



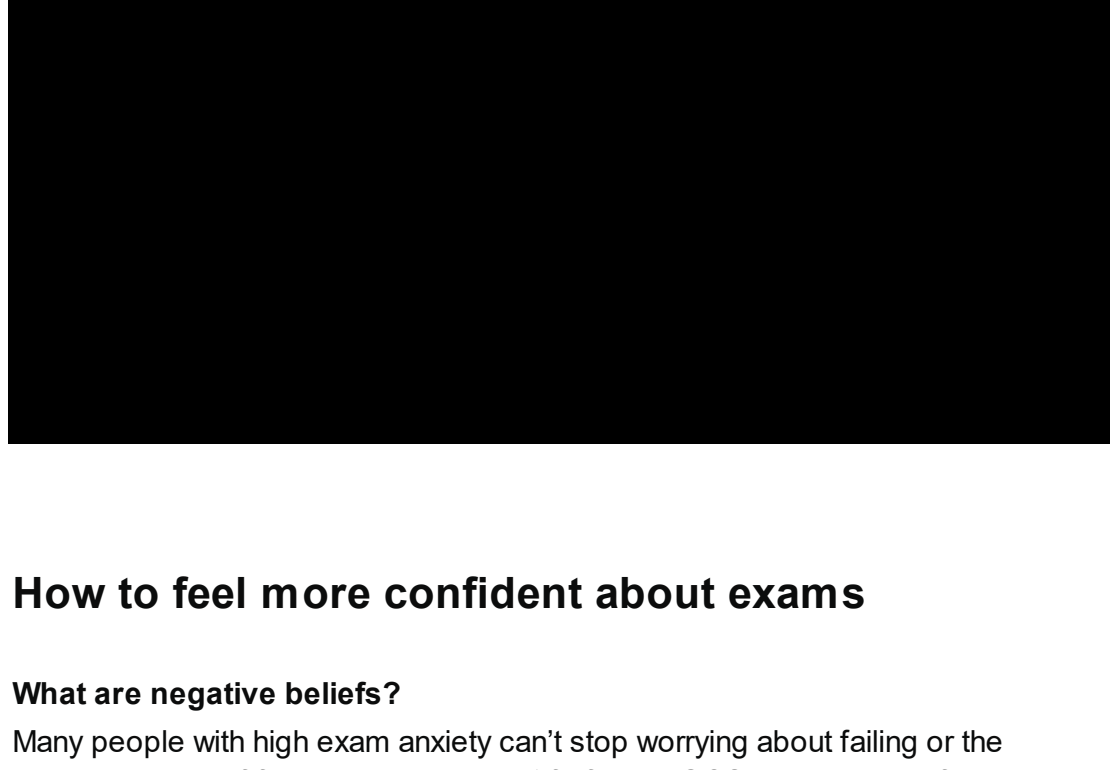
Guidance

Coping with exam pressure - a guide for students

Updated 7 February 2022

Coping with exam pressure – a guide for students

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How to feel more confident about exams

What are negative beliefs?

Many people with high exam anxiety can't stop worrying about failing or the consequences of failing. For instance, 'If I fail my GCSEs my whole life will be a failure'. These types of beliefs focus on what you can't do rather than what you can.



Replacing negative beliefs with positive beliefs

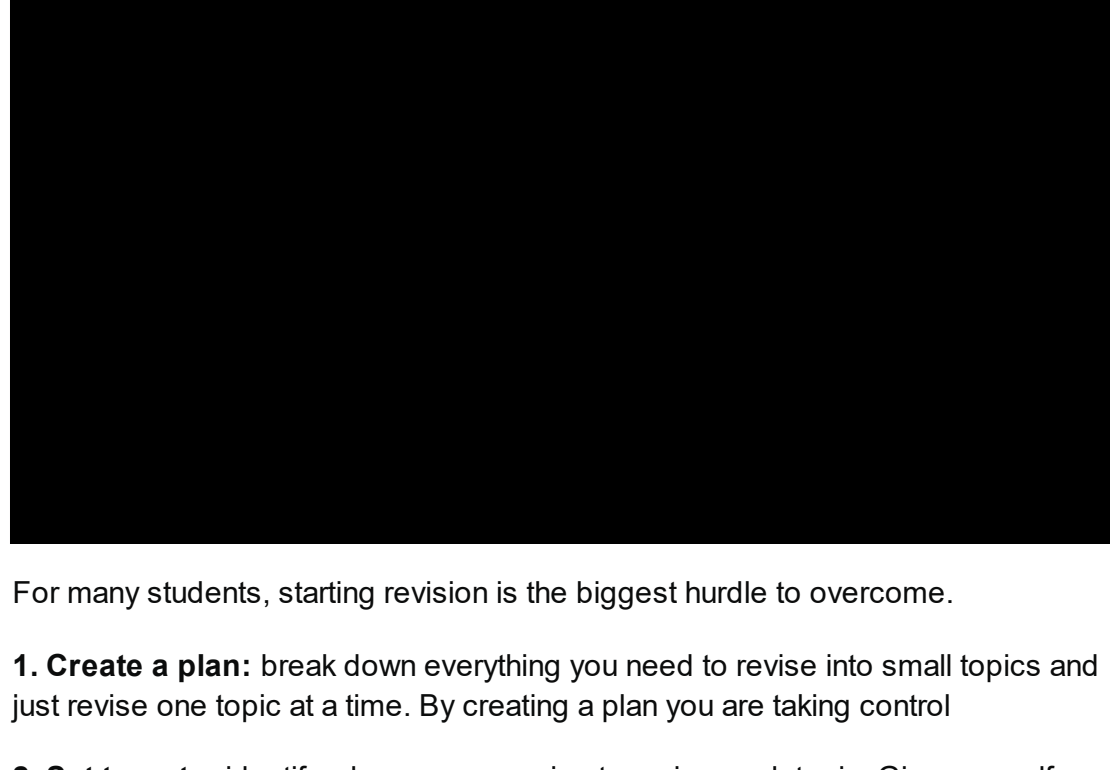
Find a positive, realistic belief that can replace the negative belief. For instance, if your negative belief is 'I am rubbish at maths' a positive, realistic alternative could be: 'Even if I will never be the best at maths, I will do better if I have a revision plan and stick to it'.

The key things to remember are that:

- if you suffer from anxiety, replacing negative beliefs can help
- some people find it helpful to keep a record of their beliefs
- you can become a more confident person with a 'can do' attitude

How to best plan your revision

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For many students, starting revision is the biggest hurdle to overcome.

- 1. Create a plan:** break down everything you need to revise into small topics and just revise one topic at a time. By creating a plan you are taking control
- 2. Set targets:** identify when you are going to revise each topic. Give yourself a time limit for when to complete each topic
- 3. Check progress:** check your progress and set yourself a new time limit if necessary. Once you've met a target, set yourself a new one

The key things to remember are that:

- targets should be achievable and manageable
- targets must be short-term and include a time-limit
- review your targets, and when complete, set new ones
- it is important to test yourself to see if your revision is effective

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing

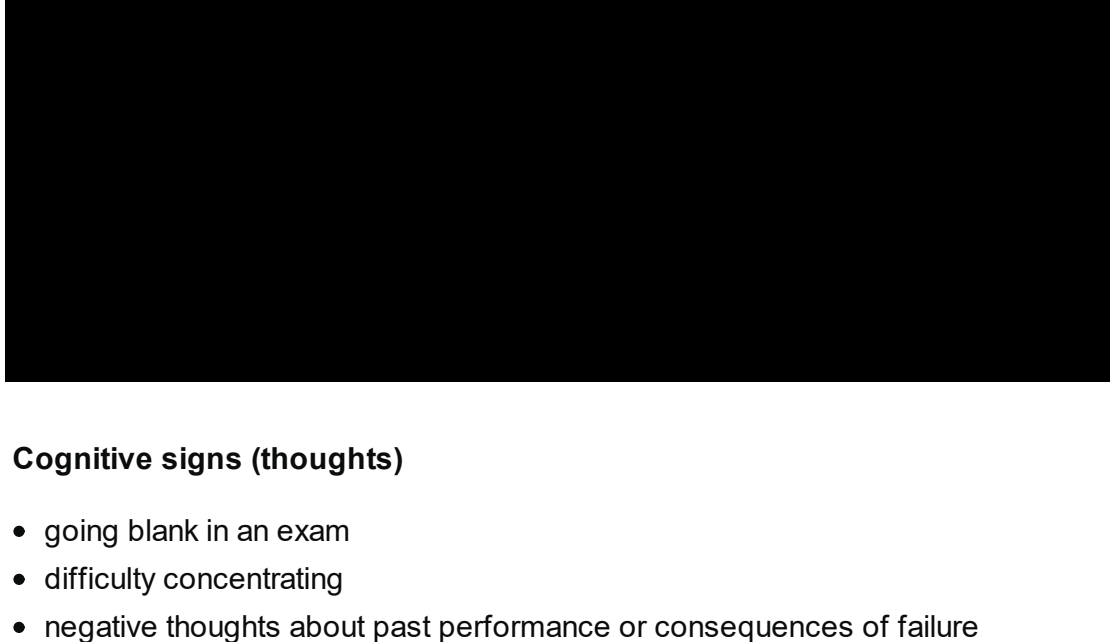
People react to stress in different ways. Stress can be a great motivator for some students, giving them the 'get up and go' that they need to succeed. Other students are indifferent to stress; they can float along without getting affected by stress in a good or bad way. Stress can be a bad thing for some students, when exam pressures become overwhelming.

The key things to remember are that:

- stress is nothing to be scared of
- anxiety is not inevitable
- you can learn how to cope more effectively

The signs of high exam anxiety

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Cognitive signs (thoughts)

- going blank in an exam
- difficulty concentrating
- negative thoughts about past performance or consequences of failure

Affective signs (emotions)

- feeling excessive tension
- feeling panic
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling not in control

Physical signs

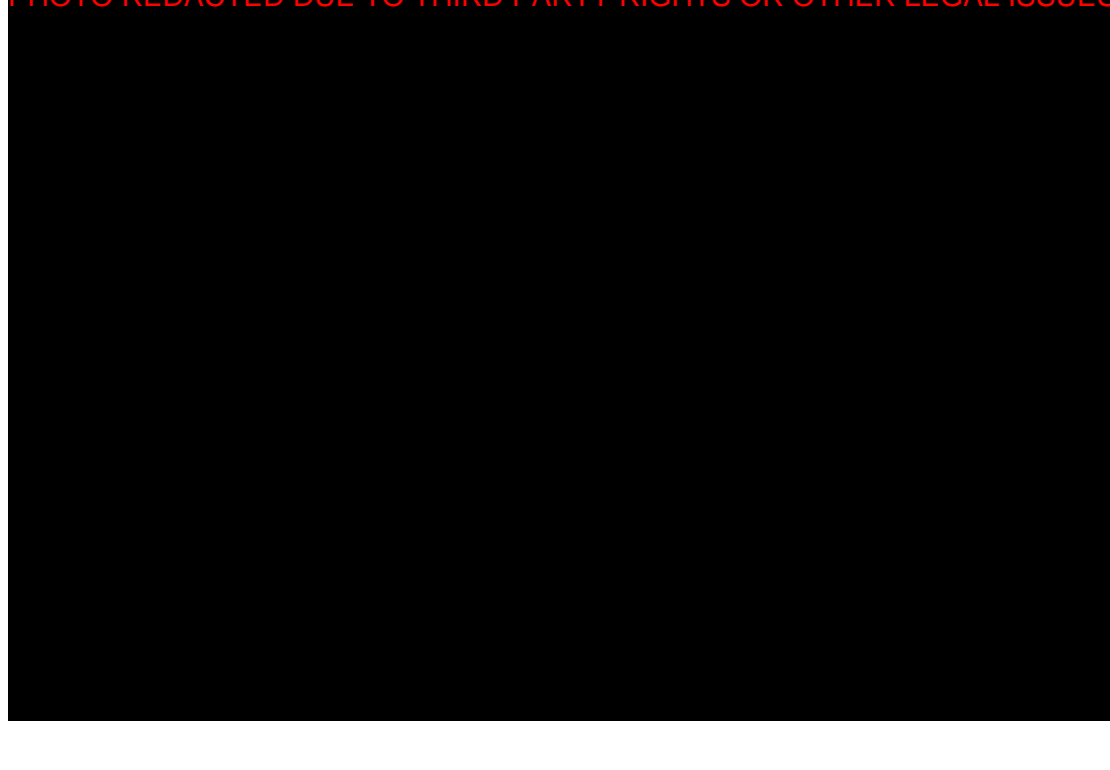
- dizzy or faint
- sweating
- fast heartbeat
- tight churning stomach
- jelly or wobbly legs

The key things to remember are that:

- most people experience some of these signs during an exam
- high exam anxiety is when you experience them most of the time
- you can learn to control your physical reactions to anxiety

How to control physical reactions to anxiety

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Deep breathing

When you become anxious your breathing becomes shallow and fast. Breathing slowly and deeply will help you calm down and feel in control.

How do I do it?

- Sit comfortably with a straight back.
- Place your left hand on your chest, and right hand below it, on your diaphragm.
- Inhale deeply through your nose for 5 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth.
- Feel the expansion in your diaphragm.
- Repeat for 1 or 2 minutes until you feel calm.

The key things to remember are that:

- you can learn to control anxiety with deep breathing
- many people find it easier to learn with an instructor
- yoga or mindfulness classes can also be helpful

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