



University Counselling

Exam Anxiety

Apps

Smiling Mind

Smiling Mind is a mindfulness app with a number of different audio scripts to help you develop your mindfulness skills

It is natural to feel some degree of anxiety, stress or apprehension about exams. Some anxiety can actually be beneficial as it can help you perform better. If your anxiety is overwhelming and/or affecting your functioning (e.g. concentration or memory) please contact Counselling for assistance and strategies.

It is useful to learn strategies to deal with exam anxiety well ahead of time, however students often don't manage to schedule this in, so here are some quick tips as well as longer term strategies.

Tips for managing anxiety just prior to or during an exam

Manage your thoughts or 'self-talk'

Notice what your mind is telling you. It may be negative and fear-producing, such as: "I can't remember the answer, I'll fail." or "I've gone blank I've blown the entire exam."

These thoughts are unhelpful so try not to engage with them. Label them as 'unhelpful' and then refocus your attention by using some mindfulness techniques.

You could also try to be more realistic and positive with your thinking: "I don't have to know everything or get 100%, I will attempt all that I can and come back to this question and have a go at it later. More will come to me as I get going." and "This stress reaction will settle down. I just need to calm down and breathe slowly."

Manage your reaction to uncomfortable feelings and sensations

It is important to acknowledge and accept the uncomfortable sensations, if you ignore them they will get worse. Remember, these feelings will pass.

Acknowledge the sensation and then focus your attention on your breathing or your feet on the floor and say to yourself, "It's ok I can do this", then return to undergoing the exam.

Slow down your breathing

Breathe in for four seconds, hold for two seconds and then breathe out for six seconds.

Repeat 5-10 times.

Recognise muscle tension

Learn to tense and then release groups of muscles throughout the body. Let the tension go on each outward breath. Observe the difference.

Strategies you can practice during the year and the weeks prior to exams

Be prepared

Being prepared for exams is essential and will reduce your anxiety. See UON's resources on 'Surviving First Year Exams' and 'Study Tips'.

Learn stress management techniques

- University Counselling 'Stress' tip sheet