



Your Assessment Wellbeing Guide

Helping you stay well before,
during and after exams



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What is Your Assessment Wellbeing Guide?



UCL Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW) and Central Assessments Team (CAT) have produced this collaborative guide to help you stay well before, during and after exams.

This guide is suitable for any UCL student who sits exams during their programme of study.

We invite you to use this tool to learn new techniques for managing symptoms of stress and prioritising your wellbeing.

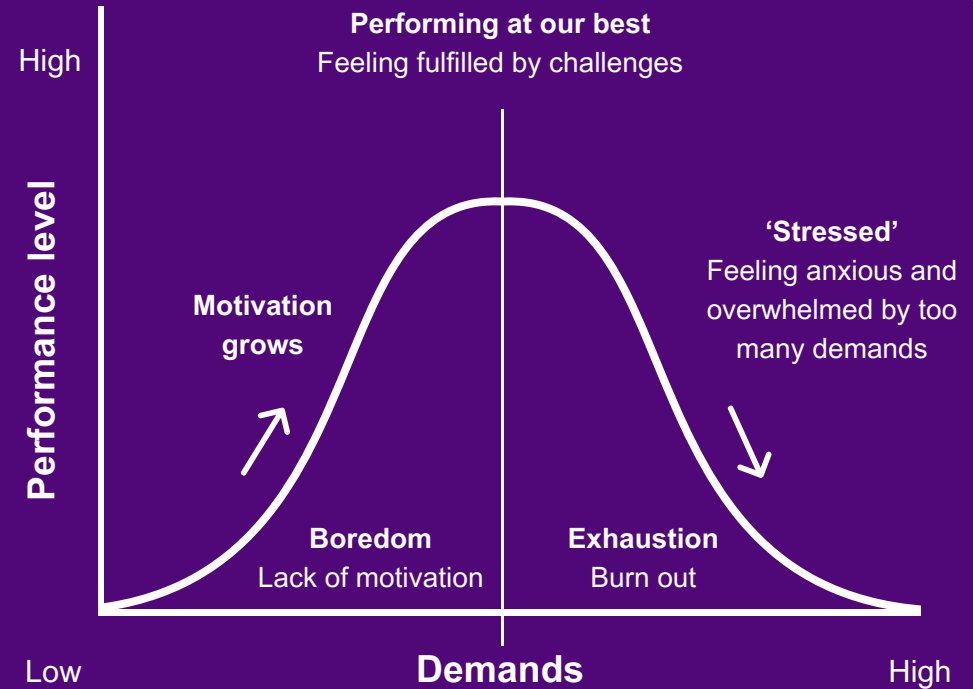
Is exam stress normal?

Feeling stressed about upcoming assessments is a very normal response to pressure. Many people experience anxiety around revision, essay writing and exams. A small amount of exam stress (eustress) can motivate you to revise.

However, extreme exam stress (distress) can lead to procrastination, overworking and poor physical and mental health.

You may worry about the worst-case scenario of failing an assessment. You may be experiencing external pressure from family or peers, leaving you feeling irritable or overwhelmed.

To reduce the likelihood of a negative assessment experience, prioritise both your academic and emotional wellbeing.



In this guide, you will learn how to spot the signs of exam anxiety, support a friend, practical tips for self-care and the support available at UCL.

Our worksheets will help you understand your stressors and prepare for exams.

Common signs of exam stress



Exam stress affects different people in different ways. Panic or anxiety can impact our feelings, cause physical reactions in the body, change our thoughts and even how we behave. It can be hard to tell if you are being affected by stress, but some typical signs are...

You mentally feel...

- Anxious, worried
- Overwhelmed
- Upset
- Mentally drained
- Defeated, fed up
- Bored
- Uninterested
- Frustrated
- Angry
- Embarrassed
- Irritable
- Disappointed
- Confused

You physically feel...

- Nauseous
- Headaches and dizziness
- Teary
- Unable to concentrate
- Forgetful
- Restless/shaky
- Tense in your muscles or body
- Breathless, or breathing rapidly
- Sweaty or hot
- Tired or exhausted
- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in appetite

You may think...

- Everything has gone wrong
- You can't cope with the stress
- You have disappointed yourself or others
- Things won't improve
- You are not good enough
- You have not performed as well as others
- Negative thoughts about yourself
- You are a failure

You may start to...

- Neglect eating, sleeping and maintaining personal hygiene
- Struggle to manage day-to-day life and your relationships
- Avoid revision and exam planning
- Procrastinate and lack motivation
- Not doing things you usually enjoy
- Work too much without taking breaks

As unpleasant as exam stress can feel, it is important to remember these symptoms will not last.

Read on to learn how you can manage your exam anxiety in a healthy and sustainable manner.

Healthy mind

Mindfulness

- [Every Mind Matters](#): create a free personalised mind plan based on your responses to a quick 5-minute wellbeing survey by the NHS
- Mindfulness tips and exercises for you to try from mental health charity [Mind](#)
- [10 Minute Mind](#): a mindfulness course provided by [Student Psychological and Counselling Services](#) in UCL Student Support and Wellbeing
- Wellbeing apps such as [Calm](#) and [Headspace](#) offer up-to-date resources to help you manage stress, anxiety and sleep



Relaxation

It is always important to take time out when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Step away from revision, unwind and recharge your mind.

Looking for ideas? You could...

- Engage with your hobbies
- Visit a museum or exhibition
- Create a self-care routine (skincare, meditation, reading a book)
- Meet up with friends (cafe, cinema, picnic)
- Get crafting (knitting, painting, candle making)
- Stimulate your mind (board games, puzzles)

UCL Student Support and Wellbeing host a range of [events and activities](#) to help you take time out from exams in your Halls of Residence, your faculty or on our campuses.

Healthy body

Movement

- **Get outside.** Enjoy the benefits of fresh air by going for a walk, run or bike ride. These can be great activities to try with a friend.
- **Visit the gym.** Develop cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and release mood-boosting endorphins. [Bloomsbury Fitness](#) is a low-priced Student's Union gym for all UCL students.
- **Try a sport.** If the gym isn't for you, try swimming, tennis, squash or team games such as rugby, basketball and football
- **Relaxing movement.** Join a Students' Union [Project Active](#) yoga, Pilates or barre session for weekly beginner-friendly classes.



Nutrition

- **Meal preparation.** Avoid skipping meals and plan your weekly meals to include whole foods and protein. Cook meals in batches and freeze them to enjoy a healthy meal when you are too busy or tired to cook.
- **Healthy snacks.** Too much fast food or energy drinks high in sugar and salt can negatively impact your diet. Fuel your body and mind with nutritious snacks (sandwich, salad, fruit, nuts).
- **Quiet spaces.** Whether you study in the library or your bedroom, find somewhere away from your place of work to take time out.
- **Enjoying a treat.** Being too restrictive with your diet can lead to disordered eating practices. Remember to reward yourself for your hard work with food that you enjoy.

Sleep

- **Study spaces.** Work away from your bedroom or find a [study space on campus](#).
- **Sleep schedule.** Sleep deprivation causes poor concentration and inability to retain information. Resist pulling an 'all-nighter' to cram revision and try to sleep for 7-9 hours.
- **Power naps.** If you've missed sleep, try a 20-minute 'power nap' to replenish lost sleep.
- **Sleep hygiene.** Stop studying and looking at digital devices 1-2 hours before you go to bed. Completing chores or taking a warm bath/shower can also help you unwind.
- **Journaling.** Jot down any stressful thoughts in a notebook, spend 10-15 minutes reflecting, then put the notebook away. You can resolve your stressful thoughts the next morning.

[Sleep School](#) and [Sleepio](#) are digital sleep improvement apps to help those who suffer with insomnia. Look out for the next [Sleep School talk or webinar at UCL](#) on our website.

Supporting a friend



Not sure what to say or do to comfort your stressed friend? Try our top 5 strategies to soothe their worries and help them get prepared for exams.



Ask them what they need today



Become a study buddy



Help them take a break



Remind them of their worth



Be there for them on exam day

Stress bucket



Download or print out this exercise to identify and work through your stressors. In the top row of boxes, write or draw the anxieties that fill up your stress bucket.



In the bottom row of boxes, write or draw the thoughts and activities that help you release anxieties from your stress bucket. What makes you feel better in times of exam stress?

Before the exam

Prepare for a successful exam season by building healthy habits in the days, weeks and months before your assessments. Look after yourself...

Throughout the exam season:

- Form a study group with friends or classmates
- Develop [effective revision and assessment planning](#)
- Download or print out our **Revision timetable** to build consistent study habits

The night before your exam:

- Plan your journey to [location of your examination venue](#)
- Prepare your equipment and bag before bed
- Plan comfortable clothing for long exams

On exam day:

- Start your day with a balanced breakfast
- Give yourself plenty of time to arrive at your examination venue
- Drink water and go to the toilet before the exam

During the exam



Mindfulness and grounding techniques can help you to stay calm and filter out distractions. If you begin to feel anxious, you can...

- Look up from your paper to prevent eye strain
- Take slow breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Flex your hand muscles to avoid typing or writing cramp
- Stretch your legs under your table
- Place your hands on the table and take note of its texture, temperature etc.
- Shift your weight from one foot to the other to connect with the floor

Try not to fixate on external stressors. Focus on yourself and, when you are ready, return to your writing.



REVISION TIMETABLE

/

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

SUN

Panic and grounding

It is not uncommon to feel stressed during revision and assessments. Some people might experience symptoms of panic or anxiety, such as:

- *Racing heart/palpitations*
- *Shortness of breath*
- *Feeling dizzy or light-headed*
- *Sweating*
- *Trembling*
- *Tingling in your fingers or lips*

If you experience panic symptoms during an exam, **don't worry**.

You can use practical techniques, such as the **5-4-3-2-1 method**, to stay calm and ground yourself in the present moment.

Focus on your breathing and try to identify...



5 things you
can **see**



4 things you
can **touch**



3 things you
can **hear**



2 things you
can **smell**



1 thing you
can **taste**

After the exam

The days and weeks after exams can bring both relief and new challenges.

As your body unwinds from stress, emotions may come to the surface.

This is completely normal, and it is important to maintain your wellbeing...

In the hours after an exam:

- Avoid comparing your exam experience to others. You may assume you gave a wrong answer to a question when you were actually correct
- Try to put the exam out of mind and prepare for your next assessment
- Relax and engage in self-care, such as a shower, bath or skincare routine



After the assessment season:

- Go celebrate! Call a loved one or meet up with your friends
- Plan a break or holiday in the summer
- Journal your experience to reflect on your hard work throughout the exam season
- Think about your career aspirations. For help with opportunities and applications, book an appointment with [UCL Careers](#)

If your exams didn't go to plan, **you still have many options**. Ensure that you make the most of the wide range of [academic support at UCL](#) and [Student's Union UCL](#).

The next page offers a list of wellbeing support services and resources at UCL.

Support at UCL

Always remember that you are not alone after your assessments. It could be helpful to discuss any worries you may have with a friend, family member, trusted contact or a UCL staff member.

UCL Student Support and Wellbeing are here to listen to your concerns, offering professional guidance and advice. You can speak to us...

In person:

- [Student Enquiries Centre](#)
- [Student Advisers](#)

By phone:

- Student Support and Wellbeing Phone Line: +44 (0) 20 3108 8836
- UCL 24/7 Student Support Line: call +44 (0) 808 238 0077

Online:

- Log an enquiry on [askUCL](#)



For additional support resources across UCL, you can refer to the Student Support and Wellbeing [Here to Support You Guide](#) e-booklet.

Beyond Student Support and Wellbeing, we encourage you to get in touch with...

- Your [Personal Tutor](#)
- Your [faculty](#)
- [Central Assessments Team](#)
- [Academic Communication Centre](#)
- [Student's Union UCL](#)
- [UCL Careers](#)

Thank you for reading Your Assessment Wellbeing Guide. We wish every UCL student the best of luck throughout the assessment period.

If you are struggling, or know someone who is, please remember that it is **never too late** to ask for help.

