Getting through exams

Studying and sitting exams without burning out.

Some pressure before exams is useful. It gets you to the desk. Too much, and your mind goes round in circles instead of taking anything in. The aim is to keep the pressure in the useful range.

Studying

- **Plan in blocks.** 25 to 45 minutes on one topic, then a real break. Three or four good blocks beat a whole day at the desk.
- **Start with a small, easy task.** Starting is the hardest part.
- **Test yourself.** Closing the book and writing down what you remember works better than reading your notes over and over.
- **Decide when you stop.** A fixed finishing time protects your evening and your sleep.
- **Compare less.** Other people's hours are not a measure of yours. Step back from group chats that wind you up.

Looking after yourself

- **Sleep.** Memories are filed during sleep. Staying up to cram usually costs more marks than it gains.
- **Food, water, movement, daylight.** Twenty minutes outside clears more fog than another coffee.
- **People.** Keep some contact that has nothing to do with exams.

The thoughts that pile on pressure

The thought	A fairer way to see it
"If I fail this, my life is ruined."	"It would be a setback. There are repeats and other routes, and people recover from worse."
"Everyone else is ahead of me."	"I see their best moments. I do not see their panic."
"I know nothing."	"That is a feeling, not a fact. Let me test myself on one topic."
"Top marks, or it is not worth it."	"My best on the day is the only thing I control."

On the day

1. Pack the night before. Arrive early, and stay away from people comparing notes at the door.
2. Read the whole paper. Start with a question you can do.
3. If your mind goes blank: pen down, feet on the floor, three slow breaths out. Move to another question and come back.
4. Afterwards, do not go through the paper with others. It is done.

> **Talk to someone**
> If the pressure is making you feel hopeless, or you are not sleeping or eating, tell someone: family, a tutor, the college counselling service or your GP.

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.