

Test Anxiety

Tips for Easing the Stress of Taking Tests

What Causes Test Anxiety

- Lack of preparation as indicated by:
 - Cramming the night before the exam.
 - Poor time management.
 - Failure to organize text information.
 - Poor study habits.
- Worrying about the following:
 - Past performance on exams.
 - How friends and other students are doing.
 - The negative consequences of failure.

Reducing Test Taking Anxiety

Test anxiety is when a student excessively worries about doing well on a test. This can become a major hindrance on test performance and cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses among other symptoms. The following are tips on reducing test taking anxiety.

- Being well prepared for the test is the best way to reduce test taking anxiety.
- Space out your studying over a few days or weeks and continually review class material. Don't try to learn everything the night before.
- Try to maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the test and during the test.
- Exercising for a few days before the test will help reduce stress.
- Get a good night's sleep before the test.
- Show up to class early so you won't have to worry about being late.
- Chew gum (if allowed) during the test to help relieve test anxiety.
- Stay relaxed; if you begin to get nervous, take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.
- Read the directions slowly and carefully.
- If you don't understand the directions on the test, ask the teacher to explain it to you.
- Skim through the test so that you have a good idea how to pace yourself.
- Write down important formulas, facts, definitions and/or keywords in the margin first so you won't worry about forgetting them. Do the simple questions first to help build up your confidence for the harder questions.
- Don't worry about how fast other people finish their test; just concentrate on your own test.
- If you don't know an answer to a question, skip it for the time being (come back to it later if you have time), and remember that you don't have to always get every question right to do well on the test.
- Focus on the question at hand. Don't let your mind wander on other things.

Test preparation to reduce anxiety

- Approach the exam with confidence:
 - Use whatever strategies you can to personalize success: visualization, logic,

- talking to yourself, practice, teamwork, journaling, etc.
 - View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you've studied and to receive a reward for the studying you've done.
- Be prepared!
 - Learn your material thoroughly and organize what materials you will need for the test. Use a checklist.
- Avoid thinking you need to cram just before.
- Strive for a relaxed state of concentration.
 - Avoid speaking with any fellow students who have not prepared, who express negativity, who will distract your preparation.
- A program of exercise is said to sharpen the mind.
- Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam.
- Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach.
 - Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Take a small snack, or some other nourishment to help take your mind off of your anxiety.
 - Avoid high sugar content (candy) which may aggravate your condition.

During the test

- Read the directions carefully.
- Budget your test taking time.
- Change positions to help you relax.
- If you go blank, skip the question and go on.
- If you're taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind.
- Don't panic when students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for finishing first.
- Use relaxation techniques if you find yourself tensing and getting anxious during the test:
 - Relax; you are in control.
 - Take slow, deep breaths.
- Don't think about the fear
- Pause: think about the next step and keep on task, step by step.
- Use positive reinforcement for yourself:
 - Acknowledge that you have done, and are doing, your best
- Expect *some* anxiety.
 - It's a reminder that you want to do your best and can provide energy
 - Just keep it manageable
 - Realize that anxiety can be a "habit" and that it takes practice to use it as a tool to succeed

After the test, review how you did

- List what worked, and hold onto these strategies.
 - It does not matter how small the items are: they are building blocks to success.
- List what did not work for improvement.
- Celebrate that you are on the road to overcoming this obstacle.