

Preparing for Exams

Brakenhale Year 11

Special points of interest:

- Sleep and revision
- Music and revision
- Food and cognitive function
- 20 quick hints

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Exam Success- the pitfalls to avoid

Exam stress happens to all students. The pattern of life becomes disrupted with late nights cramming, a diet of fast food and caffeinated drinks.

Over the course of the next couple of months our students will go through an important period of their lives. At school we will do what we can to ensure that they can be as successful as possible.

In the home we are sure that you want to maximize the support that you can give them during this stressful time. To help you with this we have put together this booklet with information on various things that you can do at home to support your learners.

Perhaps the most important thing that you can do is keep an open dialogue with your young person. Often students can feel isolated during this period as if no one cares

how they seem. The Year 11 team and their teachers will be doing the same and will keep in contact with home if we have any concerns.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any concerns.

Students can also make use of the online support services offered by Kooth.com which can help students with support and is anonymous.

The school can also help should more dedicated support be required.

Please remember that you and your young person are not alone- if we work as a team then this can be a period of success.



Avoiding wasted time and excess stress

or understands the pressure that they feel. Try to support them simply by asking how they are doing and keeping an eye on

20 Quick Study Hacks to improve performance- parents guide 1-10

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|---|--|---|
| 1) Exercise before an exam- see our article on this | to explain something they have learnt to you | distraction is best- do they need the internet all evening |
| 2) Speak out loud when reading whilst revising—studies show we are 50% more likely to remember if we speak when reading | 5) Create Mental Associations- connected knowledge is easier to maintain | 9) Watch to learn- use documentaries to compact a narrative |
| 3) Have a reward- Provide a simple reward whilst studying it will maintain focus | 6) Draw- images are easier to retain for the brain (even if they are badly drawn!) | 10) Use Google properly- the search engine has certain features to help you search (see image on back page) |
| 4) Teach what you learn- ask your young person | 7) Times new Roman font- this is the easiest to read | |
| | 8) Blocking Apps/block Wi-Fi- having time without | |



Good sleep is key to effective revision and exam performance

To Sleep perchance to Dream- Rest and Exams

The key to exam success is balance. The tendency before exams is for students to try to cram information. The pressure to cover all of the content covered over the past two years can result in an impact on sleep patterns.

Studies have long shown that lack of sleep impacts cognitive function during study. More recently studies have focused more on the impact of lack of sleep on exam performance.

Most students believe that staying up late the night before the exam is worth doing as they will then have

been able to go through more notes and revision resources ready for the next day.

In fact this belief is wrong, whilst students will have been able to carry out more revision the benefit of this extra time is offset by the impact that the lack of sleep has on overall performance.

Studies by the University of California have shown that the impact of lack of sleep prior to the exam sees an overall drop off of at the high levels. This means that a student with the potential to be a high performer will drop to an average perform-

er as they struggle to use their higher cognitive skills.

Sleep and Exam Preparation

During revision sleep also provides a vital function. During sleep the brain processes information which it has been collating during the day.

If a student has revised well during the day during the night the brain sorts the information, **if the student doesn't sleep properly then the brain doesn't process the information.**

Over time this then means that the student will need to do more revision to keep up.

The key is regular and sufficient sleep.

If using music to revise to then Mozart is the most effective. The cognitive impact is known as the 'Mozart Effect'.

Music and Revision

Generally quiet is the best environment in which to study. For some people this **isn't the most effective** as they find quiet distracting and this causes lack of focus.

The key if this is case is to choose the right type of music. Classical music is the best music to use as it provides a light harmonious background which allows for focus plus it has no lyrical content to provide distractions.

Volume is also important, if you hear loud music coming from a room it is too loud not to be a distraction. As a parent you should suggest they reduce the volume.

Music is also a good way to measure time, a playlist of around 45 minutes long will enable a student to know when to take a break away from the books as well as clear starting point.

Students can use music to fix knowledge. From a young age people use tunes to

cement knowledge- the ABC song and rainbow song being two classic examples. Students could attempt to fix knowledge to a favourite tune to allow recall.

Another technique which can be effective is to listen to a certain piece only when revising a particular topic/subject then before the exam the student can listen to the track to create a moment of recall.

Overall though it is best to revise in silence—this is after all the situation the exam will be carried out in.



Simple walking before the exam can boost performance

The Importance of Exercise

Studies have shown that 20 minutes exercise prior to study boosts academic performance.

This isn't a matter of a heavy gym workout or twenty minute run but rather evidence shows that 20 minutes exercise prior to sitting a test provides better attention and control during the test itself.

What happens is the basal ganglia which co-ordinates **attention and 'executive**

function' which is key in decision making is made more active by the exercise the benefit is then taken into the exam which means that the student begins the exam with this portion of the brain active rather than awaiting for it to become active during the test.

Also studies have shown that the fitter a student is the larger the basal ganglia becomes which then can improve overall performance.

It is important then for young people to do the following during the revision and exam period.

- 1) maintain their exercise routine- **or if they don't have one** to introduce some light exercise into their days (walking to school is good for this).
- 2) Walk to school on the morning of the exams- avoid the lift or driving in.
- 3) During morning revision staff will include some element of exercise to aid this.

Eating and exams

There is a lot of debate about whether three large meals or six smaller meals are more effective during a revision period.

Which ever option is used the truth is that hunger is the enemy of exam success.

Students should always start with a filling breakfast, Oats or Eggs are the best breakfast foods rather than sugar drenched cereals. Oats provide slow release energy which can provide a consistent level during long periods of revision or in the exam itself.

Eggs are full of a nutrient called Choline which has

been proven to improve cognitive performance and memory.

Lunch is also key particularly during the exam period. Focusing on foods with a low-glycaemic index is advised as these will keep blood sugar levels steady and aid metabolism. This avoids the rush of energy from High-glycaemic foods which can then result in a feeling of lethargy, hunger and sugar pangs later in the afternoon. This will often occur about an hour after the food is eaten—right in the middle of a revision session or an exam— not the best time to be tired. On the

back of the booklet we have provided a list of high and low glycaemic foods.

For dinner Fish is always a good choice, the omega 3 in fish is a fatty acid which is believed to aid brain function. If fish is not your thing then Chia and flaxseeds are an alternative and suitable for vegetarians.

For snacking (often my downfall) try switching in dried fruits or use berries as they are full of vitamin C yet avoid some of the pitfalls of oranges and apples. For those not fruit lovers try pumpkin seeds and walnuts both full of Vitamin E and zinc which aids brain function.



Banning sugary energy drinks at home is a great start

Drinking and exams

It is common for students to turn to energy drinks when trying to cram knowledge in for the exams.

It is important to note that drinks can also have the high-glycaemic impact that foods have and therefore need to be taken seriously.

The NHS recommends between 6-8 glasses of fluid as a minimum per day. This includes all types of liquid but it is important to consider the following-

Coffee and teas contain

caffeine which if taken in large amounts can impact sleep patterns which will effect ability to focus.

Smoothies, Fruit squash and fizzy drinks contain a lot of sugar and are high on the glycaemic index causing the cycle of energy then crash.

Water is the best liquid but if like me your young person likes a bit of flavour try fruit teas, semi-skimmed milk or water with pieces of fruit in to provide flavour.

It is important that a student

avoids caffeine during the exam period particularly on days of the actual exams. Caffeine can impact the production of urine. This could well mean that they have to leave the exam hall for a bathroom break, this is lost time but more importantly a loss of focus.

Sports drinks which market themselves as for high endurance are useful for sports but not for exams—they are high in sugar and designed for the quick boost for a short period.

Students should always make sure that they have a bottle of water for the exams which complies to the exam regulations— this is critical to longer exams.

Ten Foods to Boost Brainpower

Over the next months try to integrate some of the following into your young persons' diet

- 1) Wholegrains- brown wholegrains are low-GI foods which enable slow release energy-good in pasta form
- 2) EFA Foods- oily fish, pumpkin seeds, walnuts- EFA aids in managing stress and aid serotonin.
- 3) Blueberries- they

might improve or at least reduce short term memory loss

- 4) Tomatoes- again guard against memory loss and are good with olive oil
- 5) Vitamin B foods- improve blood flow to brain- chicken and eggs are good
- 6) Blackcurrants and peppers- high in vitamin C generally promotes good health

- 7) Pumpkin Seeds- high in zinc which promotes memory
- 8) Broccoli- Source of Vitamin K enhances brain power
- 9) Sage- the herb is strong in various oils which aid brain function
- 10) Nuts- Vitamin E in nuts aids in the retention of strong brain function



Broccoli is a great brain food

