



Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is being so afraid or worried about a test that performance suffers. Test anxiety can have physical and emotional effects. For example, it can cause:

stomach upset
loss of sleep
headaches
rapid heartbeat
sweaty palms

loss of concentration
memory lapses
mental blocks
anger or depression
low self-esteem

The causes of test anxiety vary. They include:

Bad experiences with taking tests
Worrying about the future
Poor study habits
Lack of stress management skills
Comparing yourself to others
Perfectionism
Fear of failure

You can learn to reduce test anxiety no matter what the cause.

Ways to reduce test anxiety

Remember, a test is only a test. Keep your perspective. Tests are designed to measure how much of a body of knowledge you have learned. Classroom tests do not measure your creativity, general intelligence, or value as a person. The outcome of a test measures only how well you have done on a particular test.

Be prepared. Preparing well may be the best way to lessen anxiety. Use good study skills and habits. Review course material on a regular basis. People tend to fear the unknown, so learn all you can about the scope and nature of each exam.

Surround yourself with positive people. Avoid students who tend to panic and talk about how terrible a coming exam is going to be.

Be realistic. Understand that you probably won't know the answer to every question on a test. Despite your best efforts, there may be questions for which you have not prepared. There will be questions that you will get wrong. You do not need to be perfect to pass or do well on a test.

Use relaxation strategies. Use relaxation strategies before, during, and after exams. Learn techniques to slow your breathing, and practice them consistently. Visualize positive testing situations.

For some students, anxiety can be so significant that these strategies are not enough. If you cannot overcome your anxiety, ask for support from others. It may be helpful to talk with parents, a professor, a staff member in the Learning Assistance Center or Student Services Center, or a counselor at the Campus Health Center.

More tips

- Treat your body well; eat healthful foods and get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Dress comfortably for tests.
- Make sure you have all materials (pencil, pen, paper, eraser, scantron, blue book) you will need during the exam.
- Be on time for exams. Arriving late sets you up to do poorly.
- Sit in a spot with few distractions. Rather than talking with others during the time before the exam, use that time to collect your thoughts and slow your breathing.
- Carefully read all the directions on the exam before you begin. Also, listen carefully to any spoken directions or hints the instructor may give.
- Budget your time. Take a few seconds to figure out roughly how much time you can spend on each section of the test.
- Do the best you can. Perfection isn't possible; strive instead for excellence.

If additional information on test-taking techniques will help you out, please contact the Academic Resource Center.

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