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6 top tips for staying calm and reducing exam nerves

Noticing a few jitters or nerves before an exam is a normal experience for most people. The quick boost of adrenaline gives us a lift and enhances the brain so that we can really perform well. However, for those whose anxiety takes over, the feelings can be overwhelming as the adrenaline keeps on flowing. If this happens to you, just follow our BE CALM top tips to get back in the driving seat and use your body's natural turbo system to your advantage!

Breathe intentionally

Finding an effective breathing pattern can transform the chemical balance of stress hormones and reduce levels of adrenaline and cortisol in the body which cause the feelings that we instantly recognise as nervousness or anxiety. Try 7:11 breathing to bring back control – breathe in for a count of 7 (at your preferred speed) and then out for a count of 11 and keep this going. In just a couple of minutes, the nerves will fade.

Exercise

Getting active can help you to get calm. It doesn't need to be a work-out or anything strenuous, just a short walk outside or spending 10 minutes doing something active that you enjoy will improve your ability to use up that added adrenaline.

Concentrate on relaxing

Doing something enjoyable in between studying sessions will make a real difference. It can be tempting to work, work, work, but this just fuels the adrenaline you have been learning to tame. A 30 minute rest every now and then will keep you from burning out.

Accept the nervous feelings without judging them or yourself

Fighting off the feelings, or thinking of them as bad or difficult will fuel their power. Decide to go with the experience and stay with it rather than taking flight. Notice the feelings, accept them, know they will pass with these techniques and you will stay in control.

Listen to your mind and body

Taking regular breaks when preparing for exams is crucial. Be sure to eat well and drink plenty of water. Get enough sleep, remembering that the brain continues to file and link learning during sleep making it easier to recall the information you need in the exam.

Move to a safe space in your mind

Learning and practising this technique in advance will ensure that it is readily available to you whenever you need it, even if that is in the exam room or on your way into it. Think of a place where you feel very safe, perhaps somewhere familiar or imaginary, and bring it to mind in as much detail as possible using all your senses (with your eyes closed if you prefer); carefully notice the colours, shapes, textures, smells, sounds and other specific details in that place. Use 7:11 breathing while you do this. See yourself in this place looking and feeling as calm as you could ever be. Enjoy this for a minute or up to 3 minutes. Visualise writing your name in the sky, on the ground or on a wall in that place and see yourself smiling as you look at your name, claiming this calm place for yourself. Open your eyes, write your name on a piece of paper and return to the task.
Good luck!