Going into any exam you want your energy levels to remain alert and your brain to process and recall information at a fast rate. For this to happen our brain needs to be rested and have a consistent supply of fuel. According to Dr Adam Fraser, to put your brain in this state you need to get great sleep and manage your blood glucose levels.

**Get Regular!** One of the most critical aspects of a sleep routine is a regular bed and wake up time (of these two the wake up time is the most important). When you are in a regular sleep routine your body gets used to the pattern and it makes going to sleep and waking up much easier. A sign that you have your routine right is when you consistently wake up minutes before your alarm clock is set to go off. The biggest challenge in maintaining a regular sleep routine is to stick to it on the weekends. The reason why we find it hard to get out of bed on a Monday morning is that we usually stay out late on Friday and Saturday nights and sleep in on Saturday and Sunday mornings. This sudden change in sleeping patterns confuses our body clock and jet lags us for Monday morning. If you feel the need to catch up on sleep over the weekend the key is to go to bed early and get up at your normal time rather than sleeping in past lunch. When we dramatically alter our sleep pattern on the weekend we can give ourselves a mini case of jet lag. Oversleeping creates something call “sleep inertia”, where the person experiences diminished mental functioning, such as not being able to make quick decisions, impaired concentration and a lack of energy.
Relax before bed. One hour before your normal bedtime start to wind down. Avoid doing work during these hours. Rather, read a book, have a bath, calm conversation or listen to soothing music. If you were trying to get a baby to go to sleep you wouldn’t rev them up just before putting them to bed.

3. Avoid stimulants. After about 2-3 pm in the afternoon stop your intake of tobacco, alcohol, tea, coffee or chocolate. Also a high intake of protein late at night will increase your mental alertness and keep you awake, so reduce the level of protein you eat at night.

4. Dim the lights. Whether our environment is dark or light impacts on our ability to get to sleep. A part of your brain called the Suprachiasmatic Nucleus (SCN) detects light input from the eyes. The SCN controls the secretion of Melatonin, a chemical that helps you sleep. When the SCN senses light on your eyes it shuts down Melatonin production, likewise when it senses darkness it releases Melatonin. Therefore make your room as dark as possible while you are asleep. Also as the evening progresses, start to dim the lights around the house.

5. Drink up! Make sure you are hydrated properly (2 litres of water a day), as when you are dehydrated your body temp rises and you will often wake up during the night.

6. Control the voices in your head. One of the biggest causes of not being able to get to sleep or stay asleep is mental stress related to worry and anxiety. Meditation and relaxation are great ways to calm the mind down and help you drift off to sleep. When you find your mind racing in bed, lie flat on your back and relax all your muscle groups, slow your breathing down and take long full breaths, then quiet your mind by focusing on one relaxing thought.

Power On! Power naps are a great way to energise you and catch up on some sleep debt. If you have ever napped in the afternoon and woken up disoriented and fatigue you have slept for too long and entered deep sleep. The rule with power napping is to not let them go for longer than 20 minutes.

8. Catch the wave to bed. There is a 90 minute rhythm called the Ultradian Rhythm that controls how alert we are. During the majority of this rhythm we are alert, however towards the end we start to get drowsy. Have you ever been in a 90 minute meeting and you start to fall asleep? Or have you been out somewhere and you get tired and think to yourself, “I think it’s time to go home”. Only to get your second wind 10 minutes later. We can use this rhythm to help us get to sleep. During the night look out for when the drowsy part of this rhythm hits you, that is the time to go to bed as your body is naturally prepared to nod off.

Manage your glucose levels.

One of the things that impacts on our energy levels is the amount of glucose that we have in our blood. The reason for this is that our brains exist on glucose and nothing else. Our brain makes up about 2% of our body weight however consumes more than 20% of the glucose that we ingest.

The problem with this is that our glucose levels fluctuate during the day; in particular we see a slight drop at 11 am and a huge drop at 3 pm. How often do you get tired at 3 pm? When our glucose levels are low we feel tired, cant focus, and generally our productivity stinks. When our glucose levels are high we are erratic, impulsive and often make mistakes. Obviously we are aiming for stable and steady glucose levels. Two things will help you to achieve this:
- Eating around every 4 hours
- Having low GI foods

When we skip meals our glucose levels begin to fall, therefore it is crucial to have regular meals during the day to stabilise our energy. Research tells us that eating approximately every 4 hours is an effective way to stabilise our glucose levels.

The next thing to look at is what you consume at these times. Often when we hit the 3pm slump we think “I need a sugar hit”. So we inhale a can of coke, and enough lollies to sink the titanic. When all this sugar hits your blood stream your glucose levels sky rocket, your energy levels go through the roof however it doesn’t last because insulin is secreted into your blood and it takes all the glucose out of your blood, and your glucose levels crash.

Your meals in the day should be low Glycemic Index (GI). What is GI, it is the rate at which food that goes in your mouth becomes glucose in your blood. The slower the better. Examples of low GI meals are;
• Fruit smoothies.
• Chicken salad sandwich.
• Muesli and yoghurt.
• Beef salad.
• Fruit and nuts
• Stir fry meat and vegetables

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