

Test Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to any perceived threat or concern. If we believe something important to us is in danger or being threatened, we may over-estimate the threat and under-estimate our ability to cope with it. Test anxiety is when symptoms of anxiety affect your performance on a test, and may result in emotional and/or physical distress, difficulty concentrating, and emotional upset.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety

1. Physical indicators:

- Perspiration, sweaty palms, feeling too hot or too cold
- Headaches, upset stomach, nausea
- Rapid heartbeat shallow/ irregular breathing, dizziness
- Muscle tightness

2. Emotional indicators:

- Feeling fearful, guilty, angry, depressed or uncertain

3. Behavioural indicators:

- Procrastination and avoidance
- Excessive study
- Over/ under eating; poor nutrition
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Fatigue or inability to relax

4. Cognitive indicators:

- Negative or self-defeating talk
- Excessive worry
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty identifying key ideas
- Difficulty organizing and expressing thoughts
- Going blank on exam questions



What can increase anxiety?

1. Insufficient exam preparation.
2. Worrying about past performance.
3. Worrying about your performance in comparison to your peers.
4. Striving for perfection.
5. Thinking about expectations of others.
6. Focusing exclusively on the marks.
7. Assuming you will not perform well.
8. Focusing on the consequences if you are unsuccessful.
9. Stimulant use: caffeine, nicotine, drugs, alcohol, etc.

Reducing anxiety

1. On the day of the exam:

- Prepare by eating well before the exam and limiting stimulant use.
- Arrive early for the exam.
- Do something relaxing before the exam.
- Avoid classmates that may upset your composure.
- Avoid last minute cramming.
- Think positively about the exam and the information you have studied.
- If reviewing your notes, finish with the material you are most familiar with to end your study session on a positive note

2. During the exam:

- Slow down and become intentional about your breathing pattern.
- Slowly repeat a helpful word or phrase to yourself (“I can do this”).
- Read the directions first and survey the exam.
- Pace yourself throughout the exam and note how much time to dedicate to each section.

3. After the exam:

- Learn from the experience.
- Keep a record of what techniques worked to decrease anxiety.
- Do not punish yourself for missing a question or not performing at your best.

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LEARNING SERVICES

- Remind yourself that it takes slow and steady steps to develop excellent test taking skills. You are well on your way.

If you would like more information on how to incorporate these strategies into your study routine visit a success coach. To book an appointment, visit the student success office (2nd floor of south campus hall) or call 519-888-4567 ext. 84410.

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