

# The ultimate Kooth exam toolkit



This article was written by a Kooth writer (she/her) and contains the following themes: exam stress.

Stress is a natural emotion that causes us to feel worried, anxious, or tense because of a particular situation or experience. Sitting exams is one experience that can lead to feelings of stress for many of us, so, we've created this ultimate exam stress toolkit to explore:

- what exam stress is
- what causes exam stress
- how we can manage exam stress

## **What is exam stress?**

Exam stress is a term used to describe any worries or anxiety related to exams. Exam stress might be the cause of those uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and physical responses you experience in the lead up to an exam, how you feel the morning you're due to sit an exam, or even the feeling you get while you're waiting for your results. Let's take a look at some of the thoughts, feelings, and physical symptoms you might experience due to exam stress.



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Exam stress might cause some difficult thoughts, such as:

- “I can’t do this.”
- “I’m worried I might fail.”
- “I’m concerned I haven’t prepared enough for my exam.”
- “Everyone’s much more prepared than I am.”
- “I should know more/do more.”
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Exam stress might cause some difficult feelings, such as:

- pressure to succeed
- being overwhelmed
- fear
- nervousness
- anxiety
- frustration
- confusion

Exam stress might even cause some uncomfortable physical symptoms, too, such as:

- stomachaches
- headaches
- feeling unable to concentrate
- restlessness
- changes to eating habits
- changes to sleeping patterns
- tiredness

## Is all stress bad?

Stress isn’t always bad; at certain times, stress and anxiety can actually be helpful. For example - when it comes to exams, a little bit of stress can help motivate you to ensure that you prepare and do your best. It’s only when your stress levels rise to the point of being overwhelmed that it can become unhelpful.

## Thinking about what’s causing your exam stress

There might be all sorts of reasons why people feel especially stressed about exams. If you’re feeling stressed, it might be useful to ask yourself:

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- Do I feel any expectation from others to succeed? For example - family, friends, teachers.
- Am I comparing myself to others?
- Do I feel prepared for my exams?
- Do I have any additional responsibilities that might be adding to my stress? For example, am I a young carer, a parent, or am I supporting someone else in some way?
- Do I have any issues that might be adding to my stress? For example - mental, physical, emotional health issues.

**\*\***However you're feeling, and whatever the reason for your exam stress, you are not alone - although at times it can certainly feel that way. We've talked to a student, a teacher, and a mental health professional to gather some tips on how to help manage exam stress. **\*\***

\*The names used are pseudonyms

## Top tips from a student on how to manage exam stress

We chatted to Hari, 19, who sat A' level exams last year. These tips were helpful for Hari:

- **Think about your study space** - Find a space where you can really concentrate. It might be your bedroom, a space at home, or even your local library. It can be useful to have a calming space without too many distractions, that has everything you need to study - e.g. equipment, a water bottle, peace and quiet.
- **Be realistic about your study/revision plan** - While it might be tempting to cram or do as much as you possibly can in a day, it can also make you feel more overwhelmed and stressed out. If you're realistic about what you can do in a day, it can help you feel more in control, and feel more confident.
- **Find your own way to study** - Just because your friend is using flashcards, or you know someone colour coding their revision notes, it doesn't mean you need to do exactly the same. We all learn in different ways, so find what works for you.

## Top tips from a teacher on how to manage exam stress

We chatted to Michele - a psychology teacher who has supported hundreds of students over the years in higher and further education. These are her top tips:

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- **Your sleep and sleep routine are really important** - While it can be tempting to revise late into the night, getting a good night's sleep and having a consistent sleep routine in the lead up to exams can really help you to feel well-rested, and better prepared for exams.
- **Create a simple revision timetable** - If you have lots of exams, it can be difficult to know what to focus on. Creating a timetable can help you focus on the topics you need to revise, and can help you break things down into smaller, more manageable chunks. Don't forget to factor in breaks, too- taking breaks is essential; it gives your brain a rest so you feel energised, and ready to concentrate again.
- **Put your worries into perspective** - Exams can help you take the next step whether that's college, university, or something else - but you are also more than a set of results. To remind you of this, make time for things you enjoy, or think about what else feels important in your life aside from exams. This might be future plans you have with family or friends, or hopes and dreams that don't involve taking exams.

## Top tips from a counsellor on how to manage exam stress

We chatted to Stella - a counsellor who supports lots of young people managing exam stress. These are her suggestions:

- **Try not to compare yourself to others** - It can be tempting to compare yourself to your peers, or other people in your family, when it comes to exams, exam prep, and academic success. It's helpful to remember that we are all different; we all prepare for exams in different ways, and we all have different strengths. If you're looking around thinking everyone is more prepared than you, just remember that there are probably lots of people who are feeling just as worried. Focus on you, and your own unique qualities. For example, you might say to yourself, "I may struggle with \_\_\_\_, but I'm quite good at \_\_\_\_."
- **Make time for self-care** - When managing exam stress, lots of people forget to take care of their other needs. Take a moment each day to look after your basic needs (for example, drinking water, moving your body, taking a shower) and you'll see what a difference it makes.
- **Reach out for support** - You don't have to go through this time alone. Talk to your friends or family about your feelings, or even find a study group if you'd find it useful to get some practical support.



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For additional support, you might also find some like-minded students on our [forums](#).

Why not check out our discussion boards on:

- [Managing exam stress.](#)
- [Avoiding comparisons during exam time](#)
- [Coping with family pressure and conflict during exam periods](#)
- [Exam stress as the days get closer](#)

However you're feeling about your exams right now, please remember that you are not alone.

Would you like a safe space to explore the issues raised in this article? At [Kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com), you can read more, use an online journal, chat with our community and access confidential and anonymous support - all for free, with no waiting lists.