

MANAGING STRESS DURING FINALS

For most students, final exams week is the most stressful time of the semester. A minimal amount of stress can help motivate you to study, but too much stress or the inability to cope with the stress can cause you to worry excessively, become physically sick, or can immobilize you in your efforts to study.

If you are looking for ways to cope with stress during finals, try some of the following stress reduction techniques.

SELF-TALK OR "INNER SPEECH"

Self-talk or "inner speech" consists of all the thoughts you have and the messages you give yourself. Listen to the things you say to yourself, and try changing anxiety-generating self-talk as in the example below. Remember, the idea is not to deny your feelings, but to re-focus your thoughts away from yourself and back to the task.

Eecch!

"I'll never be able to pass my Algebra final; I hate math, and if I don't pass this test, I'll probably flunk the class. Then my parents will take away my car and . . ."

Helpful

"I'm really worried about this test, but all I can do is try my best. Even if I flunk the class, my teacher and parents know I've been trying. It won't be the end of the world. Now, what I need to do to start studying is . . ."

Self-talk is an effective stress reduction technique and can be used before, during, and after a stressful event.

BREAKING THE "WORRY CYCLE"

Breaking the "worry cycle" involves confronting yourself with the fact that your anxiety-generating self-talk causes you to worry (but not to act). Because of this, you end up facing a situation unprepared and perform poorly. Finally, because of your poor performance, you start the anxiety-generating self-talk and worrying all over again (the worry cycle). Change your self-talk to be more helpful, make a detailed list of what you need to accomplish and when you will do it, and get started. Procrastination only makes you worry more!

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Physical exercise is also an effective technique for coping with stress. Each day, before or after you have taken your finals, spend some time jogging, doing yoga, riding a bicycle, or walking down by the river. Even 30 minutes of exercise will help! Your mind shouldn't be the only part of your body that gets a work out during finals week.



TALKING WITH A FRIEND

Talking with a friend can bring the source of stress out into the open where it can be evaluated objectively. You may find that others share your feelings and reactions to the stress of finals and may be able to offer a sympathetic ear and some additional coping suggestions.