

WHAT'S UP

MAKE STRESS WORK FOR YOU AT EXAMS

“Wah, so stressful!” I’m sure you’ve heard your friends say that when exams are approaching. And, you may be saying it, too, right now. Students sometimes feel paralysed by stress. That’s a pity because you can actually make stress work for you.

Stress is neither good nor bad. It’s just the way your body responds to a challenge. Stress is only a problem if it happens too often. And, even then, it really depends on how you label your stress.

Say, for example, that a student is sitting in the hall waiting to start an exam. At the same time, an athlete is at the starting line of the track, ready for the race to begin. Both are excited. Both experience stress: their palms are sweaty, their hearts are racing and their stomachs feel as though there were butterflies fluttering around in them. These are signs that they are in an aroused state.

The student panics when he feels his wet palms, pounding heartbeat and strange stomach sensations. He tell himself, “Oh no, I’m stressed out. I’m going to fail this exam!”

The athlete, feeling the very same sweaty palms, pounding heartbeat and butterflies in her stomach, tells herself, “Great, my adrenalin is flowing. I’m all psyched up and ready to go. I’m going to win this race!”

The student may not fail and the athlete may not win after all. But, the chances of the student doing badly are slightly higher because of how he labelled his stress. And the chances of the athlete running faster are greater because of how she, in turn, labelled her stress. Exactly the same things happened to their bodies. The athlete identified her stress as a good thing. The student identified his stress as a bad thing. And, the labels they gave made them experience and respond to their stress states differently.

Tell yourself you are going to be like the athlete. A few days before your exams begin, have a ‘mental dress rehearsal’ by imagining yourself sitting at your desk, waiting for an exam to begin. Then, imagine that your palms get sweaty, your heart beats faster and you feel butterflies in your stomach. At that point, tell yourself, “Great, my adrenalin is flowing. I’m all psyched up and ready to go. I’m going to do well in this exam!”

These mental rehearsals can help you on real exam days. At that time, if you feel too excited, be still and breathe calmly until you are ready and all set to go. Then, put your heart and soul into answering the questions. After your exams, let us know if the mental rehearsals worked; write to letters@whatsup.sg.