Self-Care During Exams

We all know that exams are extremely challenging, not only because of what we have to learn, but also because they can affect our mental health. You're told to take regular breaks, but do you find it hard to know how best to use them. There's plenty of advice out there on study techniques, but you must remember that self-care during your exams, is just as important as revision. Always plan when you're going to start and finish your revision so you know when to stop.

These are top tips to build self-care into the non-working parts of your day.

If you have five minutes -

Try a grounding exercise. Grab a (non-academic) book or sheet of paper and count how many letters there are on the page, or count how many blue things you can see in the room.

These types of exercises help to reduce anxiety by focusing your brain on a specific task that is unrelated to your work.

Another grounding exercise is the 5,4,3,2,1 trick. You need to find:

5 things you can see

4 things you can touch

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell/taste

1 good thing about yourself

If you have fifteen minutes -

Find a YouTube video that makes you smile.

Make a hot drink, but don't take it back to your desk with you. Drink it away from your work space and turn it into a short mindfulness exercise - notice how the mug feels warm in your hands, but cools down gently, and the way the liquid feels when you take a sip. Try to bring your mind back to it if you find yourself going back into revision-mode before your break is over!

Do something creative, like drawing, colouring or printing off funny pictures to stick on your noticeboard. You could even try to learn a new skill.

If you have an hour -

Have a shower with a shower gel or soap that smells really good. You could try a lavender-scented shower gel or moisturiser, a smell many people find calming, so that the smell lingers for a while.

Do something involving exercise. Go for a walk, go for a bike ride or sit in the garden.

Connect with other humans. Find somebody who also needs a break and have a chat with them – you might be able to help each other get through the exam period. It's easy to feel isolated when you're doing exams, so make time to connect with your friends.

In general -

It sounds obvious, but make sure you're drinking enough water and eating regular meals - it can be tempting to eat at your desk to maximise study time, but you'll work more effectively if you use meal times as a way to get away from your study space.

Remember that everybody has different study patterns and energy levels, so try not to worry that you're not doing enough work. Keep in mind that people might exaggerate the amount of time they claim to be working for!

If you're struggling to manage your mood or anxiety levels, don't keep it to yourself. Friends and family members can be a great source of support, and there's no shame in seeking professional help. Don't hesitate to ask a member of staff for further help and support.

Think positively, because when we feel anxious, we can start thinking things like 'I can't do this' and 'I'm going to fail'. It can be difficult, but try to replace these with positive thoughts such as: 'this is just anxiety, it can't harm me' and, 'relax, concentrate - it's going to be okay'.

Be honest about how you feel. Sometimes people can put pressure on you without even realising and sometimes it can help to talk about how it makes you feel. Talking about things can help you think about other ways they can support you in the future.

Above all, remember you are not defined by your exam results - you are so much more than the letters or numbers that appear on a sheet of paper.