

Coping With Test Anxiety

Experiencing test anxiety is natural. In fact, most people - even those who *have* prepared extensively- experience some level of anxiety before and during tests. While a certain level of test anxiety is beneficial (as it motivates students to adequately prepare), too much can be detrimental if it prevents them from studying, preparing properly, or concentrating during a test.

The following strategies can help you control extreme test taking anxiety:

Develop good study habits. One of the most effective ways to handle test taking anxiety is through proper preparation. Besides preparing you for the questions on a test, studying will also build your confidence. As your confidence increases, your test anxiety will decrease.

Be Prepared. If you are completely prepared for a test to the point of being familiar with any question that could be asked, anxiety will dramatically decrease. There is little reason to experience anxiety for a test you have prepared for. If you're studying a subject or concept that is difficult for you to understand, start early in the semester working with your teacher or a tutor to get the help you need.

Don't cram! Cramming for an exam the night before is a major cause of test anxiety. Students who take their time to regularly study for an exam throughout the term will experience less anxiety than those who decide to study a day or *even* hours prior to the test. If you're studying a difficult subject (chemistry, biology, math, etc.) it's imperative that you start studying early in the semester, as you are likely to come across concepts, topics, and subjects that require outside help. Cramming can leave you not only pressed for time, but unable to get the help you need in time.

Get adequate exercise. Exercise relieves stress and increases mental function. It can also increase energy. If you take time to take care of your body, you'll experience far less anxiety all around.

Get plenty of sleep. Not only is receiving adequate sleep necessary for good health, it's an effective way to decrease anxiety. That is why it is recommended to get plenty of sleep the night before a test. We recommend that you get plenty of sleep the entire week before a test. If you do not get enough sleep prior to a test, you will be fatigued, unable to concentrate and remember necessary information, and be more anxious.

Get plenty to eat. Never take a test on a hungry stomach. Some students neglect to eat prior to a test because they don't want to take time away from last minute studying. Not only do you need the nutrients necessary for proper brain function and physical energy, taking a test on an empty, grumbling stomach will make it more difficult for you to concentrate on the test.

Stay positive. Do not allow yourself to get overly pessimistic. Remain positive and concentrate on doing well on the test. If you dwell on negative thoughts, it will increase your anxiety and make it more difficult to perform. If you think you're going to perform poorly on a test, chances are you will. If you're confident in your ability, you're more likely to be less anxious and perform better.

Stay relaxed. Take a few minutes to relax before taking a test. If you're struggling to relax, take deep breaths. Take a moment and clear your head. Focus on something completely unrelated to the test, or even school. Think about something fun you're planning later during the week, or maybe a fun trip you'll be taking. Once you're calm, go in and ace the test.

Focus on the learning experience. Do not be too hard on yourself if you do not perform up to your expectations on a test. Instead, learn from the experience, so you can make the necessary changes for the future. Nothing is accomplished by stressing over something that has already passed.

Ask for help. If all else fails, ask for help. Severe test anxiety can be debilitating for students. If your mind goes completely blank every time you sit down to take a test, or you feel like you're going to pass out or throw up, you probably need to speak with your teacher or a guidance counselor. Don't be scared or ashamed to seek assistance. Test anxiety can be a real psychological condition that can cause otherwise smart, hardworking students to perform poorly academically. Don't let that be you.