

Test Anxiety 101

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is a very complex human reaction that has both physical and mental elements to it. The physical elements include things such as sweaty palms, accelerated heartbeat, and a queasy stomach. • The mental elements include self-doubts and constant worry about things. To control your test anxiety you will need to deal with both of these elements.
- One way to define anxiety is to say that it is a *fear-like arousal*, when the situation really isn't that threatening. • Granted, a test can be threatening to your grade point average, but it is not a physical threat and doesn't warrant a full blown physical reaction.

WHAT IS TEST ANXIETY & HOW DID I GET IT?

- Have you ever had any of the following types of reactions? • "I felt I was ready for the test, but when it started my mind just went blank." • "Before the test started I felt sick. I just wanted to get out of there." • "I kept thinking to myself what would happen if I did poorly on this test, I just knew it would be awful because I was going to fail again." • "I thought I did just fine, but when the grade came back it was a 'D', I don't know what happened." • "I am always feeling under pressure, my life is just too hectic."

WHY DO I FEEL THIS WAY?

- Sympathetic. (The part that gets us "pumped up") • Our heart starts to beat rapidly, and blood pressure increases. • The blood goes to our muscles and less to the thinking part of our brain (which is why we go blank when nervous). • Digestion is slowed down. • Breathing rate increases. • Blood sugar is released to give us energy (also depleting energy reserves). • The rate of perspiration increases (you sweat!). • Adrenalin is released in the body giving an overall excited effect. • Parasympathetic. (the part that calms you down) • Breathing is slowed down. • Digestive processes increase. • Heart rate slows down and blood pressure decreases. • Perspiration returns to normal. IS A

Is a LITTLE ANXIETY GOOD?

There is a myth that all anxiety is bad, but a little bit of sympathetic arousal might be good for times when you have to take a test because it will get you "up" for the test and make you more alert. However, too much of this type of reaction will make it hard to concentrate. One explanation is that all the body's energy is being focused into the large muscle groups and the brain-stem (which controls the automatic functions of your body), and not enough is being brought to the *cerebral cortex* which is responsible for thinking. This explains why you go "**blank**" when you are real nervous, and then everything comes back to you when you relax later.

Self-talk → **Anxiety** • Attitudes and beliefs help determine how we react. One way we look at these attitudes and beliefs is through what is called, self-talk. **Self-talk** is literally what we say to ourselves. The following are examples of self-statements that students may be making: • "Boy that assignment sounds

like fun, I will learn something new." "Give me a break; he knows we won't have time to do all that." • "That is my worst area, what will I do? I'm sure I can't get that done." • "Well, I guess that is what I expected."

The Five Causes of Test Anxiety

1. Unfamiliarity.
2. Preparation.
3. General Lifestyle.
4. Conditioned Anxiety.
5. Irrational Thinking.

Twelve Myths of Test Anxiety

- Students are born with test anxiety.
- Test anxiety is a mental illness.
- Test anxiety cannot be reduced.
- Any level of test anxiety is bad.
- All students who are not prepared have test anxiety.
- Students with test anxiety cannot learn math.
- Doing nothing about test anxiety will make it go away.
- Students who are well prepared will not have test anxiety.
- Very intelligent students and students taking high level courses, such as calculus, do not have test anxiety.
- Attending class and doing all my homework should reduce all of my test anxiety.
- Being told to relax during a test will make you relaxed.
- Reducing test anxiety will guarantee better grades.

How to Reduce Test Anxiety: RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- **THE TENSING AND DIFFERENTIAL RELAXATION METHOD,**
- **THE PALMING METHOD,**
- **DEEP BREATHING**

The Tensing and Differential Relaxation Method

1. Put your feet flat on the floor.
2. With your hands, grab underneath the chair.
3. Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for about five seconds.
4. Relax for five to ten seconds.
5. Repeat the procedure two or three times.
6. Relax all your muscles except for the ones that are actually used to take the test.

The Palming Method

1. Close and cover your eyes using the center of the palms of your hands.
2. Prevent your hands from touching your eyes by resting the lower parts of your palms on your cheekbones and placing your fingers on your forehead. Your eyeballs must not be touched, rubbed or handled in any way.
3. Think of some real or imaginary relaxing scene. Mentally visualize this scene. Picture the scene as if you were actually there, looking through your own eyes.
4. Visualize this relaxing scene for one to two minutes.

Deep Breathing

1. Sit straight up in your chair in a good posture position. 2. Slowly inhale through your nose. 3. As you inhale, first fill the lower section of your lungs and work your way up to the upper part of your lungs. 4. Hold your breath for a few seconds. 5. Exhale slowly through your mouth. 6. Wait a few seconds and repeat the cycle.

Long- Term Relaxation Techniques

Learning long-term relaxation techniques can be helpful in conquering test anxiety permanently. After sufficient practice of such techniques you can induce your own relaxation. • The best long-term relaxation technique is cue-controlled relaxation response. This form of relaxation involves the repetition of cue words, such as: *“I am relaxed,” “I can get through this,”* or *“Tests don’t scare me.”* • It is essential to avoid use of negative cue words or self-talk and to concentrate on more positive phrases.

Adapted from NYASP: NY Association of School Psychologists