

# Tips for overcoming test anxiety



## **Do your knees shake a little too much right before taking an exam?**

Too much anxiety about a test is commonly referred to as test anxiety. It is perfectly natural to feel some anxiety when preparing for and taking a test. In fact, a little anxiety can jump start your studying and keep you motivated.

However, too much anxiety can interfere with your studying. You may have difficulty learning and remembering what you need to know for the test. Further, too much anxiety may block your performance during the test. You may have difficulty demonstrating what you know during the test.

## **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 past performance on exams, how friends and other students are doing, and the negative consequences of failure.

## **Physical Signs of Test Anxiety**

During an exam, as in any stressful situations, a student may experience any of the following bodily changes:

- Perspiration
- Sweaty palms
- Headache
- Upset stomach

- Rapid heartbeat
- Tense muscles

### **Effects of Test Anxiety**

Nervousness:

- Having difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper.
- Having difficulty organizing your thoughts.
- Having difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions.
- Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material.
- Mental blocking (going blank on questions and remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over).

### **How to Reduce Test Anxiety**

- Study and know the material well enough so that you can recall it even if you are under stress.
- Learn and practice good time management and avoid: Laziness, procrastination, day dreaming.
- Build confidence by studying throughout the semester and avoid cramming the night before the exam.

### **Learn to concentrate on the material you are studying.**

- Generating questions from your textbooks and lecture notes.
- Focusing on key words, concepts and examples in your textbooks and lecture notes.
- Making charts and outlines which organize the information in your notes and textbooks.
- Use relaxation techniques, for example, taking long deep breaths to relax the body and reduce stress.

### **The Immediate Environment.**

The environment in which you study can have a big effect on how efficient your study time is. Check your place of study for the following conditions:

- Noise

- Interruptions
- Lighting
- Temperature
- Neatness
- Comfort
- Equipment
- Suggestions

### **Minimize distracting noise.**

- Some people need some sound and some like silence. Find what works for you.
- Culprits are family and friends. Consider a "do not disturb sign" and turning on your answering machine. You can catch up with folks later.
- 75 watt bulbs are best, but not too close and placed opposite the dominant hand. Better cool than warm.
- Have plenty of room to work; don't be cramped. Your study time will go better if you take a few minutes at the start to straighten things up.
- A desk and straight-backed chair is usually best. Don't get too comfortable--a bed is a place to sleep, not study.
- Have everything (book, pencils, paper, coffee, dictionary, typewriter, calculator, tape recorder, etc.) close at hand. Don't spend your time jumping up and down to get things.

### **Preparing for or Anticipating Test Anxiety**

- What is it you have to do? Focus on dealing with it.
- Just take one step at a time.
- Think about what you can do about it. That's better than getting anxious.
- No negative or panicky self-statements; just think rationally.
- Don't worry; worrying won't help anything.

### **Confronting and Handling Test Anxiety**

- Don't think about fear; just think about what you have to do.
- Stay relevant.
- Relax; you're in control. Take a slow, deep breath.
- You should expect some anxiety; it's a reminder not to panic and to relax and cope steadily with the situation.
- Tenseness can be an ally, a friend; it's a cue to cope.

### **Coping with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed**

- When the fear comes, just pause.
- Keep the focus on the present; what is it you have to do?
- You should expect your fear to raise some.
- Don't try to eliminate fear totally; just keep it manageable.
- You can convince yourself to do it. You can reason your fear away.
- It's not the worst thing that can happen.
- Do something that will prevent you from thinking about fear.
- Describe what is around you. That way you won't think about worrying.

### **Reinforcing Self-Statements**

- It worked! You did it!
- It wasn't as bad as you expected.
- You made more out of the fear than it was worth.
- You're getting better. You're learning to cope more smoothly.
- You can be pleased with your progress.
- You like how you handled it. You can be proud of it.