

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is the name given to the uneasy or overwhelming feeling experienced by many people as a test approaches. The extent to which people experience test anxiety varies greatly, and the symptoms experienced differ from person to person.

Some feel that mild test anxiety is beneficial because the mind is made more alert, and the attention is focused as the body gets ready to do "battle" with difficult material. However, severe test anxiety can be overwhelming, leaving the test taker with a racing heart, sweaty brow, nauseous stomach, and only fragmented thoughts.

Test anxiety can occur before a student starts preparing for a test, while studying for a test, and while taking the test. Here are some ways to avoid or lessen anxiety:

Preventing Anxiety

Regular exercise is very useful in keeping stress levels down. Eating well feeds the body and the mind—complex carbohydrates provide good brain food! Drink plenty of fluids, too.

Being organized, knowing what is on the test and knowing when the test is being given are necessary factors in decreasing anxiety!

Preparing well for the test is essential! If you are not prepared, anxiety will be inevitable. You may ask the instructor for assistance in preparation.

Coping Strategies

- ◆ **"Stop!"**
If you notice that you can't concentrate because your thoughts are bombarding you, think "stop." Consciously halting the worrying will help you refocus.
- ◆ **Visualize Success**
Visualize or create a picture of being successful. Imaging getting your test back

with an "A" on it. If you believe you will fail, you will. Be positive instead.

- ◆ **Refocus**
When your mind wanders from the task at hand, refocus on something potentially unrelated, like your pen/pencil or a poster on the wall. The idea is to calm your mind, which is similar to meditation.
- ◆ **Affirm Yourself**
Talk to yourself in a positive way. Use the following as a mantra or affirmation: *I am in control. I am calm. I am doing a good job on this test. I am prepared. I am successful.*
- ◆ **Deep Breathe**
When we are stressed, we breathe fast and shallow. You can calm rising anxiety by taking deep breaths—expand the stomach when you inhale. Pay special attention to the air going in and out of your lungs. Breathe slowly to allow for the full relaxation effect.
- ◆ **Progressive Relaxation**
Focus your attention on the each muscle group, starting with your feet, and tense and relax each group.
- ◆ **Use Guided Imagery**
Stop what you are doing completely and imagine a different scene. Close your eyes, relax your body physically, and visualize yourself elsewhere.
- ◆ **Talk to your Instructor**
Your instructor may be able to help with a different location, different style of test, or some additional coping techniques.
- ◆ **Get Professional Help**
If things continue to be troublesome, talk with a counselor who can help you work through your issues with tests.

