

Guide 3

**Looking
After Your
Health and
Wellbeing**



**Revise
with Mike**

www.revisewithmike.com



Introduction

Revision can be a stressful and challenging time.

There are lots of things you can do to look after yourself. Taking care of your health and wellbeing will not only make you feel better, but it'll also make revision easier as well. If you're feeling good, in control, and relaxed, everything else becomes simpler and more achievable.

Explore these strategies for looking after your health and wellbeing and see which ones might work for you.

1. Recognise the Signs of Stress

Stress is a bodily response that affects our mental state. When someone is stressed, their body changes the level of hormones being released, altering the way they feel.

Stress can make you feel irritated, fed up, and frustrated. It can also make you feel like you are not in control or that you are overwhelmed. Sometimes it can be difficult to relax if you are stressed. It may even lead you to have negative feelings about yourself, making you feel lonely or depressed.

Recognising the signs of stress is important because it is the first step to doing something about it.

The challenges of revising and preparing for exams can cause anybody to become stressed.

Look out for the signs of stress and, if you spot them, be ready to do something about it.

There's lots of ways you can deal positively with stress. Here are ten key tools you can use, recommended by the NHS:

1

Be active.

Exercise doesn't eliminate stress, but it will make you feel better, calmer and more ready to deal with stress.

2

Take control.

Identify the problem you're facing and then look for a solution. This will help you to feel empowered.

3

Connect with people.

Talking things through, laughing with friends, having fun with people and being with others all contribute to stress reduction.

4

Have some 'me' time.

Set aside time where you are doing things you enjoy. Don't feel like you always have to be revising.

5

Challenge yourself.

This could be part of your revision, or something else entirely. Taking on a challenge can build confidence and resilience.

6

Avoid unhealthy habits.

A good diet will help you minimise stress. Try to avoid excess caffeine, as this can intensify feelings of stress.

7

Help other people.

Helping others is a great way to feel better about yourself. Find something small you can do for a friend or a family member.

8

Work smarter, not harder.

Do the important tasks first, leave the less important tasks until last.

9

Try to be positive.

Think about the things you are grateful for. Try writing down three or four different things. This can help lift your mood and refocus you on positive thinking.

10

Accept the things you can't change.

The exams are still going to be there, and the revision still has to be done. Accepting you can't change this will help you to feel better about the process, and less stressed.

2. Regulate Yourself

One way to think about our emotions is that we can be in one of two states: **regulated, or dysregulated.**

When we are regulated, we feel normal. Our emotions are in check and we feel calm, focused and relaxed. Being regulated means our emotions are in balance, and we feel like we are in control.

Dysregulation happens when we get stressed. This pushes us out of balance. The stress response in our bodies is built around fight, flight or freeze. Imagine you found yourself in an unexpected, stressful situation. You might lash out by shouting (fight), you might try to get out of the situation (flight), or you might give up and hope it is over quickly (freeze).

There might be times during your revision when you feel dysregulated.

This is when you feel like your emotions are out of balance. As if you have been pushed beyond the level of everyday stress that you can tolerate.

Some signs of being dysregulated are **feeling angry, tense, nervous, wanting to run away or remove yourself from the situation you're in.**

If you feel like this when you're revising, or if you feel like this because of your revision, try using one of the following techniques to regulate yourself. This is where you bring yourself back into a stable emotional state:



1. **Take a time-in (not a time-out).**

Take a break for five minutes and use this time to sit quietly and think about how you are feeling. Tune in to your emotions and see if you can work out where they are coming from.

2. **Create a calm area.**

This could be in your bedroom or in another part of the house. Your calm area is a place you can go to take a break, relax and reset. There should be no revision in the calm area, and no phones or electronic devices.

3. **Give your brain a break.**

Sometimes too much mental work, for example, lots of revision, can cause us to become dysregulated. Giving your brain a break means giving your brain a chance to process what you've been doing and to regain balance.

4. **Focus on your breathing.**

This is an ancient technique used for many thousands of years to help people calm themselves and relax their minds. Take slow, deep breaths and focus on your breathing as you inhale and exhale.

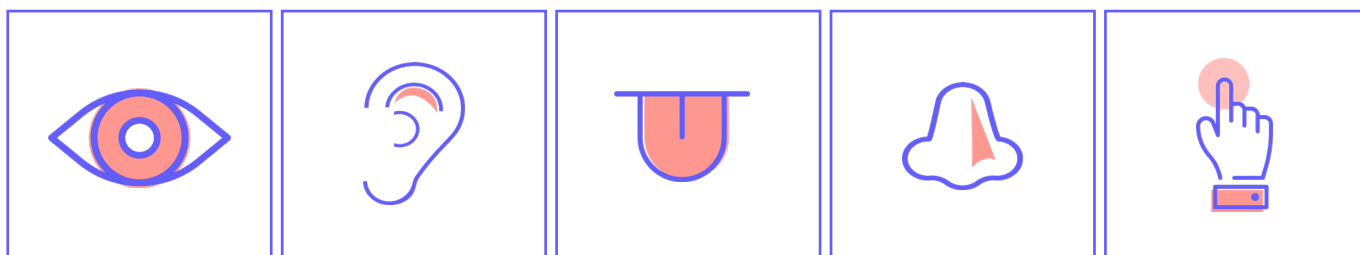
5. Recognise your feelings.

It's OK not to feel OK. It happens to all of us. Take a few moments to think about your feelings. Recognise them. Ask yourself what feelings you are having. Ask yourself why you are having them. Doing this is often the first step to feeling more in control and better regulated.

3. Try Mindfulness

Mindfulness has become very popular in recent years. It is a form of meditation where you focus on becoming more aware of your body, your senses, and your surroundings.

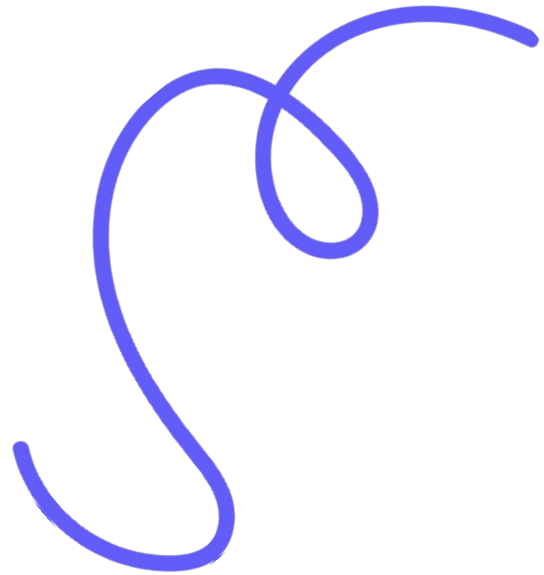
One of the aims of mindfulness is to connect you to the present. By focussing on your senses, you stop thinking about the future and the past.



This is calming. It brings you into the moment, helping you to quiet your mind, and is a great tool for promoting relaxation.

Many people use mindfulness to deal with stress. Once you've learned a few mindfulness techniques, you can use them pretty much anywhere, at any time, to help yourself feel calmer and more relaxed.

Here are some examples of mindfulness techniques you can learn to help you deal positively with stress and feel more in the moment:



1

Notice the everyday.

As you go about daily life, try noticing the small things around you. Notice how your feet feel as you walk across different surfaces. Notice the smells around you when you are walking outside. Notice the sounds on your walk to school. All of this helps bring you into the moment and focuses your mind on your senses.

2

Create a routine.

You can create a routine built around noticing the everyday. For example, you might decide that you will use your walk to school each morning to notice the things around you. This will help you get into a rhythm of being mindful. Each morning, as you start the day, you will be reminded to focus on your senses, relaxing you in the process.

3

Give thoughts and feelings a name.

We all experience challenging and negative emotions at different times. It's a normal, and inevitable, part of being human. Giving thoughts and feelings a name means recognising these and becoming more aware of them. For example, you might say to yourself something like 'Ah, this is frustration I'm feeling at the moment,' or 'This is the thought that I might not complete all my revision in time.'

4

Focus on your breathing.

There are lots of specific mindfulness breathing techniques you can research online. In general, though, simply focussing on your breathing can help you to calm yourself. Take slow, deep breaths. Think about your breathing. Focus on it. Focus on the inhalation. Then focus on the exhalation.

4. Zone Your Space

There are lots of different places people choose to revise. Some like to revise in their bedrooms. Others prefer to revise in the kitchen or the living room. And there's always the option of revising at school as well. Maybe in the library or in a classroom set up as a revision area.

When you revise at home, it can be helpful to zone your space.

This means setting up different zones in your house or in your bedroom and keeping them for different purposes.

For example, imagine a young person who is preparing for their GCSEs. They like to revise in their bedroom because this is where they feel most comfortable, and this is where they encounter the fewest distractions.

However, there is a potential problem.

Their bedroom is also where they sleep.

It might also be where they go to chill out and relax.

Imagine, then, if they revise in all different areas of their bedroom. Sometimes they revise sat on their bed. Sometimes they revise sat on the floor, with their notes laid out in front of them. And sometimes they revise sitting at their desk.

This means every area of their bedroom is connected to revision.

In their mind, they might start to feel like their whole bedroom is a revision space. And this can have an impact on how they sleep, as well as how they relax when they are in there.

If every part of your bedroom is connected to revision, you might start to feel that you can't escape it when you're spending time there. This, in turn, might make you feel stressed or irritable.

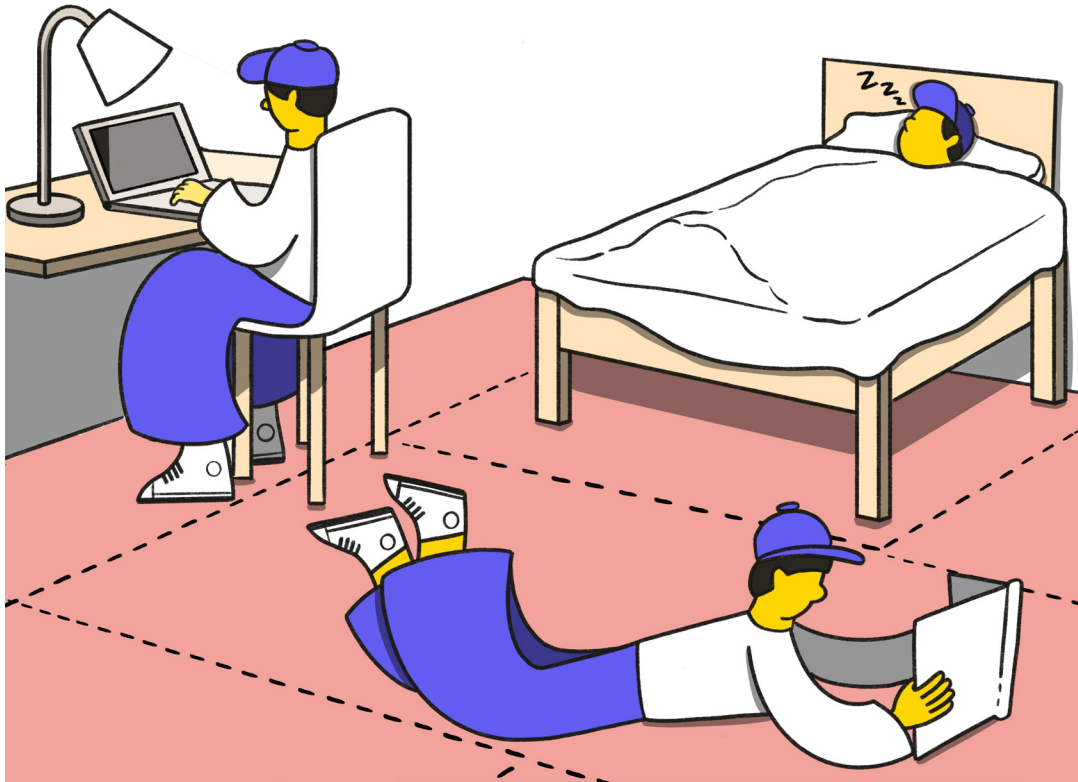
Zoning your space helps prevent this happening.

It's when you look at your space (in this case, your bedroom) and you identify **different zones**.

For example, you might decide that your desk is your **revision zone**...

...your floor is your **chillout space**...

...and your bed is your **sleep zone**.



This means that when you do revision in your bedroom, you always do it sitting at your desk. This preserves your floor and bed as separate spaces. Meaning that when you are using them to chill out or sleep, you know in your mind that these spaces aren't connected to revision.

It's a simple strategy, but a good one for helping you to keep revision from spilling out and taking over every part of your room.

5. Sleep is Your Friend

It really is.

Sleep is crucial for good cognitive function.

And what is good cognitive function? Being able to think clearly. Being able to concentrate. Being able to focus. Feeling energised. Feeling calm, relaxed and regulated.

Don't skimp on sleep. Scientists and doctors recommend 8-10 hours of sleep a night for teenagers aged 13-18.

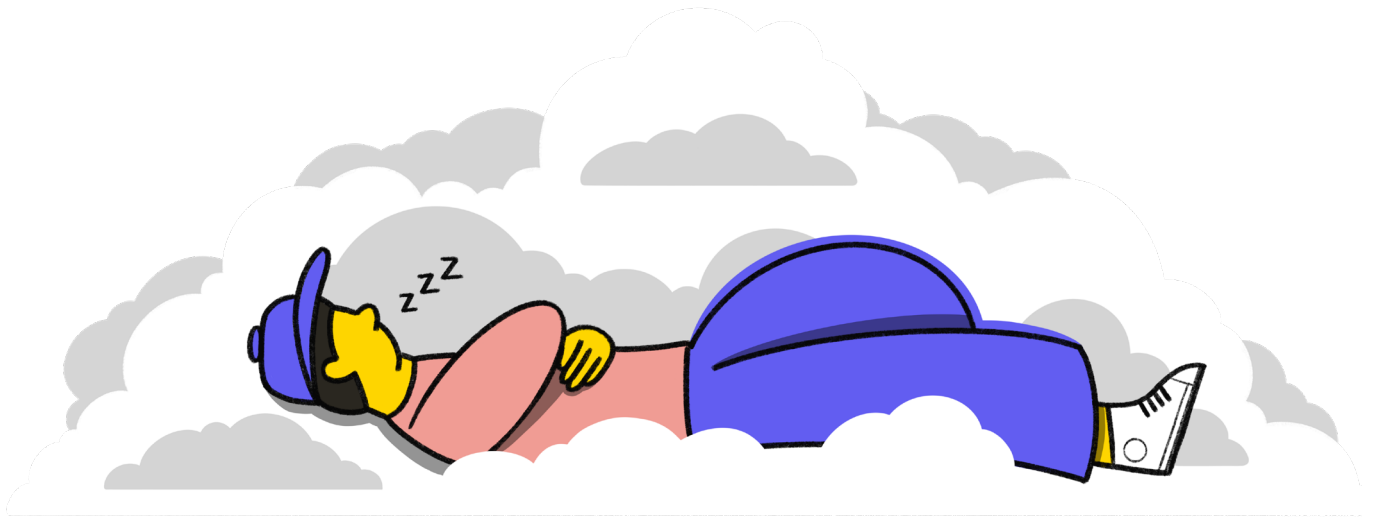
During that time, your brain is processing information it has taken in during the day. This means sleep is an important aspect of your revision. Part of sleep is consolidation. That means your brain is making sense of what you've done, thought and experienced.

If you do a big chunk of revision and follow it up with a good night's sleep, that sleep is going to help reinforce all the revision you've done.

You might like to think of good quality sleep as being part of your revision. The bit that comes afterwards. The bit that helps you to consolidate and make sense of all that information you've been revising.

Good quality sleep is the key here. The NHS has sound advice about the things you can do to help yourself sleep better:

- 1 Limit screens.**
Smartphones, laptops, computers, TVs. They all negatively affect your ability to get to sleep. Try to avoid all of these for one hour before you go to sleep.
- 2 Exercise.**
This promotes good sleep and helps you sleep more deeply. Where possible, exercise in daylight as this further supports good sleep.
- 3 Cut out caffeine.**
Caffeine is a stimulant. Stimulants keep you awake. Try drinking less caffeine in general but, particularly, in the afternoons and evenings.
- 4 Avoid bingeing.**
Eating too much or too little close to bedtime can affect your sleep. An empty or overfull stomach can make it harder to nod off.
- 5 Have a good routine.**
A regular sleep routine helps signal to your body when it's time to switch off and go to sleep. Try creating a routine that covers the last hour of the day, before you go to bed.
- 6 Create a sleep-friendly bedroom.**
Dark, cool, quiet and comfortable are the key things to focus on here. All of them will help you to sleep better.



7

Talk through problems.

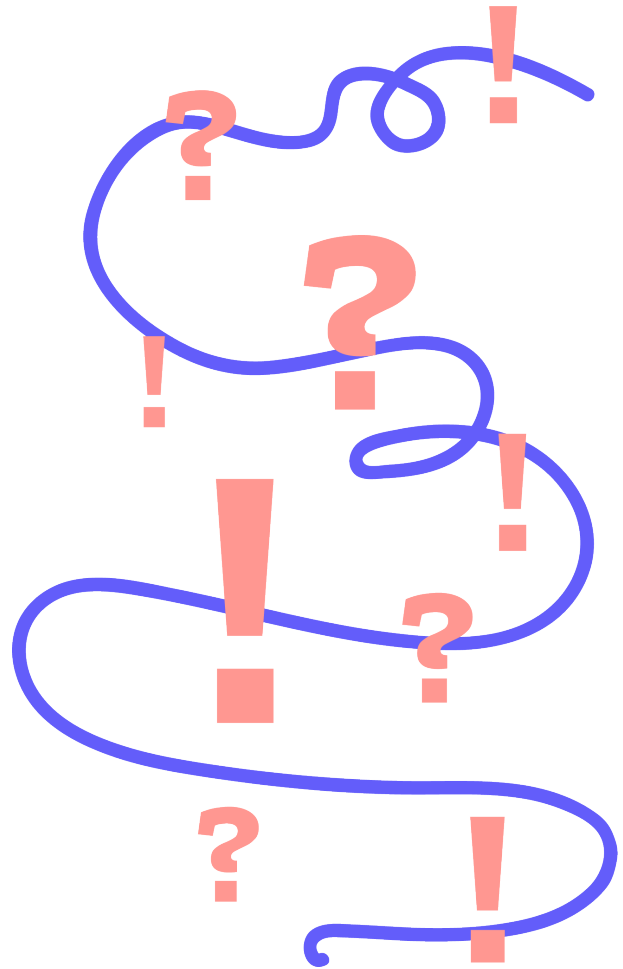
If you have problems weighing on your mind, try talking these through with a parent, carer, sibling or friend. Talking through a problem goes a long way to relieving your mind of the stress or anxiety associated with the problem. This makes it easier for you to feel calm and relaxed as you go to sleep.

6. Ask for Help

Sometimes, things can get on top of you. Revising for exams can be tough. It can take up a lot of your time. And it can drain your reserves of energy.

You might end up feeling stressed, anxious or frustrated. Maybe even angry or confused. Lots of young people have experienced negative emotions because of the challenges of revision and preparing for exams.

If you find this happening, the first thing to do is to recognise it. The second thing to do is to realise that it's OK. These are normal reactions that many people have, particularly when things are challenging. The third thing to do is ask for help.



That might mean talking to one of your teachers, speaking to a parent or carer, or turning to a friend.

Sometimes, it might mean asking for just a little bit of help. For example, you might ask your teacher to spend some time helping you to understand a topic you find really difficult. Or you might ask a parent or carer if they can help you prepare some revision materials because you feel like you have so much to do. Or you might ring up a friend and ask them to listen while you vent your frustrations.

At other times, it might mean asking for a bit more help. Maybe even a lot of help. You might feel like you're not coping, or you might find yourself feeling overwhelmed by how much revision you need to do.

However much help you feel you need, it doesn't matter. There are always people out there who will help you. Whether it's your teachers, a family member, or a friend.

Asking for help is about recognising that we don't have to do everything on our own. It's about reaching out and getting support from those around us. And it's about taking control

of a situation by accepting that we don't have to deal singlehandedly with everything we face.

If things do feel tough, if you find yourself struggling, or if you feel like revision and exams are taking over your life, reach out. Ask for help. It's always there, from someone. And it will help you feel like you're not alone, and that positive change is possible.

7. Pick Out Your Successes and Reward Yourself


We all have successes. Some successes are bigger than others. When it comes to revision, there are lots of little successes. But many young people overlook these. It's easy to do. You're so focussed on getting your revision done, that you don't take time out to recognise what you've achieved.

Picking out your successes means focussing your mind on the positive things you're doing. This is good for your wellbeing. It helps you to appreciate the work you're putting in and the fact that this is helping you to achieve your goal – of preparing yourself for the exams you're going to sit.

Doing one session of revision is a mini success. Doing a week's worth of revision is a bigger success. Sticking to your revision timetable for a month and completing everything you put in it is a great success.

It's so easy to let these slip by, without picking them out and giving yourself a pat on the back.





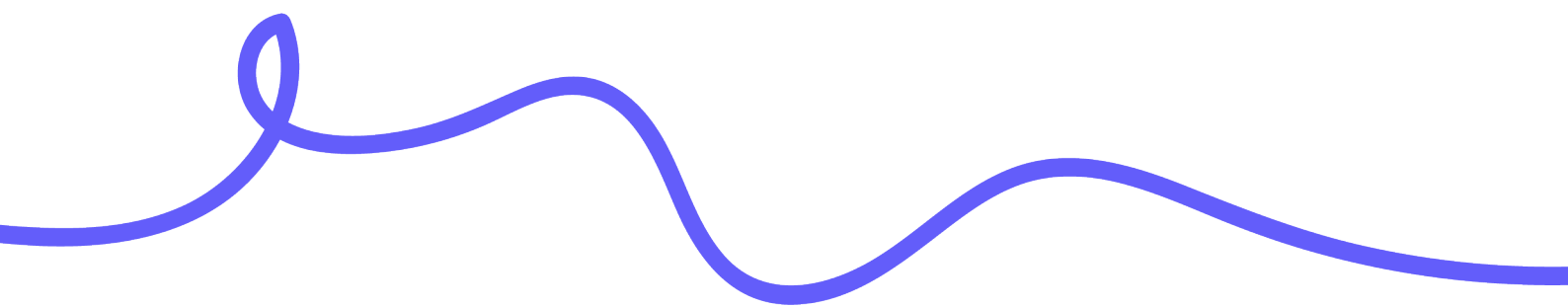
When you're working your way through your revision, take time out every week to look back over what you've done. Recognise your successes – whether they are small or large. Congratulate yourself for what you've achieved. Then use it to inspire yourself to keep going and to work harder.

You can even link your successes to **rewards**. Many young people find this motivational.

You might decide that a certain number of small successes are worth a certain reward. For example, you might say that ten successfully completed revision sessions are worth an ice cream. Or maybe you'll say that a week of sticking to your revision timetable is worth one day off from revision, during which you can do whatever you want.

Recognising your success can help you to build a positive sense of self. It supports your wellbeing by keeping things in perspective. Instead of just focussing on what you need to do next, you can balance your focus between what you've done (your successes) and what you still have left to do (the future successes you're going to create).

Adding in rewards, linked to your successes, can further help you to keep your morale up and maintain a positive outlook.



8. Schedule Breaks and Take Them

What would you say to someone who was preparing for a 100-metre race and decided the best option was to train every day, as much as possible?

It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

You'd tell them it wasn't a good strategy. Nobody trains like that. It's not a useful way to get fit, or to prepare for a sporting contest.

You'd tell them the best way to train is to include breaks, to schedule rest days, and to listen to your body.

The best athletes in the world don't train for every hour of every day. They have a schedule. They stick to it. And the schedule includes breaks, rest, and time for recovery.

Sports scientists tell us that the body needs time to recover. It needs time to rest. And you can injure yourself by trying to do too much or working too hard.

What would you say to someone who was revising for their exams and decided the best option was to do as much revision as possible, filling all their free time with revision and never taking a break?

The answer's pretty obvious, isn't it?

You'd tell them that revision is important, but that you also need to take breaks, to rest, and to give yourself enough time to do other things.

You'd probably tell them that the best approach is to put together a **revision timetable** and to use this as a schedule. And that your schedule should include breaks and rest.

You might also say that taking breaks helps you to recharge your batteries, refresh your concentration and renew your energy levels.

And you might tell them that focussing

too much on revision, not giving yourself any breaks or enough rest, can lead to burnout, or to feelings of frustration and irritability.

These are kind of like emotional injuries – similar to sporting injuries that result from too much training.

The best revision schedule contains breaks. It contains plenty of opportunities to rest. And it also allows time for you to take a break by doing other things.

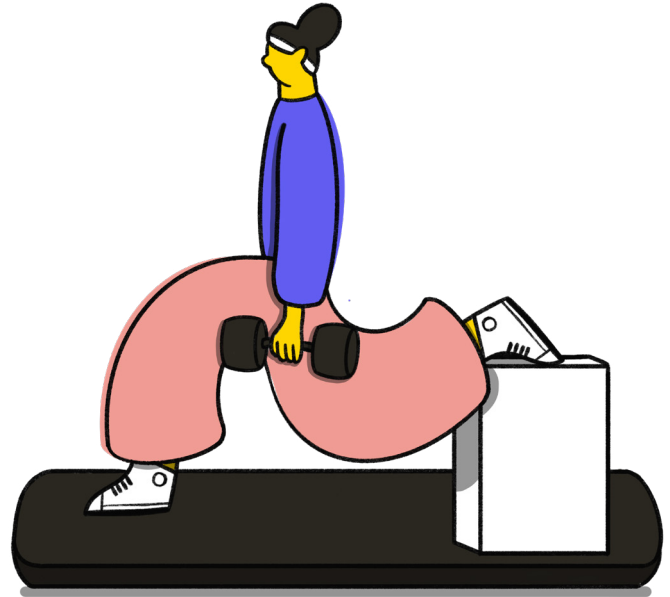
Balance is the key. Do plenty of revision, of course. Work hard, of course. Prepare yourself, of course. But don't forget to rest, relax and take a break as well. Your body will thank you for it, as will your mind.

9. Exercise is the Best Medicine



Our bodies are built to move.

During your revision, you'll probably find yourself spending a good deal of time in similar positions – sitting down at a desk, sitting on the floor, reclining on your bed – the kind of positions that help you to revise effectively.



Exercise brings many benefits for mental health and wellbeing. Making sure you get enough exercise while you're revising is another way you can help regulate how you feel and keep yourself in a good space.

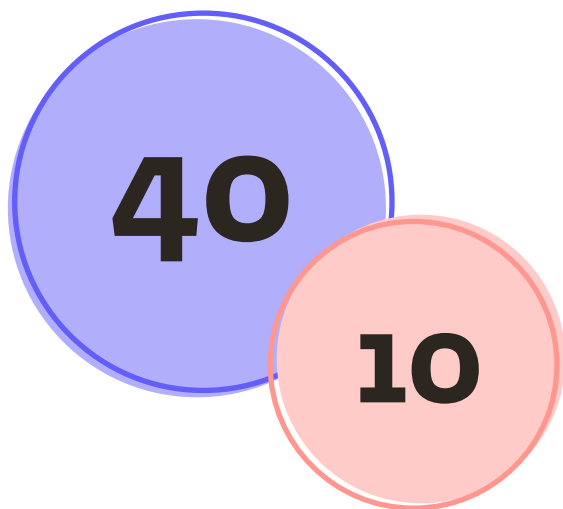
The NHS recommends that children and young people aged between 13 and 18 should get at least sixty minutes of moderate exercise a day. That includes things like walking to school, taking the dog for a walk, swimming, dancing, cycling or playing a sport like football or tennis.

Doctors, scientists and psychologists are all in agreement that exercise has many beneficial effects on the body and on the mind. These include: better sleep, happier moods, managing stress and anxiety, increased self-esteem, connecting with people and reducing the risk of depression and low mood.

There is a scientific basis for how exercise can contribute to our wellbeing, and how it can make us feel better. When we exercise, our brains release endorphins. Endorphins are chemicals that interact with neurotransmitters in our brains and trigger a positive feeling in our bodies.

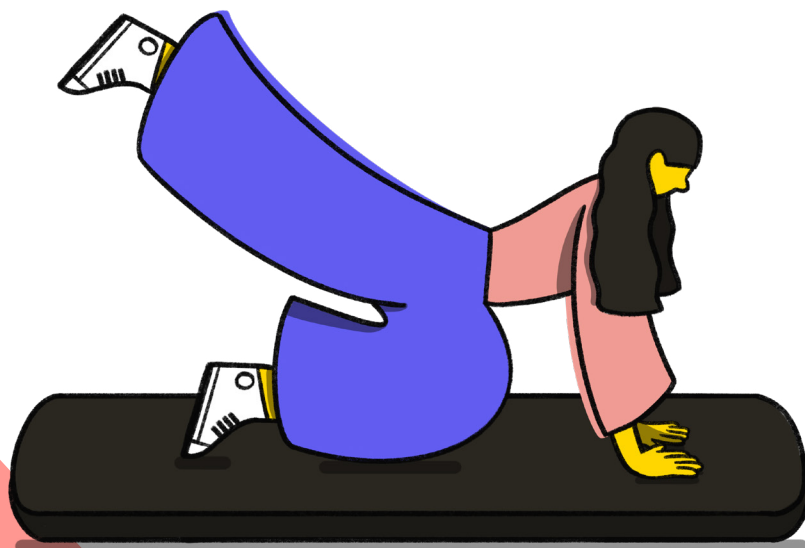
Finding time to exercise while you are revising means finding time to look after your body, your mind and your wellbeing.

As well as doing moderate exercise like the examples listed above, it is also good to avoid sitting or lying down for extended periods of time without taking some sort of movement break.



The 40-10 rule can help you to manage this. When revising, try doing forty minutes of revision, followed by a ten-minute break. During the ten-minute break, get up and move around. Even a small bit of exercise like this can stimulate your mind and your body, lifting your mood and improving your concentration levels.

It's easy to overlook exercise when revision is looming large in your mind as your top priority. If you feel like this, try thinking about exercise as part of your revision. It's not that you're revising while you're exercising, but it is the case that exercising during the revision period will support your health and wellbeing. Which, in turn, makes revision easier.



10. Keep Things in Perspective

Our final strategy for looking after your health and wellbeing is short and simple. But still important.

Keeping things in perspective can be easier said than done.

It means looking at things realistically. And not allowing yourself to give things more importance than they require.

Imagine you had a friend who was preparing for their driving test. They were so concerned about passing their driving test first time round that they lost all perspective. All they could talk about was their driving test. All they could think about was their driving test. It took over their life.

Come the day of the driving test, they felt stressed, anxious and nervous. This affected their decision-making and they ended up failing.

To them, it felt like the end of the world.

But was it?

No.

Of course not.

It was disappointing and frustrating, yes. They would have liked to have passed first time. But what did they do? They went away, let their emotions settle down, had some more lessons, booked another test, and passed on the second attempt.

Simple.

This same way of thinking can creep up on any of us when we're preparing for exams.

We can lose perspective. We can feel like our exams are the single most important thing in the world. And we can build them up in our minds, overplaying the consequences and creating stress and anxiety as a result.

Keeping things in perspective means recognising that exams are important, they do matter, but they are not the end of the world. Life happens before exams, and it happens afterwards as well.

Of course, you want to do your best. Keeping things in perspective will help you to achieve that. It will keep you balanced, grounded. And it will help you to keep negative emotions at bay and focus on making the good decisions around revision that will set you up for success in your exams.