

Test Anxiety: How to Manage It



All anxiety is a reaction to anticipating something stressful, and the body reacts by releasing adrenaline, which prepares you for danger (i.e. fight or flight response). Students, in particular, may feel test anxiety because they are in a situation where their performance counts. A little bit of stress can actually be useful. It helps you to prepare for something important. But when the test anxiety is overwhelming, it's good to seek out some help and develop some strategies for how to manage the stress. Realize that anxiety is a habit, and as such, it can be replaced by new habits—with practice. There's also an online tutorial at: <http://www.lanecc.edu/volunteertutor/links.htm> on "Calm Confident Test Taking."

Develop Good Study Habits

- Being prepared for an exam is half the battle. Having good study skills is very important. No amount of cramming the night before a test can make up for the learning that happens over time as you study on a day-to-day basis. The more you know the material, the more confident you'll be and the better you will do.
- Keep up with the reading, and learn to take good notes in class.
- Space out the studying over time and continually review the class material.
- Write out summaries of what you have read, and review them before a test.
- Seek out a study group if you are someone who learns best from interactions with others.

Self-Talk

Watch what you say to yourself. Often students who have high test anxiety tend to speak negatively to themselves. "Everyone in this class is smarter and faster than I am," or "I always mess up on tests." "If I don't do well, I'll flunk the class."

- Become aware of what you are saying to yourself, and replace the negative messages with positive ones: "I've studied hard and I know this material." "I can do this!"
- Write out the negative messages and next to them, write a statement that disputes it.
- Practice the positive statements.
- Encourage yourself in the same way you would encourage a friend.
- Visualize yourself doing well and reaching your goals.

Stress Management Awareness

- Eat well—3 meals/day, with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid junk food.
- Get plenty of exercise. This helps to reduce your stress levels.
- Avoid caffeine, which increases anxiety.
- Practice relaxation and breathing techniques. When you do this on a regular basis, your body will know how to quickly respond when you use them in a stressful situation. A relaxation technique is included on the following page.

Test Taking Strategies

- Get a good night's sleep before the test. It helps your brain to absorb what you've studied. One study showed that people who got 8 hours sleep before a math test were almost 3 times more likely to figure out the problems than those who stayed up all night.
- Keep a positive attitude.
- Read the directions first: slowly and carefully.
- Skim through the test so you know how to pace yourself.
- Start with the easiest questions first.
- Focus your attention on the test and don't worry about how you will do.
- If you don't know a question, skip it and return to it later. Tell yourself that you probably studied it, and it will come to you later.
- If you start feeling anxious, close your eyes and take three slow, deep breaths and practice relaxation techniques. Then return to the task.
- For essay exams, you can write out a quick outline to organize your thoughts before writing an essay question. Start with a short summary of the topic and then make your points. If your mind goes blank, pick a question and just start writing. It may help bring the information to mind.
- For objective exams, think of your own answer first, before looking at the choices provided.
- Take your time. There's no reward for being the first person done.
- Relax. Take the exam step by step, and do the best you can.
- Later, list what strategies worked and keep them. Reward yourself for your efforts.

Relaxation Technique

Just as athletes visualize their performance beforehand, practice this before an exam:

- Close your eyes and breathe deeply, all the way to your abdomen, so it rises and falls.
- Focus on your breathing. Exhale slowly, and as you exhale, let go of negative thoughts and tension. Notice how relaxed you feel, and know that you can feel this relaxed even in a stressful situation such as an exam.
- Imagine yourself taking a test. See yourself in the classroom sitting calmly, breathing, thinking positive thoughts. Feel more calm and confident with each breath you exhale.
- See yourself reading the questions and answering them one at a time, slowly and carefully. You are in control; you have prepared and have all the knowledge you need to pass the test.
- Notice how regular your breathing is and how calm and confident you are. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply for another 5 breaths, and open your eyes feeling relaxed and alert. Information from: www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/relaxation.html

More information can be found at:

www.testtakingtips.com/anxiety/index.htm

www.studyqs.net/tstprp8.htm