

# Getting ready for GCSE and A-level exams 2017

## Power yourself to Perform

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You need to fuel your body with the right foods at the right times to energise your system, improve your alertness and sustain you through long exams. The wrong food choices can make you feel sluggish, jittery, burned out and crash your energy levels. Exams are like mental marathons so endurance is the key. Use the following nutrition tips to help you perform at your best on exam day.

**P – Preparation** Start the day with a nutritious breakfast. Your brain needs the energy from food to work efficiently. You need to keep your mental focus on your exam and not on your hunger. The best breakfasts should include slow-release carbohydrates, such as **porridge oats, whole grain bread or low-sugar muesli**, as these provide slow-release energy. Add a protein food, such as milk, **0% fat yoghurt or eggs**, to keep you feeling full for longer, you can also add a **banana, berries or nuts & seeds**. If you really cannot stomach food, then try having a **healthy smoothie**.



## E – Energy Levels

Eat at regular times throughout the day and avoid high sugary foods such as pastries, sweets, caffeine and fizzy drinks. These will give you energy highs and crashes. The aim is to keep your blood sugars and energy levels stable by eating a combination of wholegrain carbohydrates, proteins and healthy fats. **Example foods for lunch include wholegrain sandwich, jacket or sweet potatoes with tuna, baked beans or a protein filling. Wholegrain rice or pasta mixed with protein. Wholemeal roll/wrap with cold meat, fish, egg, cheese or peanut butter and salad. Omelette with cheese, ham, mushrooms or tomatoes.**

## R – Re-hydrate

Drink a glass of water ideally with lemon at the start of the day. **Carry a bottle of water** around with you and take it into the exam. Limit your caffeine, fizzy or sugary drinks as this will lead to energy highs & lows. Dehydration can cause your brain to shut down, not work effectively & give you headaches. Aim to **drink at least 2 litres of water every day** to help you think faster, keep focused and give your brain energy to function.

## F – Focus Fuels

**Snack on brain boosting foods** throughout the day such as **fresh & dried fruit, nuts & seeds**. Snacks such as **peanut butter on rice cakes or cottage cheese on celery sticks**,

cheese and oat cakes or crackers, toast and marmite or peanut butter, non-sugary popcorn, 0% fat yogurt, raw vegetables – carrots, avocado, peppers, tomatoes or a small amount of dark chocolate are all good options.

## O – Omega 3's –

Omega 3 has been shown to help brain function and increases concentration. It also helps to improve your immune system when your body and mind are stressed. The best source of Omega 3 is **oily fish** such as **mackerel, sardines, salmon & trout**. A great lunch would be **fish on wholemeal toast**. Other foods include **walnuts, chia seeds, spinach & eggs**. You could even take a supplement of **cod liver oil tablets**.

## R – Re-think brain blockers

On exam day, stay away from foods made of **white flour, such as cookies, cereal bars, pastries, cakes and muffins**, which require added time and energy to digest. Also avoid foods that are high in refined sugar, such as **chocolates, desserts, and sweets** as these won't keep you stable during a long exam. **Avoid sugary, fizzy or energy drinks** and **limit your caffeine**, as it can increase your nervousness.

Don't have turkey before an exam as it contains L-tryptophan, an essential amino acid which makes you feel sleepy. **Avoid heavy carbohydrate meals** as these can make you feel sluggish if eaten in large quantities. **Eat lighter meals** making sure it is enough to feel satisfied but not so much as to feel full and don't try out foods that you haven't had before!

## M – Macro-nutrients

**Have a combination of protein, fats, and carbs at every meal on exam day.** You need protein to provide amino acids that create dopamine and norepinephrine. These brain chemicals make you feel more alert, attentive, and energetic. You need complex carbs that turn into glucose which fuels your brain. Carbs also create serotonin which can help you feel calm and put you in a positive frame of mind about your test. Having some healthy fats can keep you feeling full longer and help stabilize your blood sugar levels.

**Carbohydrates**

Breads  
Rice  
Couscous  
Cereals  
Bran  
Potatoes  
Pasta  
Oats  
Cream of Wheat  
Corn  
English Muffins  
Pancakes  
Whole Wheat/  
Whole Grains  
Vegetables  
Squash  
Pumpkin  
Berries  
Fruits  
Sugars

**Proteins**

Beans  
Sprouted  
Grains  
Quinoa  
Most Yogurts  
Skim Milk  
Peas

Chicken  
Turkey  
Egg Whites  
Fish  
Buffalo  
Bison  
Whey Protein  
Turkey Bacon  
Lean Beef  
Low/Non-fat  
cottage  
cheese  
Low/Non-fat  
greek yogurt

**Fats**

Eggs  
Salmon  
Bacon  
Chia Seeds  
Cottage  
Cheese  
Whole Fat  
Milk  
Duck  
Whole-Fat  
Yogurt

Acocado  
Nut Butters  
Egg Yolks  
Nuts  
Oils  
Olives  
Flaxseed

**Macro Cheat Sheet**

## MIGHTY MAGNESIUM

Magnesium is involved in over 1000 enzymatic reactions in the body. It's vitally important in providing our cells with energy

**Green vegetables**  
**Nuts**  
**Pulses**  
**Fish**  
**Bananas**

## UP THE B'S

B vitamins are directly involved in creating energy at a cellular level & will give you an energy boost

**Green vegetables**  
**Asparagus / Spinach**  
**Broccoli**  
**Yoghurt**  
**Chicken / Turkey / Salmon**  
**Whole Grains / Brown rice**  
**Almonds / Pecans**  
**Eggs**

**Pre plan your meals during your exams so that you give your brains and bodies the best possible fuel for maximum efficiency and therefore greatest success.**