

ANUx - SP | Managing_Exam_Anxiety

Hello, I'm Carol Bannon from the ANU counseling center. And today, I'm going to talk about managing, or as I like to say, wrangling exam anxiety. Some anxiety before and in an exam is normal and useful. And it can help us to do our best. But if we have too much anxiety, it can shut us down or we can go blank.

And this sense of going blank can be one sign of exam anxiety. Today, I'll be talking about how he can manage anxiety during exams so it doesn't get in the way of our performance. So we can do our best or feel reasonably satisfied and comfortable with our performance in an exam. So today I'm going to be going over eight tips to manage.

Tip one, life balance, managing your health and well-being, it's commonly acknowledged that a balanced lifestyle can potentially prevent unhelpful stress and anxiety and of course manage it. I like the work of Dr. Dan Siegel and his ideas of the Healthy Mind Platter. He has seven areas of mind health and body health. And this promotes a holistic view.

For example, one of the seven areas is enough sleep. Another of the seven areas is enough play. Another area of mind and body health he talks about is focus time. This is the intensive time we need to study. And he also talks about down time. In these seven areas, it is an ideal to have a balance in all of these. We usually know that when we're out of balance, we don't feel quite right or we're overdoing it in one area, for example, over sleeping.

Tip two, prepare for exams, this might seem obvious. But it's really important to aim for weekly reviews in preparation, to attend class and try to keep up to date with your tasks for the semester. And try to avoid cramming. The academic skills and learning center at ANU is a great resource. And it can certainly help you to develop study routines.

Tip three, understand anxiety, gaining knowledge about when the stress response can become the fear or the fight or flight response, know what your fearful responses are, for example feeling flushed in the face or breathing too fast. So you can then soothe down your reactions. A fear response, the release of adrenaline and stress hormones, is really helpful when you want to get out of the way of a bus, but less helpful in an exam setting. When we are in fear our higher brain shuts down. I like to think about it in terms of it's easy to learn and perform academically when we have a smile on our face or when we're feeling fairly calm.

Tip four, soothe anxiety, practicing calming ourselves on a regular basis, including structured relaxation, even daily can help in the long term to reduce stress and anxiety. While you want to soothe down in an exam if you're feeling anxious, you can simply take a long out breath. You can fill up your lungs and very simply imagine blowing out 1,000 candles. Or you might want to close your eyes for one minute and just visualize a calming scene, so you can regulate and soothe yourself during the exam.

Tip five, let's have a look at what your attitudes and beliefs are about learning. Do you believe that intelligence is

an inborn talent requiring no active effort? This is called a fixed mindset. And this attitude or belief can stifle learning and potential. If you build a belief that academic abilities and knowledge can be learned through effort and hard work, and make a commitment to doing that work, research has demonstrated that you're more likely to enjoy learning and perform well. This is what is known as a growth mindset. And the good news is that you can build a growth mindset. Some examples of a growth mindset attitude include embracing challenges and learning from mistakes and actively seeking feedback.

This is the life work of Carol Dweck, a psychologist from Stanford. She studied what makes people successful learners for many years. Her book, *Mindset*, is a great resource for getting the most out of ourselves as learners and also improving on motivation.

Tip six, check your thinking. Research has demonstrated that our internal dialogue, or self-talk, has a great impact on anxiety. For example, persistently negative or critical thinking about our day to day activity and tasks can build anxiety. If you have catastrophic thinking, become aware. Challenge this thinking. Try to balance it, and try to move to a more neutral or realistic thinking.

Tip seven, work on tolerating normal discomfort and then work towards thriving. Anxiety is a daily part of life. You can have some anxiety and cope with a situation at the same time. This is a helpful adaptation. You don't have to be totally at peace to perform well. Remember emotions naturally come and go like the weather or the waves on an ocean.

And finally, tip eight, celebrate your achievements and persist. Remember to be kind to yourself and celebrate your successes no matter how small. And remember to keep on going. I hope this talking tip has been helpful for you. You can access this tip on our ANU counseling center web page by the mental health tab. And it will take you to the topic, exam anxiety.

If you think you might benefit from a face to face talk with a counselor and if you are an enrolled ANU student, please call the center to make an appointment on 61 25 2442. I hope you found this talking tip helpful. Thanks for listening, and goodbye for now.