

EXAM ANXIETY

Exams are a part of getting through university. Unfortunately, exams can trigger stress and a lot of anxiety for many students. However, there are ways of managing your nervous energy to help you get through your exams with success, instead of freezing in fear.

What is exam anxiety?

Exam anxiety is the experience of feeling an intense moment of fear or panic before and/or during an exam or assessment.

For some students they experience low anxiety. Students who experience low anxiety may feel a little nervous about an upcoming exam but are still able to focus their attention on their studies or the question asked during the assessment. Usually low anxiety students are not struck with intrusive thoughts or feel debilitated by the exam.

For other students the anxiety associated with exams is so high that they show an immediate anxiety reaction when exposed to the feared exam situation.

They attempt to avoid the situation by not showing up to the exam, or may endure it but with extreme fear. High anxiety can tip some into a sense of panic: "I just really can't do this!"

Students with either high or low anxiety can respond to tests in different ways. However, research shows that managing anxiety effectively can actually help with exam performance.



The challenge is to recognise when your anxiety has increased past an optimal level so that it starts to affect your ability to complete the exam — this is high-level anxiety.

Exam anxiety can be a sensation that occurs in one part of your body or general tension throughout your body.

How can I manage my exam anxiety?

Self-care strategies leading up to and during exam periods are essential for those students who identify high anxiety in themselves. Self-care strategies can include good sleep hygiene, maintaining a nutritional diet, exercising regularly, reducing your weekly caffeine, alcohol and drug consumption as well as implementing a few relaxation routines into your day.

Mindfulness is one of the most known and popular relaxation techniques used. Mindfulness is about experiencing the world that is firmly in the 'here and now'. Mindfulness is a skill that takes time to develop. It is not easy, and like any skill, it requires a certain level of effort, time, patience, and ongoing practice. For further information on mindfulness training, contact the Student Counselling Service on 9919 5400 to make an appointment to see a counsellor.

Tips for coping with exam anxiety

- Prepare ahead of time by working on sections of the content each day.
- Use practice exam papers as an opportunity to manage your exam anxiety.
- Identify your anxiety early by noticing the physical responses.
- Try replacing unhelpful thoughts with more encouraging self-talk by challenging your worried and negative thoughts.
- Practice focusing your attention on the task at hand (mindfulness), rather than being tangled in your anxiety and thinking of the "what if?"
- Learn a few skills for reducing your physical reactions to exam anxiety.
- Remember good self-care: pay attention to your sleep, nutrition, exercise, relaxation routines, and reach out for social support.

Useful links and resources

You can find more resources for managing exam anxiety and more at www.vu.edu.au/counselling

If you would like to talk to someone about your exam anxiety and ask a few questions about individual support, contact **Student Counselling on 9919 5400** Monday to Friday during business hours.

You can also access:

- Kids Helpline — 1800 55 1800
- Headspace — (03) 9027 0100
- Lifeline — 13 11 14