



OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

"I've suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most never happened."
~ Mark Twain

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a NORMAL reaction –
apprehension, tension, or uneasiness
– to any perceived threat of
anticipation of danger.

What is Test Anxiety?

- A type of anxiety that can affect a test taker before, during or after a test.
- **Test anxiety**, just like other types of anxiety, **tends to occur like a wave**. It will increase from the time you first recognize it, come to a peak and then naturally subside.

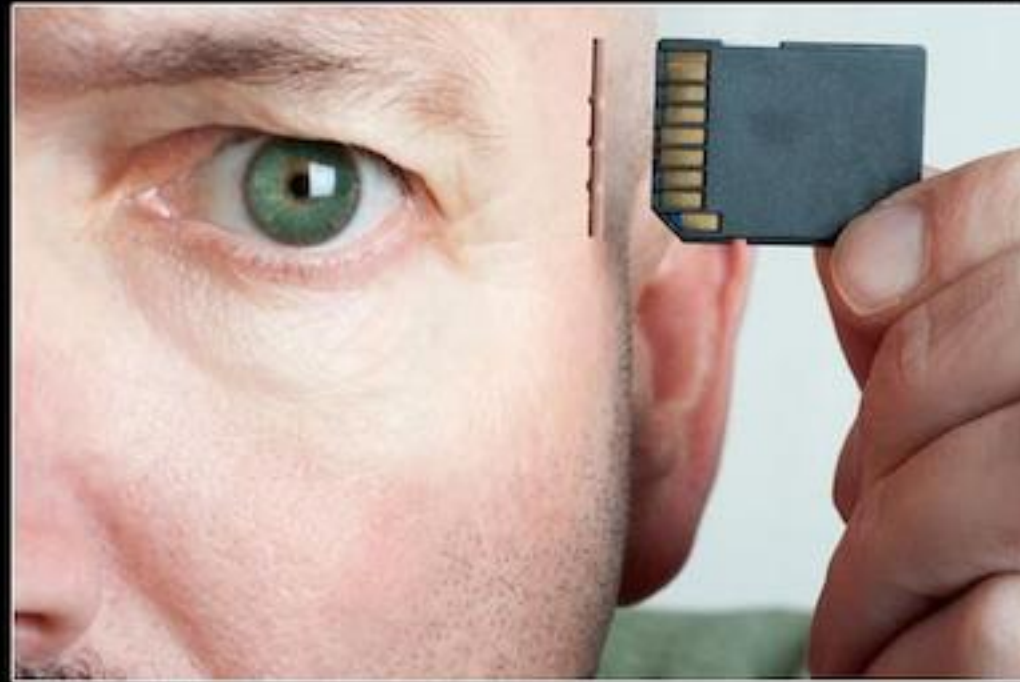
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

- **Before the test:** crying, frustrated, extreme nervousness, dread, drastic appetite changes, trouble sleeping the night before
- **During the test:** inability to remember facts that were known before the test, upset stomach, headaches, rapid heartbeat, trouble organizing thoughts, trouble reading and understanding questions, trouble following directions, mind races or feels dull or 'muddy'. Negative thinking: "I'm going to fail", "I am dumb", or "I shouldn't even bother taking this exam."

- After the test: feelings of guilt, anger or depression - blaming a poor performance on others. Remembering correct answers after the test is over. Frustrated with your grade on the test because you know you were well prepared. Pretend the test meant nothing.

These reactions can be organized into three categories:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- When combined - the state of test anxiety flourishes! Each category is connected to the other, so anything that can be done to lessen one reaction will lessen the impact of the other two categories.



**I wish I could fit a memory
card into my brain for
EXAMS**

Are some people more prone to test anxiety than others?

- People who worry a lot or who are perfectionists are more likely to have trouble with test anxiety.
- Students who are not prepared for tests but care about doing well.
- Some students who experience test anxiety are often masters at avoidance and may also have a problem with procrastination.

- Avoidance can create a vicious cycle:
Procrastination leads to last minute cramming, which leads to anxiety, which leads to self-doubt, which leads to excessive anxiety during a test, which may lead to the inability to remember or think logically.
- Students who experience test anxiety tend to be people who put a lot of pressure on themselves. When they start to experience lower grades their image of themselves, as a smart person, begins to erode. This initiates a cycle of self-doubt that can result in high anxiety levels during tests.



Some things that can increase test anxiety are:

1. Insufficient test preparation

- Cramming the night before the exam
- Inadequate time management
- Inadequate study skills or study habits

2. Worrying about ...

- Past exam performance
- Poor present performance
- Negative consequences of poor performance
- How others are doing on the exam compared to you
- The exam anxiety reactions themselves

3. Stimulant use

- Caffeine including pop and energy drinks
- Nicotine
- Cannabis
- Prescription drugs
- Amphetamines - drugs that increase the activity of certain chemicals in the brain.
- If you are using substances to help deal with the anxiety - they may help you feel better for a little while but they can make symptoms worse and harder to manage over time.

If the anxiety is severe, persistent, or generalized beyond exam situations, you may benefit from seeing a physician or counsellor.

What are some things that can reduce exam anxiety?

The most frequently mentioned strategies are:

- Relaxation
- Knowledge of the testing conditions
- Adequate preparation through improvement of test-taking and study skills
- Effective health habits, exercise, and good nutrition
- Monitoring of thinking patterns and positive self-talk

- Everything takes time and practice. Facing and dealing with test anxiety will help you learn good stress management practices, which can prove to be a valuable skill in many situations.
- Improving study and test taking skills.
- Learning effective study habits. These have to do with planning, time management and organizational skills.

- Taking care of your health - such as getting enough sleep, exercise, and healthy food before a test - can keep your mind working at its best. Students who get at least eight hours of uninterrupted sleep the night before a test are more likely to figure out problems, than those who stay awake, studying, the entire night before.

Research indicates that when students have tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits they can overcome test anxiety and its associated symptoms.

Relaxation Methods

The body and the mind are interconnected, as a result, becoming relaxed physically helps us relax mentally, and becoming relaxed mentally helps us to relax physically.

Relax Your Breathing

- Anxiety can lead to shallow, fast or irregular breathing.
- Shallow, quick, or irregular breathing can increase the physical sensations of anxiety.
- Those breathing patterns can create an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body and brain, heightening the physical reactions associated with anxiety.

Controlled Breathing Strategies

Relax Your Muscles

- Tense muscles can be a result of anxiety as well as be a cause of anxiety.
- Although most people carry muscle tension in different areas of the body, most people report increased levels of relaxation and decreased levels of physical tension and anxiety on completing progressive muscle relaxation.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Relax Through Visualization

- Visualization (or imagery) methods are techniques for learning to relax and reduce anxiety.
- Imagery involves actively visualizing scenes that are tranquil and relaxing to you.

Visualization Strategies

Relax Your Thoughts

- If you notice thoughts coming into your head (that have nothing to do with the test), that is COMPLETELY NORMAL.
- Our brains are designed to think but we can learn to refocus our attention.
- Take this as an opportunity to be kind to yourself and not judge.
- Just notice that you are having these thoughts, then redirect your attention back to the present moment.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

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**"Howl at an ambulance or fire siren every chance you get.
Run around the room in circles with a sock in your mouth.
Eat a messy meal without using your hands or utensils.
Ask a friend to scratch your belly..."**