

Surviving Year 12

[Notes adapted from a presentation by Dr Michael Carr-Gregg at the Glen Street Theatre in August 2014 and based on his book of the same title.]

Challenges faced by Year 12 students include:

- Parental pressure – by this time parents should be the cheer squad, it's too late for anything else!
- Peer pressure from friends who are anxious
- Media coverage.

His overarching message was that it is not the most important year of your life; remember that your ATAR is not the be all and end all.

In the context of brain development, he said to remember that boys will be 27 before their brain has fully matured and girls 23.

He provided 20 research-evidenced suggestions to help Year 12 students do their best:

1. Sleep

This is the single most important factor. He suggests watching Professor Russell Foster's TED talk on the neuroscience of sleep:

https://www.ted.com/talks/russell_foster_why_do_we_sleep

Stage 5/REM sleep is critical – particularly in terms of memory. REM sleep is essential to memory processing so can make a significant difference to the level of recall of material that students are learning.

In Australia 90% Year 10 to 12 students don't get enough sleep; 15% are so tired that it hampers their ability to learn.

Year 12 students should get 9 hours sleep a night, whereas many are only getting 5 hours

He suggests tracking sleep – particularly REM sleep – using a Fitbit or Jawbone Up 24 or similar.

So **9 hours sleep** is a non-negotiable.

In terms of getting to sleep he suggests:

- Trying warm milk, peppermint/chamomile tea or Chillax (concentrated cherries which contain melatonin)
- Avoid hot bath/shower before bed
- Being in a dim light for 30mins before bed (including no bright light in the bathroom while doing teeth!)
- The room should be quiet, dark and reasonably cool in order to secrete melatonin.

- No technology in the bedroom – in particular no back-lit screens as they interrupt melatonin.
- Use bright light to wake up effectively after 9 hours.

2. Feed the brain

It works better with glucose.

Try fish oil (or for vegetarians flax seed oil) and blueberries.

3. Eat Breakfast....especially on exam days

Around 50% eat cereal with milk

Toast 29%

Nothing 10%

On exam days:

- Cereal for carbohydrate
- 2 eggs – contain Choline
- Yoghurt – contains Tyrosine

Get into the habit now.

4. Concentration

For optimal concentration; study for 50 minute blocks and then take a break of 15 minutes.

For rote learning, look at just doing 20 minutes blocks.

Juggling is a good thing for brain connections so a great thing to do in the 15minute breaks.

5. Water

Stay hydrated - keep drinking water while studying.

6. No coffee after lunchtime

It disrupts the sleep cycle. Also avoid caffeine drinks such as Red Bull or V.

7. Exercise

US research showed students who joined gyms achieved better scores.

His favourite app for HSC students is 'Couch to 5k' <http://www.c25k.com>

8. Don't study late at night

You don't remember what you are studying and you sacrifice sleep.

9. Make sure your study area is comfortable

Make sure it is comfortable, well lit and with appropriate furniture.

10. Time and Place Cue

Try and study at the same time each day, in the same place – establishing a routine enhances recall.

11. Managing social media

For PC users try 'Cold Turkey' <http://getcoldturkey.com> which allows you to access the internet but not to access distractions.

For Mac users try 'Self Control' <http://selfcontrolapp.com> which is free.

12. Mindfulness

Recent research shows how effective mindfulness can be.....and the Australian Cricket team were using it before the last Ashes win!

Try 'Smiling Mind' which has a free iphone app or web based access – there will be an android version by the end of the year <http://smilingmind.com.au>

13. Try group study

It works well for some students.

14. Improve recall

Dr Katrina Barker's advice is that nothing works better in aiding recall than a mind map. Different students will have different ways but look at using headings/colours etc.

Once you are comfortable with the concepts, practice exam papers are extremely valuable.

15. Take notes with a pen and paper – don't use a laptop

Princeton and UCLA studies show that taking notes with a pen and paper aids recall.

16. Be vigilant for depression

In Victoria 1 in 4 Year 12 students are at risk of depression, NSW will be similar.

Look out for the following signs as a constellation:

- Sadness/tears/moodiness
- Lack of interest
- Sense of worthlessness
- Hopelessness
- Problems sleeping
- Changes in weight
- Presence of persistent negative thoughts

Don't leave it! Depression responds well to early diagnosis and prompt treatment.

Beyond Blue – their Anxiety and Depression Checklist (K10) is helpful

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/depression/signs-and-symptoms/anxiety-and-depression-checklist-k10>

17. Chew gum!

While hated by school Principals and parents, studies show chewing gum while studying improves concentration!

18. Say 'no' to parties during weeks close to exams

Saying 'no' to parties in the weeks leading up to and during exams will help keep students stay energised and refreshed. Don't be distracted by friends who are partying – especially if they finish before you.

19. Listen to your Year 12 teacher

Their advice is good, they've seen it all before.

20. Don't over-do your part time job

Don't put in too many hours to your part time job. Research shows that up to 10 hours a week has no impact on results; over 15 hours **does** impact on results.

Advice for parents...

....don't compare your son or daughter with their siblings or yourself. And remember that it won't matter what you say at this point in Year 12, the horse has bolted!

Celebrate when your student finishes rather than waiting for the results.

Other tips

- The impact of playing music while studying varies by student. Some are ok with any music, others with instrumental music and others best with none.
- For students who tend to procrastinate the 'I procrastinate' app is fantastic <http://www.macupdate.com/app/mac/22481/iprocrastinate>
- Pink light screens do not have the same negative impact on sleep as normal back lit screens
- No alcohol or marijuana for brain development reasons – see introduction on the age the brain matures
- A rich repertoire of friends is the best predictor of wellbeing so plan for time with them so look at something like
 - Friday night – let your hair down
 - Saturday – sport
 - Sunday – work.

And during exams move to: Friday night to relax and Saturday/Sunday work.