MANAGING AND REDUCING TEST ANXIETY

PRESENTED BY THE ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER
Test taking in any form and for any subject can be quite stressful. In most cases, this stress can actually help with a student’s performance on an exam. It provides a drive to do well. In other cases, anxiety before, during, and after an exam becomes crippling and a serious hindrance on exam performance. Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which the test taker experiences severe distress and anxiety when thinking about or taking an exam. People who suffer with test anxiety have such a great fear of not performing well that it prevents them from doing just that.
**Physical** – muscle tension, shortness of breath, sweating, shaking, rapid heart beat, dry mouth, fainting, nausea. Mild cases cause a “butterflies” in the stomach feeling. More severe cases can cause a person to become physically ill

**Cognitive/Behavioral** – trouble remembering information that was understood and thoroughly studied, trouble concentrating and analyzing problems, negative self-talk, self-treatment of anxiety (prescription medication, alcohol), racing thoughts, complete avoidance of testing situations

**Emotional** – depression, low self-esteem, anger, feeling of hopelessness and helplessness
Some anxiety is caused by a biological response to a perceived threat. The release of adrenaline will cause a “fight-or-flight” response. Naturally, the body will want to, as the term states, fight or run away. In the classroom while taking a test, there is no option to run away. Having to be exposed to a situation of perceived threat without an option to escape may lead a person’s brain to fluster and shut down.

Other people who suffer from test anxiety suffer as a result from concern about how others will perceive them. They have high expectations of themselves and believe that peers, instructors, or family have equal or higher expectations. This leads to extreme pressure to do well and the stress becomes much worse if the person experiences a slip in grades—be it a slight slip or a large one. Self-doubt and anxiety are a result.
If you are someone who experiences severe test anxiety, there are a few things you can do so that you are as comfortable as possible before, during, and after your exam.

If your test anxiety is something that you believe is unmanageable on your own, don’t be afraid to address your situation with your professor or a person with whom you feel comfortable.

HOW TO MANAGE/REDUCE TEST ANXIETY
PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

• Maintain good study habits
  • Review previous exams to learn from experience
  • Study over an extended period of time, not overnight
  • Try to maintain confidence and a positive attitude
  • Exercise to reduce stress
• Personalize your success using different strategies – visualization, logic, list making, working in groups, journaling your progress

BEFORE THE EXAM

• Get a good night’s sleep
• Give yourself enough time to complete your pre-class routine so you can arrive to class early
  • Chew gum or candy to reduce anxiety (if allowed)
• Avoid stressful conversation with other students before the exam
  • Don’t go to the exam hungry
DURING THE EXAM

• Choose a comfortable place in class
  • Read the directions
• Ask questions – the worst the professor can say is “I can’t help you with that”
  • Skim the test before beginning to know how to pace yourself
• Write down important equations/formulas, definitions, or facts on top of the page or in the margins before beginning
  • Do the simple questions first to build confidence
• Don’t pay attention to how quickly others are finishing their tests
• Skip questions you don’t know the answer to – answer them at the end if you have time
  • Focus on the question you’re working on

AFTER THE EXAM

• Review your test
• Focus on what you did wrong first. Make sure you understand fully how to do the problem so you can successfully answer a similar problem when you see it again.
• Recognize those things that you did right.
AFTER THE EXAM (CONT.)

• Identify which of your pre-test strategies worked.
• Identify which of your pre-test strategies did NOT work.
• Take your test to your professor if you need further explanation on what you did wrong – take notes during this process and review your test again afterwards.
• Regardless of whether you did well or not: Reward yourself for getting through the exam
• If you need to improve for the next exam: Don’t beat yourself up. What’s done is done. Focus on what you need to do to improve for the next exam.
SOURCES

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