



By Joe O'Connor

STAY HEALTHY DURING EXAMS

The Leaving Cert is fast approaching and for many students it's time to drop their regular physical activity routine and change onto a caffeine and sugar diet in order to take on the mammoth revision cycle.

Unfortunately such routines can have a drastic effect on a student's health and well-being and subsequently their exam performance.

Exam times can be physically and emotionally draining. By incorporating the following techniques students can increase their study efficiency but also reduce stress and anxiety levels.

Exercise

Regular exercise releases hormones in the body called endorphins.

These "happy hormones" have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and also improve many brain functions such as concentration, information retention and alertness.

So in order to maximise the natural high of endorphins, take 15-30min "exercise breaks" on a regular basis throughout the day.

Sleep

In addition to the hormonal response, students will have plenty fresh air which aids sleep and circulation.

Many students cut back on hours of sleep in an attempt to "cram" more revision in.

Sleep Deprivation Syndrome is quite common among Leaving Cert students and side effects include headaches, body aches, poor digestion, inability to concentrate, irritability and many more side effects.

Although caffeine can help stay awake sometimes the student is actually better off getting some shut eye in order to prevent long term effects of sleep deprivation which can be detrimental to long exam periods such as the Leaving Certificate.

15-30min exercise breaks throughout the day that take you outdoors can improve your mood and health.

Nutrition

Another shortcut often taken by students during intensive study and exam periods is proper nutrition.

As with appropriate physical activity, proper nutrition can aid and improve your revision and exam performance.

By eating "real food" meals instead of processed packaged meals, you increase the number of macro and micro nutrients consumed essential for optimal physical and mental performance.

For example, Omega 3 which is found in fish, fish oils, flax seeds and walnuts have been shown to increase brain function.

One test found that concentration improved just 2 hours after taking the type of Omega 3 found in fish and fish oil!

In another study in Sweden nearly 4,000 boys were surveyed on their fish intake at age 15. They were questioned again at 18 and the researchers found that when fish was eaten more than once a week the improvement in their intelligence score almost doubled!

Simple nutritional tips:

- Always eat breakfast
- Try to eat every 3-4 hrs to maintain energy and concentration levels
- Drink plenty water in order to remain hydrated at all times
- Eat real food and avoid snacking on

To conclude, in order to remain healthy, avoid stress and optimise exam performance one should incorporate regular 15-30 minute exercise breaks and maintain healthy nutritional practices on a daily basis.

Best of luck in the exams.

