





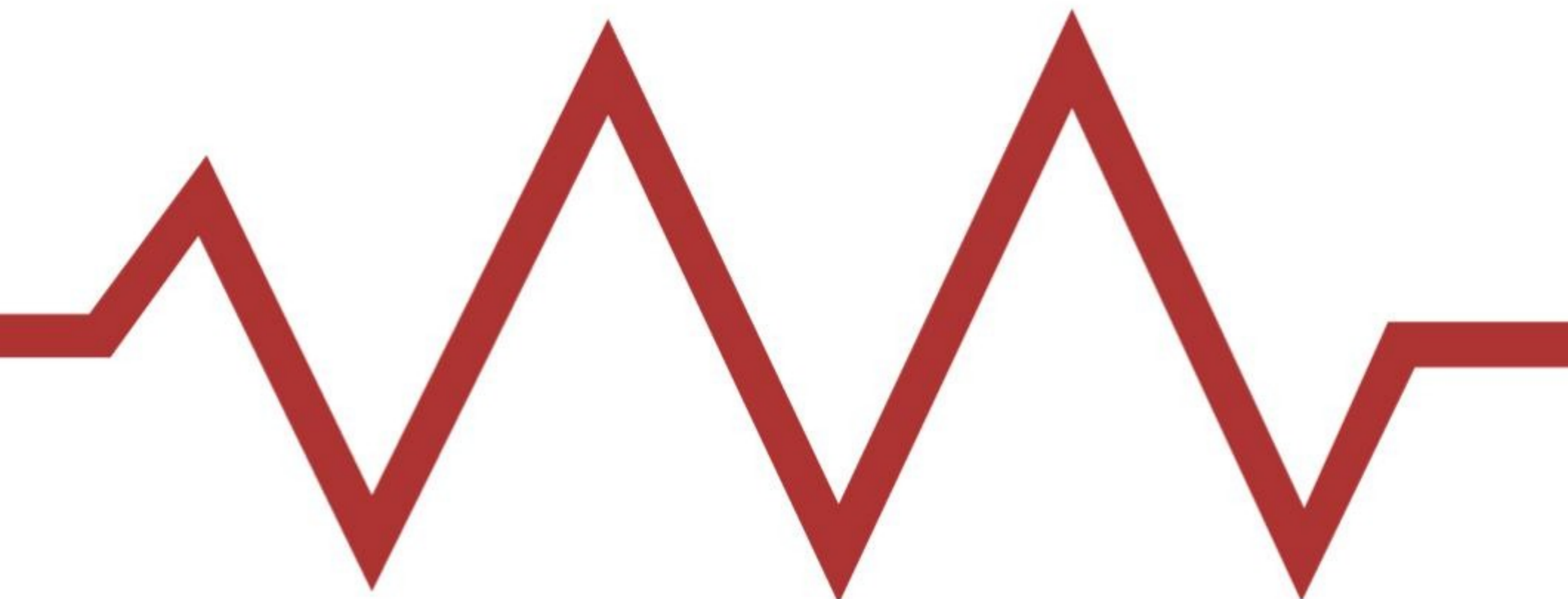


How to cope with exam stress?



Is my stress level excessive?

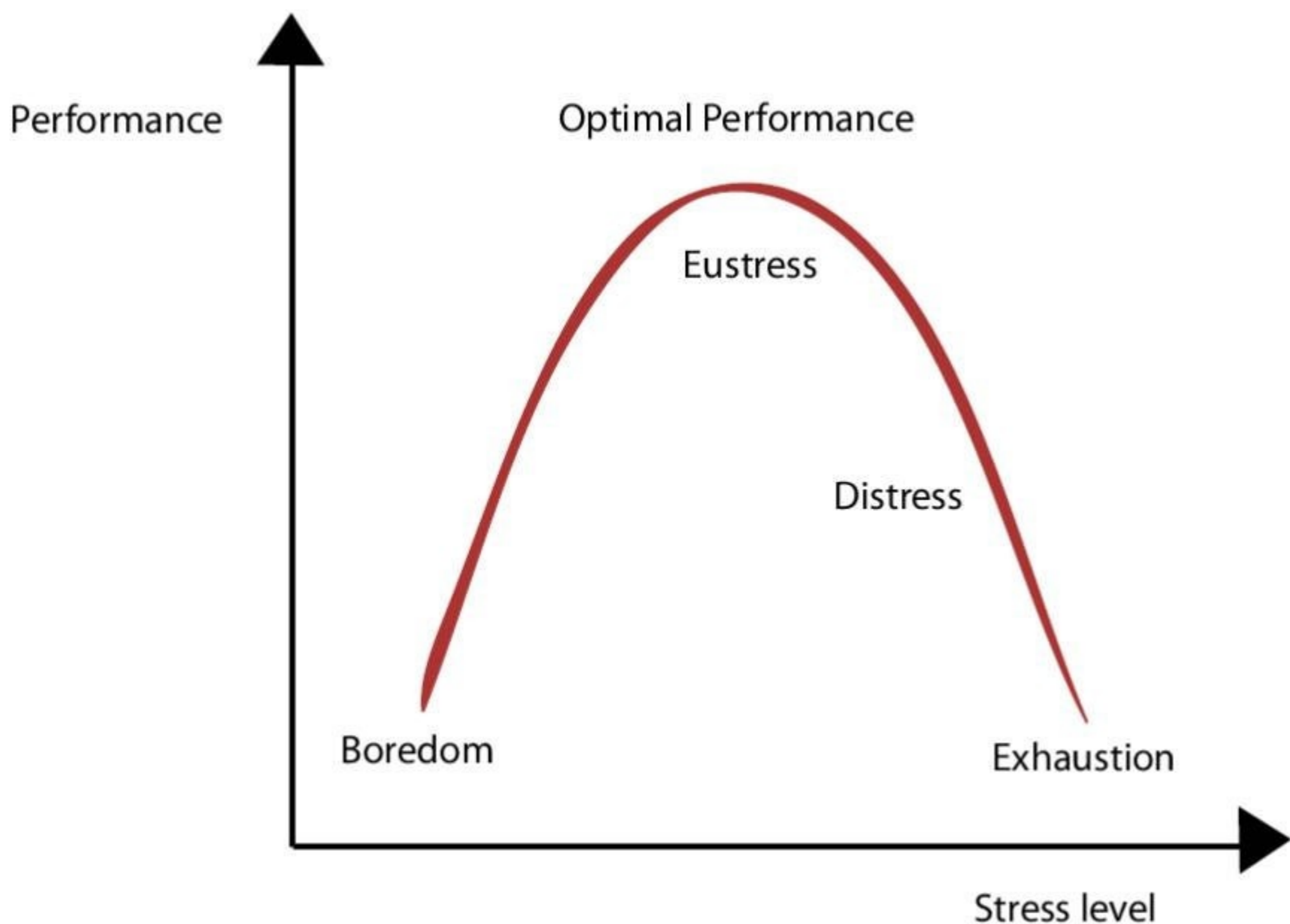
-  I feel physically ill just before an exam.
-  I have trouble completing exams because I keep thinking about what will happen if I fail.
-  My mind just went completely blank in the middle of an exam.
-  I have difficulty getting a good night's sleep before an exam.
-  I start to panic when other students finish their exams while I am still working.
-  I know the exam materials better than my score indicates.



The Cost and Benefits of Stress

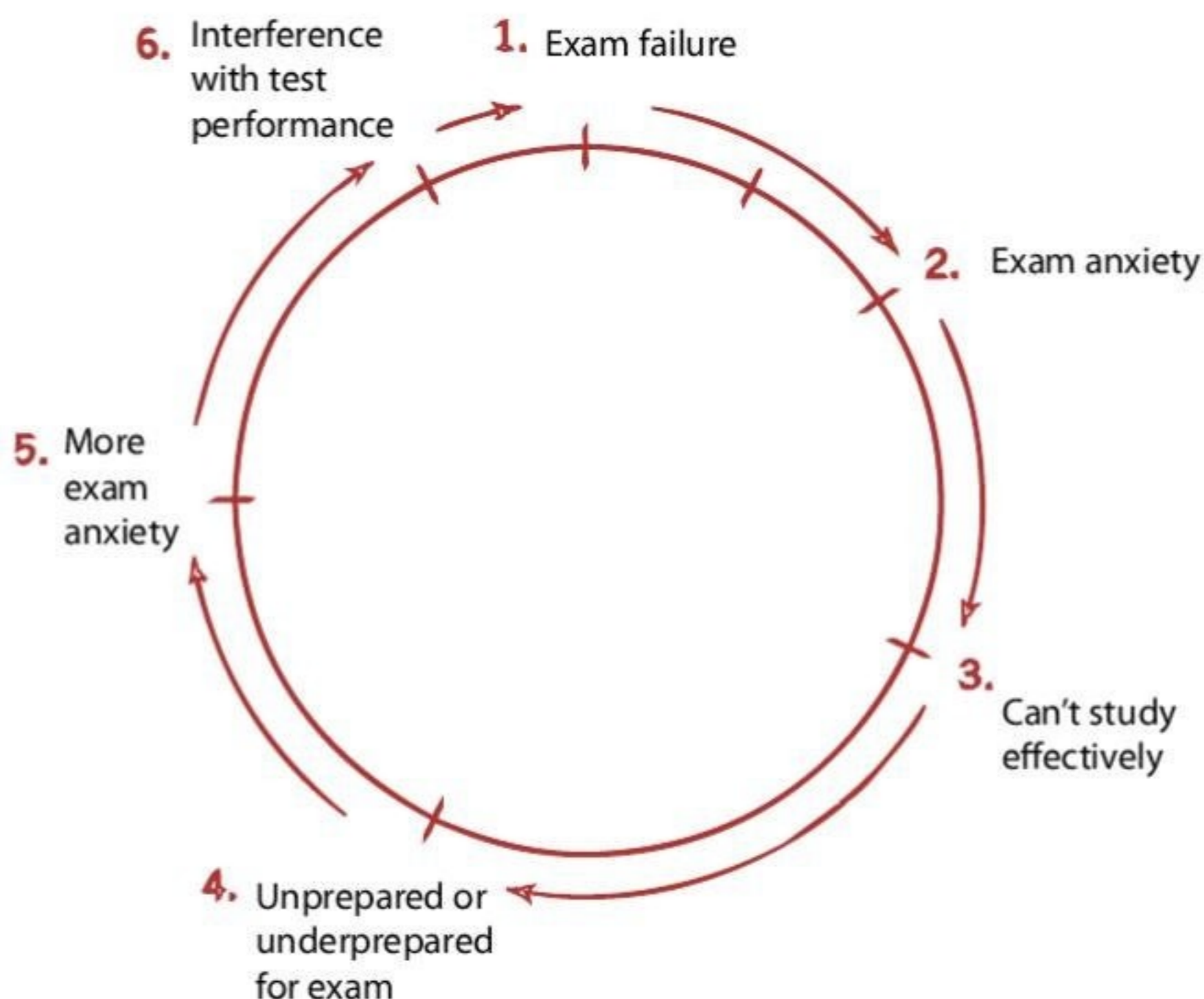
Stress is a double-edged sword.

Overwhelmingly high level of stress (distress) induces anxiety. However, at the optimal level (eustress), a certain amount of stress serves as an important function to help us perform better.



General Advice

Negative experiences in exam and exam stress often go hand-in-hand. They will form a vicious cycle as illustrated below:



To triumph in exams, it is important for us to break this vicious cycle.

As we can see in the cycle above, there are at least three things that we can do to combat exams:

1. Developing good study habits
2. Equipping yourself with effective study skills
3. Dealing with your anxious feelings

Developing Effective Study Habits



1. Prepare a pre-exam study schedule

Since time is always limited, make sure that your revision period is spent in a way that maximizes your study effectiveness. To set up a study plan, count backward from your exam date to decide when is the best to begin your revision.

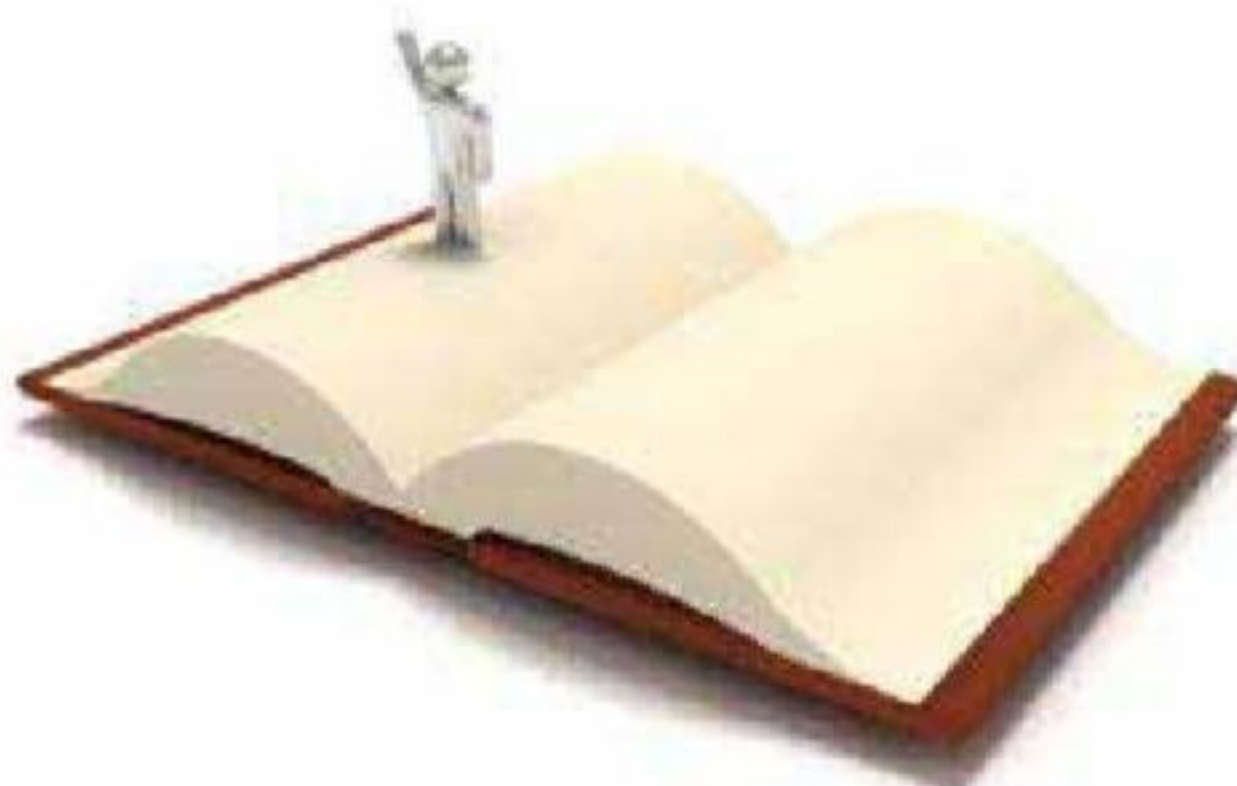
Developing Effective Study Habits

2. Space your study

Distributed practice is always better than cramming. In other words, it is always more effective to study for 2 hours each day for 5 days, instead of 10 hours the night before an exam.

3. Divide your learning materials

List out the chapters, topics, and readings that are covered in the exam. Divide them into chunks with materials of similar concepts. Space the chunks out during the whole revision period and make sure that you have enough time to cover all the chunks before exams.



Equipping Yourself with Effective Study Skills

1. Take good notes for lectures and readings

Please refer to “how to take good notes for lectures and readings” for specific advice on note-taking.



2. Prepare flash cards and Q cards to facilitate your study

Summarize the key concepts of your readings on flash cards to facilitate your memory. You can also put down questions on Q cards to prompt you with important concepts.

An example of a flash card

Key structures of the Limbic System

Amygdala

- influences our motivation, fear responses, emotional control, and interpretations of nonverbal, emotional expressions

Hippocampus

- plays a role in our emotions, ability to remember, and ability to compare sensory information to expectations

An example of a Q card

What are the stages of Freudian psychosexual development?

Oral stage

Anal stage

Phallic stage

Latency stage

Genital stage

Equipping Yourself with Effective Study Skills

3. Summarize key points

Summarizing key points of important concepts is especially useful for combating essay-type questions. Draft a list of key points under each concept as cues to organize your thoughts and to memorize relevant information.

4. Prepare end-of-chapter questions

Create a list of end-of chapter questions and answer them after you have gone through a particular chapter. Go back to the relevant parts if you are unsure of the answers. This acts as a checkpoint to help you identify anything that you have missed out during revision.

Dealing with Your Anxious Feelings

1. Prepare yourself well for exam

Good preparations can reduce your stress to a manageable level. Make sure you have block sufficient time for revision. You can use the strategies above to facilitate your preparation.

2. Relaxation strategies

Regulate your breathing is an important relaxation technique because people inclined to over-breathe (hyperventilate) when feeling anxious. Slowing down your rate of breathing can help your body to calm down.

3. Talk to yourself positively

Prepare a mental script that encourages yourself to face challenges ahead would be helpful during times when negative thoughts pop up before exams. Statements like “I have done my best and there is no need for me to worry” or “It’s alright even if I do not know the answers for all questions” are useful examples.

Dealing with Your Anxious Feelings

4. Identify Your Triggers

Knowing “what” make you anxious always helps you to cope with them. If you need time to warm up and settle down right after the exam starts, you may want to strategically overview all questions before you start answering. If essay question makes your nervous, you may start with multiple choice questions first.

5. Exercise Regularly

Exercise is a great stress reliever. It also promotes deeper and more restful sleep. Spare some time for it in spite of your busy revision schedule.

6. Stay Away from Substance

Alcohol and other drugs are obviously hindrance to academic success while causing other long-term problems. Caffeine intake may be arousing to some students, but caffeine overdose (e.g. > 2 cups per day) may also lead to agitated feelings.

Recap

Developing Effective Study Habits

1. Prepare a pre-exam study schedule
2. Space your study
3. Divide your learning materials

Equipping Yourself with Effective Study Skills

1. Take good notes for lectures and readings
2. Prepare flash cards and Q cards to facilitate your study
3. Summarize key points
4. Prepare end-of-chapter questions

Dealing with Your Anxious Feelings

1. Prepare yourself well for exam
2. Relaxation strategies
3. Talk to yourself positively
4. Identify Your Triggers
5. Exercise Regularly
6. Stay Away from Substance