

# BRAIN HACKS FOR EXAM SUCCESS

## Neuroscience Backed Tips & Tricks

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One more month of school left before the much needed summer vacation. The end of school also means that exam and testing season is upon us. I have some tips and tricks up my sleeve to help you achieve all that you are capable of. Use my top 10 brain hacks to guide you through you or your upcoming tests and exams.

Your teenage brain is glorious - if you didn't know that already. Neuroscience has shown that the brain goes through critical periods of growth and development - while in the womb, the first year of life, and the early years, right into adulthood. What scientists have more recently discovered is that the brain undergoes a 'secret mission' of change during the period between the ages of 12 to 19 years, that is truly unique.

Research has shown that successful students aren't more intelligent, they are disciplined focused, and they've developed winning habits. Students who perform well are effective learners. Let neuroscience guide you to develop a super brain.

### Ten Brain Hacks

#### 1: Goals

**Setting goals** helps you visualize them and helps you reach them. If you have a clear goal in mind it helps you to prioritize things to be able to accomplish it. Research has shown that visualizing your goals is key to achieving them. Place motivational quotes in your study area, they help you feel inspired and motivated. Research has shown that if you believe you can achieve a goal, or you believe you are smart, or good at math – you perform better. Self-belief is extremely powerful. Don't give yourself any negative labels, being positive helps you to stay focused and energize.

#### 2: Exercise

**Regular exercise** stimulates the prefrontal cortex, and helps you to remember information better, enhances your concentration, and makes you more creative. Exercise three to four times a week, for at least 20 to 30 minutes each time, play a sport, walk, bike, scooter – anything that raises your heart rate. Fit kids perform better in exams and tests.

#### 3: Sleep

**Lack of sleep** is linked to decreased attentiveness, short-term memory, inconsistent performance, and delayed response time. Research has shown that lack

of sleep leads has a major impact on your ability to concentrate - poor concentration leads to errors and lower test scores. Go to bed early enough to get a good night's sleep. You need about eight to nine hours each night. Sleep is a vital part of becoming an effective learner. Sleep boosts memory, enhances learning, and improves your mood. During sleep the brain removes toxins that built up during the day. Avoid caffeine as it disrupts sleep and slows down growth.

#### 4: Food

**Your brain needs energy to work**, and it can only use the energy in give your body. You can boost your attention span, concentration, and memory by eating a breakfast and lunch is rich in whole grains, fiber, and protein, as well as low in added sugar (e.g. yogurt, egg, fruit, sandwich). Research shows that the better your nutrition, the better your brain functions - the better your performance in school.

#### 5: Mnemonics

**Some aspects of tests and exams include recall of facts.** The best way to recall facts is to use specific memory techniques that are powerful for information recall. Some of the most useful ones are:

**Acronyms:** or an invented combination of letters that means something. In an acronym each letter is a cue to an item you need to remember. Think 'Never Eat Soggy Waffles' as a way to remember the directions on a compass - NESW.

**Visualization:** is an excellent way to help you remember. The brain loves images, even more than words or written information as a cue to remember information. Making a mental picture of facts you want to recall forces you to focus and increases the likelihood of remembering information for a test or exam. Images provide mental cues that your brain can use to retrieve information from long-term memory.

**Chunking:** is a way of combining groups of information into 'chunks,' or blocks of facts that are related to each other as a way to help you remember individual items.

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The brain prefers groups of items of about five to seven items - known as the magic number seven. If you are trying to remember the structure of a cell - 'chunk it' into say external and major cell structure - cell wall, cell membrane, vacuole membrane, cytoplasm, nucleus and nucleolus.

Association: grouping items to recall that are related to each other is easier. Think of your vacation packing - clothes, passport, sunscreen, etc.

**6:  
Notes**

**Your memory for information is enhanced by writing notes**, as it reinforces your understanding and helps you learn better. Taking notes forces you to pay attention and listen out for the important topics. By writing notes you use your brain's motor pathways to increase your recall in tests. Be sure to focus on one task at a time, and you'll find that you'll get more done in less time.

**7:  
Group Study**

**Join or set up a study group.** Research has shown that students that do well in school, and tests/exams typically study with others rather than alone. Working with others that are learning the same material as you, and listening to different points of view helps you understand and remember the topic better. You will learn faster and prepare for big tests more easily working with peers. You can explain concepts and quiz each other. It helps with putting off doing the work, stops you from getting bored, and makes you accountable.

**8:  
Emotions**

**Your emotions** are located in the amygdala, the part of the brain that can hijack your thinking and reasoning. It can be hard to stay focused and motivated, and you might feel discouraged if you let your fear of failure or anxiety get in the way. Try to keep your thoughts and emotions in check, especially when you get a bad grade. Remain positive, and have a resilient mindset. Stay calm, and focus on preparing for the next assignment and don't dwell on a previous grade.

**9:  
Stress**

**Make sure to find ways to manage stress.** Everyone experiences worries, especially when a test is coming. Being able to relax and reduce anxiety will help you remain focused, be able to study and do well on tests. There are several ways to reduce your stress, listening to music, exercising, keeping a gratitude journal, yoga, deep breathing. Peer pressure affects everyone, so think carefully about the friends you spend time with. Find a group that is supportive and caring, surround yourself with friends that look out for you. Research shows that we imitate the people we are with, and want to be like them. Find friends that are positive, generous, hardworking and motivated. Strong relationships with teachers, family, and peers makes you feel like you belong, and more connected to others. You will then be able to rely on them when you need support. Don't compare yourself to others, we all have different skills and talents. Focus on you and what you can do to feel better and do.

**10:  
Relax**

**Your brain needs downtime to perform at its best.** Make sure to ways to reward yourself for trying your best. Have fun with friends, go to the movies, have some ice-cream. Small rewards can be a great way to keep you motivated on a day to day. It takes your brain about 15 to 20 minutes to really focus on a task, and it needs a break at about 45 to 60 minutes. Keep to a schedule and don't over do it. So, if you've studied for 45 minutes, maybe take a 10-minute break and watch something you enjoy. Setting a timer on your phone really helps. It important to have a balance in life, block out time to relax.

Remember: exams and tests are only a portion of who you are. Try your best and forget the rest.

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