



ST. PETERS FAMILY PRACTICE

EXAM TIME ... TIME TO FINE TUNE YOUR BRAIN! PATIENT NOTES BY DR. ADAM PEDLER

As School Doctor at St Peters College, I understand that student stress and parent anxiety is common at this end of the school year. I wrote this article when my son was doing Year 12 and I'm making it available again this year because it is helpful advice!

Parents know that providing a quiet, supportive environment with guidance and encouragement is paramount, but for students to study most effectively they need good health and good blood supply. I want to remind students that eating well, drinking lots of water, regular exercise are very important, and, a good night's sleep is essential.

SLEEP helps consolidate what has been learned and prepares the brain to take in new information. A good night's sleep cannot be underestimated as it will help you learn new tasks faster and retain newly learned information.

Here's how to sleep better ...

- Implement a routine:
- Try to go to bed & wake at the same time daily.
- Dim lighting helps start sleep chemicals
- Bright lights in the morning help turn it off
- Limit the bed to sleeping
- Do not exercise just before bed
- Relax before bed
- Avoid cat naps
- Don't sleep in too warm a bed

Don't be concerned if you have trouble falling asleep the night before your exams. Often worrying about not getting enough sleep will cause more stress and prevent you from sleeping. If you're lying in bed you're getting some form of rest.

A NOURISHING DIET is essential to give your brain the right nutrition and will increase your levels of concentration. Start with a good breakfast- not eating breakfast causes you to be 20-40% "dumber" in studying and exams.

Raw muesli or porridge with nuts is a terrific way to fire up your brain. Add a piece of chopped fruit but don't add sugar. Eggs, yoghurt and blueberries are fabulous breakfast brain food.

Don't eat and study at the same time. In between meals nibbling on raw nuts and dried fruit will feed your brain. Leave the chocolate for after the exams and forget the potato chips. Did you know that chewing gum improves memory by 35% of brain performance. It raises the heart beat, which causes more oxygen and nutrients to be pumped into the brain and triggers the production of insulin, which stimulates a part of the brain involved in memory. So chewing gum is a good study aid!

Decrease the bad oils in your diet including butter and margarine, oils in bread and greasy food such as takeaways. They block your arteries and thicken your blood, slowing the amount of fuel getting to your brain. Decrease sugar and processed foods – they create a short-term glucose high in the blood and a long-term glucose low causing foggy thinking.

Increase dark green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli and bok choy. They provide essential vitamins and minerals for your brain to function and think clearly. It puts muscles in your brain!

Eliminate over processed grain products. Eat only wholegrain and wholemeal grains – they contain essential minerals and vitamins for your brain. Rye bread gives you the lowest sugar hit.

Increase good oils high in Essential Fatty Acids and include fish oils and flaxseed. 60% of your healthy brain is made up of fats and these EFA's are the biggest part. Good fats=good thinking, they provide the building blocks for your brain and the infrastructure for you to be smarter! Eat more fish!

Drinks lots of water. The brain is 80% water and students who sip water at least every 20 minutes rehydrate the brain, improving the ability to focus, concentrate, and stay motivated.

Before a test drink 2 cups of coffee. Research from Austria shows that 2 cups of coffee boosts short term memory significantly. ...”If you are well rested it tends to improve rudimentary brain functions like keeping your attention focused on boring repetitive tasks for long periods. It also tends to improve mood”. Ordinarily I wouldn't suggest you drink coffee after 4pm because it can interfere with a good night's sleep.

You could **SUPPLEMENT YOUR DIET** with brain vitamins like EPH/DHA Fish Oil, Vitamin C for its antioxidant action, and B Vitamins are good for feeding your nervous system, especially if you're feeling stressed.

Research has shown that students who do 3 lots of aerobic **EXERCISE** a week perform much better than those who do nothing. It's also a great defence against depression. During periods of study, exercise at least 45 minutes each day. Exercise gets the blood flowing to your brain, supplying oxygen, antioxidants and glucose. It also releases substances such as noradrenalin in your body to prepare you for exams and reduce stress. When you study, don't slouch over the desk – it stops you breathing deeply and slows oxygen getting to your brain. Remember to stretch frequently, put your shoulders back and take a deep breath. This will help feed your brain. And don't forget to open the doors and windows – fresh air is critical to good brain function.

During periods of intensive study you need hourly breaks. Make your break includes a brisk 10 minute walk, it will help everything you've done sink into the powerful, subconscious part of your brain. After 2 hours, take a 20 minute break. Don't fool yourself that you're still working well - you're probably functioning at around or less than 50% which is ok for mundane tasks but not if you need really focused concentration.

There are many things you can do to optimise exam success but focusing on your health - nutrition, sleep and exercise - is the best chance you can give yourself. Good luck to all our year 12 students and their parents!



ST PETERS FAMILY PRACTICE
ACCREDITED GENERAL MEDICAL PRACTICE
50 STEPHEN TERRACE ST PETERS SA 5069
TELEPHONE: 8363 1033
WEBSITE: www.spfamily.com.au