and confidential mental health support and information for people aged between 11-25 in the Bristol area <http://www.otrbristol.org.uk/>

UWE library

- Davis, M. (2008) 6th Ed. **The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook**
[Available: Alexandra Warehouse, Frenchay, Bower, Glenside](#)
- Ingham, C. (2001) **Panic Attacks**
[Available: Alexandra Warehouse, Frenchay, Bower, Glenside](#)
- Kennerley, H. (2006) **Overcoming Anxiety Self-help Course**
[Available on shelf: 616.85223 KEN, Alexandra Warehouse, Frenchay, Glenside](#)
- Jeffers, S. (1989) **Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway.**
[Available on shelf: 158.1 JEF, Ground Floor Main Room, Glenside](#)
- Cottrell, S. (2013) **The Study Skills Handbook.** Palgrave Macmillan.
[Available on shelf: 378.170281 COT, Level 4, Frenchay & Alexandra warehouse](#)

Further reading

- Acres, D. (1998) **Passing Exams Without Anxiety**
- Hamilton, D. (2003) **Passing Exams: A guide for maximum success**

Further support at UWE

- **Peer Assisted Learning:**
<http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studysupport/peerassistedlearning/aboutpal.aspx>
- **UWE Students Union:** <https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/representation/advice-centre/academic/study-skills/>
- **UWE Study Support:** <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studysupport/studyskills.aspx>
- **Faculty Support:** <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studysupport/facultystudysupport.aspx>
- **UWE Wellbeing Service**
<http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/healthandwellbeing/wellbeingsservice/contactus.aspx>

