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Remember, not all stress is bad stress – we need a certain amount to keep us motivated. But letting things get out of hand will not help you in the lead up to your exams. Getting yourself mentally, physically, emotionally and materially prepared will give you more control and help manage stress and anxiety. Photograph: iStockphoto

the boundaries for your achievements. Expand your self image and you expand your possibilities.

Make it easy for yourself:

Eight easy steps to de-clutter your mind and improve your focus.

- 1. Get organised:** Organise your subjects. Have all the materials you need ready and accessible. Don't lose time looking for your red pen or new copy book – it will frustrate you and by the time you are all set to get going you've lost half an hour and are now in a bad mood. Develop a system that works for you, so that you can find what you need when you need it.
- 2. Plan your time:** things can take longer than you think – plan in breaks. Use wall charts to map out your study and homework timetables.
- 3. Create the right study environment:** A tidy environment will ease your mind. Avoid background 'noise' that will add to your anxiety. If listening to music helps you, make sure it is easy listening and not high intensity.
- 4. Attend your classes:** Avoid the temptation as exams loom to skip classes in favour of study. If you already have poor study technique, this will only reinforce it and add to feelings of isolation.
- 5. Get clever with your study:** Are you familiar with exam paper layouts and marking schemes? Start practising. You can download exam marking systems from [\[www.studentenrichmentservices.ie\]\(http://www.studentenrichmentservices.ie\) or buy them in your school supply shop. If you haven't got them already, don't delay, get them today. As your revision work, look over past exam papers and answer questions or subject areas covered in class, time yourself and correct your answers. For further help with study techniques, check out \[www.studentenrichmentservices.ie\]\(http://www.studentenrichmentservices.ie\).](http://www.exam-

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6. Stay connected with friends and family: If you are feeling stressed out, take time off and talk to people. Don't isolate yourself.

7. Take regular guilt-free breaks: Leave the books at home when you are off. Likewise, when you are studying, turn off the phone and focus.

8. Nourish yourself:

- ◆ Eat a balanced diet – Avoid fatty foods, excessive amounts of sweets, chocolate, fizzy drinks. Always have breakfast.
 - ◆ Sleep. Make sure you are getting your eight hours. Ideally be in bed before 11pm.
 - ◆ Take a fish oil supplement to help improve concentration or multi-vitamin to boost your immune system
 - ◆ Monitor caffeine intake – no more than three cups of coffee/tea per day.
 - ◆ Drink lots of water – a minimum of eight glasses per day.
 - ◆ Take regular exercise and relaxation.
 - ◆ Limit nicotine and alcohol. They reduce your performance, concentration and memory.
- Finally, wishing you every success and good luck.

Minimum stress

Tommy Casserly of Student Enrichment Services offers some study advice that will help to minimise stress in the lead up to exams.

Organise Your Time

- Decide how much time you can allocate for study and homework each night. Try to keep one day free at the weekend. This will help to avoid burn out and the prospect of a day off should increase your productivity!
- Make a realistic timetable, which allows enough time for homework, study, sports and even a little television and social life.
- Divide the time into slots of 25-30 minutes, allowing a five-minute break in between. For numerical subjects, ie. maths, physics and accountancy, time slots of 40 minutes are advisable. After three study/homework sessions a 20-minute break is advisable. This will help keep a high level of concentration.
- It is important to set specific time limits for each task. This will improve your efficiency at completing your home work/study and allow you to cover material more quickly.
- Allocate time for both study and homework each night, alternating a study session with a homework session. It might be advisable to keep your easiest homework or favourite subject until last. Your concentration levels will decrease as the night progresses, so it is best to keep something that you do not mind doing until last.
- Having established a realistic timetable, mark in the homework sessions and fill in the remaining time slots with the subjects that you will study each night. The subjects covered each night should remain fixed each week, eg every Monday I will study English poetry, maths and geography.
- Remember, the key to success in establishing a study method is setting realistic targets for yourself and sticking to your timetable. If you have achieved the targets you set for the week then reward yourself by taking full advantage of your study-free day. However, if you got distracted during the week and did not complete your goals you will have to use your free day to catch up.

What if I've done nothing until now?

For students that may have "drifted" through Fifth Year, there is still enough time left to do well in the Leaving Certificate as long as they study effectively. Having devised a manageable timetable, organised a place to study, (either at home or in an after-school study hall) and gathered all your necessary textbooks and past papers, your next step is to train yourself to study effectively and efficiently.

- To study a particular topic, the best method is to answer questions from past exam papers. Then you can divide the course into manageable sections and focus on studying specific topics.
- When answering these exam questions, do not write the answers out in long form. Instead your answers should be written in point form.
- Using your textbook to help you, write out a list of key points, facts and details that are required for the answer and that you will be able to memorise. It is easier to memorise a list of short points than several pages. These key points will trigger other relevant information for a complete long form answer in the exam.
- Keep these answers organised by subject and topic in separate folders so that you can easily access them later.
- To review/revise these topics, quickly jot down the main points that you have memorised on a piece of paper. Compare these with the points in your folder. Circle any words or phrases (on the original page in your folder) that you have forgotten. Always remember we learn by making mistakes.
- You should aim to revise each topic at least four times before the exams.
- Your past exam papers are your most valuable asset. Certain topics are asked very frequently and these need to be learned in great detail. Marking schemes show the required standard and the examiner's report offers valuable insight into where downfalls occur. These can be viewed at www.examinations.ie.

◆ Student Enrichment Services (SES) is a Dublin-based company that provides a series of educational and professional development seminars to second level students, staff and parents throughout Ireland. For further information log onto www.studentenrichment.ie or phone 01 4947927.