

# COPING WITH EXAMS AND EXAM ANXIETY

For most Dartmouth students, exam time is particularly stressful. Paradoxically, many students attempt to deal with this stress in ways that are counter-productive or even self-defeating; their behavior and attitudes tend to diminish their performance on exams rather than enhance it.

While there is no guarantee for an easy time on exams, there are some specific guidelines that students can follow which will help them learn more efficiently during exam time.

Remember that you are not alone: almost everyone gets somewhat anxious at exam time.

It is clear that it does **not** help to put added stress on yourself by:

- 1) keeping irregular hours.
- 2) pulling all-nighters.
- 3) eating irregularly or eating junk food.
- 4) relying on ineffective learning strategies.

## **Guidelines:**

- 1) Try to stay on a reasonably regular schedule of reviewing, eating, sleeping, and relaxing. Start at least a week, or preferably two, before exams begin.
- 2) Don't attempt to study 24 hours a day; your efficiency and capacity to retain material will rapidly decrease.
- 3) Don't force yourself to study beyond your normal limits of concentration. If you find yourself able to concentrate for only ten or twenty minutes, study for only that period of time and then take a short break. Your concentration should return. In fact, short and regular study period are more productive than lengthy single sessions.
- 4) Eat a well-balanced diet and drink lots of fluids. Excessive amounts of coffee may produce confusion and even disorganization of thought processes.
- 5) Don't use drugs or alcohol -- they can decrease your ability to think clearly. Take medication only under the supervision of a physician.
- 6) Be conservative and reasonable about the demands you place on yourself.
- 7) If you have a problem you believe will interfere with taking your exams, be sure to notify your class dean in Parkhurst or a counselor/physician in Dick's House before you take your exam.

Contact the Academic Skills Center for additional suggestions and advice.

*--adapted from: Harvard Law School Health Service  
--this handout prepared by Alison Burrell '95*