

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is the uneasy or overwhelming feeling experienced by some resulting from a test approaching. 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 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.

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

Test anxiety may occur while preparing for and during an exam. Here are some ways to reduce the anxiety:

- ◆ **Think "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.
- ◆ **Talk to your Instructor**
Your instructor may be able to help with a different location, different style of test, or some additional coping techniques.

- ◆ **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 well on this test. I am prepared. I am successful.*
- ◆ **Deep Breathing**
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**
This exercise reduces muscle tension by actively tensing and relaxing each muscle group in the body. Start with your feet and progress slowly and systematically up the legs and throughout the entire body until you have tensed and relaxed each muscle 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.
- ◆ **Get Professional Help**
If things continue to be troublesome, talk with a counselor who can help you work through your issues with tests.

