

Jake's Tips for Reducing Stress



A couple of years ago I started my Medicine degree at university. I was so excited to embark on my dream of becoming a doctor, but it quickly dawned on me that as well as being a lot of fun, my degree was going to be a lot of work!

I'd always thought of myself as a naturally relaxed person, but by the end of my first term at uni I was beginning to feel so stressed it was affecting my down time as well as my work. Talking to friends and teachers about how I was feeling helped me work out what I needed to do to take positive action.

The causes of stress – and the way you experience it – will vary from person to person. That's why I've included four of the strategies that I find most helpful in managing my stress levels at university: hopefully there will be something in there for everyone!

Tip #1: Tackle Stress Head On

When faced with something stressful, many of us will complain about it, but without taking positive steps to reduce it. For example, if you get a disappointing grade in your science mock exam, there are two ways of dealing with it. You can see it as something negative, choose to bury your head in the sand, and do nothing about it because you've convinced yourself you'll never be good at science. Or, you can use it as the catalyst for the motivation that you need to push yourself in the right direction. The first approach responds to a stressful situation by being frozen into inaction. The second approach uses stress as a springboard to fight against the very problem that is making you stressed and improve your academic performance in the process.

We can all put this second approach into action. Do the following to tackle the problem head on:

1. Identify the stressor

- Ask yourself “what exactly is it about this situation that is making me stressed?”
- It may be “I don't understand why I got a bad mark in maths when I studied so hard, and now I will never be good at it”

2. Identify actions

- Write down 3 immediate actions you can take **that day**:
 - Email maths teacher to make an appointment with them
 - Go through the test with the teacher to understand why you did not get the marks
 - Do additional practice questions from the textbook on the same topic

3. Take action

- Once you have identified the 3 things, do them **immediately!**
- This will force you to confront what is bothering you which will allow you to get back on focus and get the grades you are looking for.

Tip #2: Start Early and Manage Your Time

Don't let work pile up and use your free time wisely. Nothing breeds stress quite like being completely overwhelmed. If you have an exam or test to study for, and you also have homework you have to get done for three other subjects, then stress levels will start rising. Having foresight over due dates and deadlines will ensure you are never caught underprepared. You can also this way map out the revision you need to be getting done across the term to avoid any last-minute cramming which can be stressful. Create a weekly planner by looking ahead for the next 3 weeks and scheduling in all the required work to be done across the week and adding any revision you need to be doing too. It should include the time taken to complete each task and the associated deadline like the one below:

WEEKLY PLANNER				
Work	Approx Time	Due	To do	Mini deadline
English Civil War essay introduction	1 hour	8/3	Plan essay Draft introduction	6/3 7/3
English Civil War key words	30 mins	11/3	Research words Write definitions	9/11 10/11
Biology Notes	1 hour	14/3	Section 2B Section 2C	12/11 13/11
Geography Practice Exam	1.5 hours	16/3	Read over notes Draft answer Submit to teacher to mark	10/3 13/3 14/3

Tip #3: Prioritise Your Health and Wellbeing

Do one thing you love every day. Things like exercise, team sports and socialising with friends are vital circuit breakers which will prevent stress levels from building up.

It may seem obvious, but your health and wellbeing are crucial to maintain healthy stress levels. Hence, it is key that you are keeping fit and healthy. Physical activity releases endorphins creating a chemical change in your brain which helps to keep you more balanced and relaxed. The same goes for a healthy diet and getting plenty of sleep. They may seem like the simplest changes, but if you make them, you can be assured you'll feel a lot more relaxed come exam day.

Check out the 5 things I do below:

5 ways to look after yourself whilst revising

1. Take active study breaks away from your desk
2. Exercise at least 3 times a week (20 minutes will do!)
3. Avoid stimulants like caffeine after 2pm
4. Get at least 8 hours sleep per night
5. Avoid heavy screen-use 30 minutes before bed

Tip #4: Hit Re-Set

School can become overwhelming, and when caught in a state of stress, it can be difficult to **concentrate** and **maintain perspective**. If you are trying to relax, try the **Body Scan** technique to help you hit the reset button on stress. For other forms of mindfulness and relaxation techniques, try out the apps **1 Giant Mind** or **Headspace**.

- Body Scan Technique: <https://ukstudent.elevateeducation.com/media/video/dissolve-stress-340>
- 1 Giant Mind : www.1giantmind.com
- Headspace: www.headspace.com