

Managing Test Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is the physical and mental response to a perceived fear.

What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety is a negative physical and mental response to exams or other evaluative situations.

How does test anxiety impact you?

- Physical – nausea, sweating, increased heart rate, tension
- Emotional – worry, depression, hopelessness
- Behavior – ineffective study habits, avoidance, procrastination
- Mental – obsessive negative thinking about self

Test anxiety will often lead to poor information processing affecting all aspects of test preparation beginning with study habits and retention of the information you have studied to processing that information and retrieving that information at test time.

How can you learn to manage your test anxiety?

- Reframe your negative thoughts – Your job on a test is to think as clearly as possible on the information you currently know.
- Self-calm – if your anxiety becomes so high that you can no longer think then you must shift your focus to self-calm.
 - Physical symptoms – try some deep breathing exercises, listen to calming music, drink tea, suck on a peppermint candy for nausea, and focus on your posture to help with tension.
 - Emotional symptoms – Acknowledge your fear and counteract with confidence. For example: instead of thinking “There’s no point in studying. I’m just going to fail.” Accept the challenge of the test and think “Bring it on!”
 - Mental symptoms – Follow your negative thoughts and see where they lead. For example “If I fail this test...I’m not going to pass...I’ll never graduate college...no one will ever marry me...I’ll end up single, without a job and no hope of a future.” Counteract those irrational thoughts with rational thinking of things you can actually control. “I’m going to study for this test. I’m going to do the best I can on it.”
- Improve your study skills – You cannot hope to be successful if you are not prepared when the opportunity arrives to prove your knowledge. Keep track of your test dates. Plan each week how much studying you need to do. Review your notes. Quiz yourself on the material.