High-Performance Finals Checklist

Finals are a time of increased stress for nearly all students. Some stress and the desire for good grades can be extremely motivating. However, excessive stress and anxiety can interfere with your ability to prepare for and do your best work. We cannot guarantee you a successful and stress-free finals week. However, listed below are some ideas and tips to minimize anxiety and help students perform more effectively during finals week.

Food & Nutrition

- Increase your intake of fresh fruits and vegetables to build up your nutritional reserve.
- Stock up on some healthy snacks for study times or breaks. Examples include string cheese, nuts, raisins, yogurt, nutrition bars, oatmeal and popcorn.
- Choose meals and snacks that emphasize protein over carbohydrates. Protein-rich meals and snacks keep your energy level on an even keel.
- Drink lots of water to keep hydrated and maintain energy.

Sleep & Relaxation

- Maintain as normal a sleeping pattern as possible and strive for 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
- Give yourself a chance to calm down and relax before going to sleep.
- Select a few relaxation techniques that you think will work for you. Practice them ahead of time so they will help you relax during finals week. Consider exercise, yoga, deep breathing, hot showers, progressive muscle relaxation, visual imagery, music, etc.
- If you plan to stay awake excessively at night, plan several ways to keep yourself awake and alert such as frequent breaks, going outside for fresh air, mild exercise, shoulder rolls, neck or jaw stretches, neck and shoulder massage with a friend or roommate, etc.
- Even a short (15-20 minute) exercise break (a brisk walk, pick-up game of basketball, soccer or volleyball, a class at the Rec, etc.) can reduce stress and tension, enhance alertness and refocus your mind.
- Practice techniques for avoiding eye strain. Focus on a distant object every 30 min. or so, or alternate focusing on near and far objects for 10-15 seconds each for 5-10 repetitions.
Drugs & Medication

- Assess your caffeine use. While caffeine can be effective for maintaining alertness, using too much of any drug can reduce effectiveness - even caffeine.
  -- Beverages with caffeine content vary widely based on drink type and quantity:
    eg. soda (60-80mg), tea (6-50mg), energy drinks (64-160mg) and coffee (60-320mg)
  -- Too much caffeine can increase anxiety and make it harder to maintain concentration.
  -- If used too close to bedtime, it can interfere with falling asleep.
- Alcohol, while it may help you relax, can also impair memory and make it harder to stay awake.
- If you are currently taking any drugs or medications, be aware of any side effects such as sleepiness or over-stimulation that would inhibit your preparation for finals.

Time Management

- Plan a time schedule for each exam or project due. More frequent, shorter (1-1.5 hours) study sessions per subject are more effective than fewer but longer ones.
- Determine how, when and where you study best, then try to make it a habit.
- When unexpected events arise that take time from studying, replace that time from your other free time. Adjust your schedule to keep study time a priority.
- Go into exam week with a confident attitude. Admit you won't know everything but that you'll do the best you possibly can.

Resources

- Health Enhancement - Evans Field House rm. 139 - www.health.niu.edu - 815-753-9755
- Recreation Services - www.niu.edu/recservices/ - 815-753-0231
- Health Services - www.niu.edu/healthservices/ - 815-753-1311
- Counseling & Student Development Center - Campus Life rm. 200 www.niu.edu/csdc - 815-753-1206
- www.mayoclinic.com/health/caffeine/AN01211 - detailed caffeine information