

What is the effect of ...

SUBSTANCE USE WHILE STUDYING

Do you ever use certain substances to get **more energy** while studying or reading a long text? Or maybe you use substances with a **calming effect** against study and exam stress? Certain substances are often used as aids in the hope to study better. **But do these substances really help you to study better?** Below, we provide some information on substances that sometimes get used by students and we also guide you to more healthy alternatives!

STIMULATING/ENERGIZING SUBSTANCES

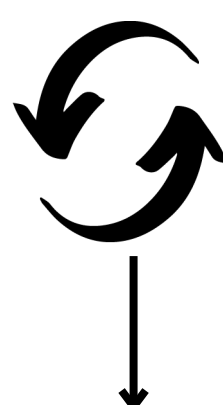
- **What?** Coffee, energy drinks, as well as illegally obtained medication such as methylphenidate (Rilatine®)
- **Why?** Often taken out of an urge to study or performance pressure
- **Risks:** you are already tired -> substance uses your own energy reserves -> body & mind are completely exhausted -> crashing
- **Long-term use:** risk for palpitations, panic attacks, blackouts, ...

Does **not** change your intelligence or abilities and therefore does **not** necessarily improve your exam result.

SLEEP AND CALMING SUBSTANCES

- **What?** Melatonin, vitamin preparations with a **possible** calming effect and calming medication
- Often taken for exam stress, anxiety or fear of failure
- **Risks:**
 - Feeling groggy
 - Indifference
 - Reduced ability to concentrate
- **Long-term use** of medication: headache, memory loss, dizziness, dependence,...

Does **not** change the quality of your sleep. So you don't necessarily feel more rested in the morning.



COMBINATION OF SUBSTANCES

Eg: drinking coffee during the day to stay awake -> a sleeping medicine at night to still be able to sleep ->....

WHAT IF YOU WANT TO USE SUBSTANCES?

- Know the substance
- Know yourself
- Know your sensitivity to substances (how strongly does your body react to them?)
- Use in **moderation**

WHAT IF YOU NEED TO TAKE MEDICATION?

- On **professional advice or prescription** only
- Discuss pros and cons with doctor
- Do not take medication for longer than necessary
- Don't take medication that you get from fellow students, friends, acquaintances,... just like that

Getting started with alternatives



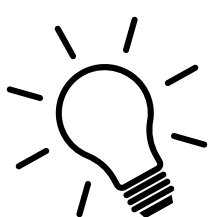
Tips for energy and concentration

- **Food and drinks** are also **fuel for the brain**. It is best to provide three nutritious meals a day and enough healthy snacks in between to get the necessary dose of vitamins. Also drink enough water (preferably 1.5L per day).
- **Regular exercise** improves concentration and memory. Stand up every 30 minutes and create an exercise-filled environment (e.g. having to walk to the kitchen for snacks).
- Get **enough sleep and rest** (see infographic [Sleep](#)). Feeling too tired during the day? Then take a **short power nap** of up to 30 minutes (before 3pm).
- Think of **activities that give you energy**, which you can use during your study breaks (e.g. go for a walk, read a book,...).
- You are not alone in studying. **Support** from **friends and/or fellow students** can be an extra motivation boost (e.g. studying together).
- Would you like to **increase** your **concentration** while studying? Then try the **Pomodoro technique**, where you switch between productive studying and relaxation. Setting **concrete goals** and **removing distractors** (e.g. mobile phone) can also increase concentration.



Tips for rest and relaxation

- **Regular moments of relaxation** are important to recharge your batteries and increase concentration. So **plan relaxation** consciously.
- It is best not to relax in your study environment. So **do not eat at your study spot**, but choose another pleasant environment (e.g. lunch with friends).
- **Regular exercise** increases your sense of calm and improves your sleep. So it is a good idea to regularly get some **fresh air** by going for a short walk, for example.
- **Create a steady sleep rhythm**: Try to get up and go to sleep at the same time every day. Also stop studying one hour before bedtime and relax with something soothing (e.g. music), but try to avoid screens while doing so.
- Is the stress while studying too high? Then try a **breathing exercise** (see infographic [Abdominal breathing](#)) to calm down. This exercise can also be used in the evening for a better night's sleep.



Need more information?

- ☐ Stop by **Study Guidance** for more useful info and tips around productive studying during a workshop or during an appointment with a study advisor/student psychologist.
- ☐ You can visit **Moodspace.be** for more information on medication and substances (while studying). You can also use their [online self-help module](#) for creating a healthy lifestyle.