

Stress Down and PREPARE

The CSP's Student Survival Guide

Preparation is everything. The CSP's 'stress-busting' system – **PREPARE** – can help your mind and body get ready for exams – and boost your chances of academic success.

THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY
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THE 1–10 TECHNIQUE

Relaxation techniques can help to beat stress. The 1–10 Technique involves focusing on relaxing individual parts of the body, and working upwards using a slow count to ten. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, say the following script quietly to yourself including the numbers. Do this slowly for the first 5-10 times:

- 1 my feet are heavy, sinking down.
- 2 my calf muscles are loose and heavy.
- 3 my knee joints are loose and open, the muscles on the front and back of my thighs are long and loose.
- 4 my bottom and lower back are comfortable and supported in the chair.
- 5 my ribs are moving gently out and in as my breath flows in and out.
- 6 my hands are open and heavy resting on my lap (or on the chair). I am aware of textures touching my hands... (my jewellery/my watch /my clothes/the chair).
- 7 my arms are heavy and loose hanging from my shoulders.
- 8 the muscles between my shoulders and my neck are long and loose... long and loose.
- 9 the skin on my face is smooth and soft, my eyes gently closed, my lips barely touching (or a little apart), my jaw loose.
- 10 I feel calm.

Stay in this state for a few minutes or more then finish with a slow deep breath out before a gentle breath in. If you practice this you will find that you can reduce the time it takes to seconds and so it is the perfect technique for just before or even during an exam.

PREPARE

And remember the PREPARE acronym is:

P lanning
R elaxation
E xam technique
P osture
A ctivity
R evision
E ating

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PLANNING

- Construct a timetable which sets out the work you need to do, including revision time and completion deadlines, teachers can advise here
- Isolate and mark which subjects require more time but leave enough time for the rest.

RELAXATION

Don't rely on sleep as a form of relaxation. Find an additional technique that suits you. For example:

- Deep and slow breathing is useful at calming nerves; also good during exams
- Meditation to music
- Create opportunities to take a break and chill-out
- A basic massage – get a parent or friend to gently rub your scalp or knead your shoulders
- During an exam – tension can be alleviated through some basic exercises such as tightly clenching fists or extending your fingers, hold then relax; while sitting, grasp your chair's seat from either side of you, pull up so you feel a contraction in your arms and shoulders, hold then relax; or firmly stretching out your body, hold then relax. If panic sets in during an exam, switch off and relax for a few minutes with your eyes closed and focus on your breathing. Come back to your paper when you feel calmer and proceed slowly reading everything carefully and moving on from parts you feel stuck on – you can come back to it later. All the while, tell yourself you will get through it like everyone else and will do the best you can
- Learn and adopt the 1-10 technique. This involves focusing on relaxing individual body parts and working upwards using a slow count to ten (see separate sheet).

EXAM REVISION TECHNIQUE

- Use available resources like books, notes and essays and make them user-friendly with summary notes, headings, sub-headings, graphs, highlighting and revision cards
- Talk to teachers and parents, and take notes of things you need help with or if you are feeling stressed
- Find out how you like to revise, e.g. with a friend, alone, morning, evening, short bursts or long sessions
- Ask students above you what their exams were like
- Access past exam papers to get a feel for what an exam might be like.

POSTURE

Your body can become very tense and tight during revision and an exam but you can take some basic steps to help loosen up and prevent back, neck and shoulder ache.

- If sitting at a desk or computer: ensure elbows are at right angles with your upper body and are relaxed; forearms should be parallel to your desk/desktop and your hips should be slightly higher than your knees and feet flat on the floor or on a footrest; your back should rest comfortably on your chair's backrest and be straight not slouched; if using a computer wrists at a keyboard should be straight rather than bent up or down; and keep your mouse within easy reach; and if possible your eyes should be level with the top of your display screen in front of you
- Make sure you have enough light in your revision room
- Whatever position you adopt for revision, be sure to change it every 20 minutes – don't sit for longer without a break.

ACTIVITY

Exercise is very important and can help stimulate your brain to work more effectively.

- Build exercise time into your timetable – this can be anything like a game of football, dancing, walking or swimming.

REVISION

The key to exam success and minimising stress is simple – revision!

EATING

A healthy and varied diet is important, although snacking can help some keep going. Ensuring you have regular meals will give you more energy. Eats lots of fruit and vegetable, and drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeine and sugary foods as these are liable to depress the system making you feel low and miserable and can prevent you from feeling active.

PREPARE

Putting the components of this programme together can reduce or prevent stress and anxiety and help you maintain a threshold of calm, and physical and psychological wellbeing.

Parents can also get involved in the helping their children beat stress and anxiety by seeking further advice from their local chartered physiotherapist who may be able to provide additional relaxation techniques and stress reduction tips. Visit www.physio2u.org.uk to find a chartered physiotherapist near you.