

# Release the pressure, take small break

**EXAM FEVER** A survey of over 4,100 students says most couldn't follow their timetable and felt pressure from parents during exams added to stress



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**NEW DELHI:** Two in three students believe exams are not a true test of knowledge and more than four in five say marks do not define their true potential. Yet Board exams continue to find place among mega stressors like death and taxes in India. Mind-wrecking pressure and anxiety stalk students for months leading up to exams, with overtly concerned parents and well-wishers asking you not stress, add to the pressure.

Nearly 90% students said parents interfered with studies. 86% said parents put too much pressure to do well, said a survey of more than 4,100 students from a dozen cities — Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Mumbai, Jaipur, Udaipur, Amritsar, Haridwar, Mathura, Karnal, Rohtak and Meerut. The study by Fortis Department of

Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, shared exclusively with HT, said less than half of the students surveyed said they did not do as well as they expected despite putting in a lot of work.

**BLACKOUT**

"I study through the year but as we near the exam dates, my mind stops working," said Shamista Kapuria, a class 12 student from Delhi Public School, who is losing sleep worrying about forgetting what she worked hard to learn. She's not alone. Close to one in five students sur-



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• Nearly one in five students surveyed said they have blacked out while writing an exam.

veyed said they have blacked out while writing an exam, which psychiatrists say is a sign of high anxiety.

"It's normal to feel anxious during exams and a moderate amount of stress is good as it boosts performance. But if the pressure gets too much, performance declines and if it's too little, it leads to underperformance," says Dr Samir Parikh, director of mental health and behavioural sciences, Fortis Healthcare, that runs a free helpline for students. Venting, or talking about what you're going through, is the most effective way to beat stress. "Share your feelings with friends, parents, teachers or a professional counsellor to relieve the pressure," he says.

**BOOSTING CONCENTRATION**

"Set realistic targets, four hours of study without a break is not more effective than an hour with a 15-minute break," says Dr Nand Kumar, professor of psychiatry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. "Research shows the brain can effectively concentrate for up to 45 minutes, after which its capacity to stay

alert and absorb information falls. My clinical practice shows it has decreased to 15-20 minutes," Dr Kumar says.

In psychology, the phenomenon is defined as 'vigilance decrement', which is marked by inattention and distraction from the task at hand. Plan breaks into hour-long chunks that give you a 10-15 minutes break before you begin again. "Chatting on FB or Snapchat is not the solution, you need to disengage the brain by doing something different — such as listening to music, singing, sketching, watching a show, playing with your pet, talking to a friend, dancing or some other physical activity," says Dr Parikh.

Unlike a phone call, screen devices use the same visual-neuromuscular coordination — eyes, posture, brain and hands — pathways as studying, which add to fatigue instead of lowering it. "Most students use laptops and phones as a study tools, and once they start using them, they get distracted by social media and text notifications, which interfere with concentration," says Dr Kumar.

**SIGNS OF STRESS**

Tiredness, restlessness, difficulty relaxing, headache, stomach distress, including diarrhoea, constipation, nausea, muscle pain, body ache, rapid heartbeat, sleeplessness, sleeping too much, frequent infections, irritability, quick to anger, frustration, moodiness

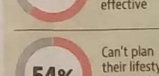
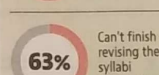
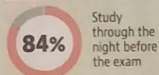
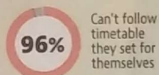
**BEAT BLACKOUTS**

Dr Nand Kumar, professor of psychiatry at the AIIMS, suggests, train your brain for exam by sitting for at least two mock exams at home, where you must simulate exam conditions to the T — get up, have breakfast, change into your uniform and finish an exam in the requisite time. Take the exam at a desk in a closed room without an AC or a smartphone and ensure there are no interruptions. "Mock exams at school are not the same because the surroundings are familiar, you need to be out of your comfort zone," says Dr Kumar

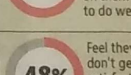
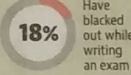
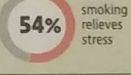
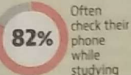
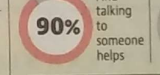
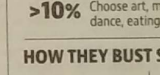
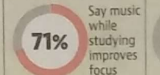
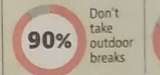
**What students want**

Students reveal their fears, beliefs and behaviour in the run-up to examinations in this exclusive survey of 4,127 students from a dozen cities in India, including Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Mumbai

**HOW THEY STUDY**



**WHAT THEY DO TO RELAX**



Source: Department of Mental Health & Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Healthcare, 2017