

# *Coping with Test Anxiety*

Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety in which fear of failure contributes to symptoms that interfere with your ability to perform well in an exam situation. If you suffer from test anxiety, there are a number of coping strategies that you can employ. Below are ten tips to help you cope.

## **1. Prepare Well**

Preparing for exams can help reduce test anxiety. First, make sure that you are adequately prepared. Cramming for a test or exam will only increase anxiety, so give yourself enough time to learn material well.

- ask friends who study regularly for advice
- join a study group
- read books about study skills
- find a study skills tutor

Finally, learn about the test or exam in advance such as the types of questions and length, so that there will be no last-minute surprises.

## **2. Watch Self-Talk**

Talking badly to yourself can worsen test anxiety. When performance suffers because of test anxiety, it can be easy to fall into a downward spiral of negative thinking. Watch what you say to yourself and replace any negative thoughts with positive ones.

Consider how rational your thoughts are and whether there are better things you could say to yourself.

Thoughts such as the following are not helpful:

- *I should have studied more.*
- *I must be stupid.*
- *I have to do well, everything is on the line.*

Tell yourself, "STOP" and come up with alternatives:

- *I am prepared for this test.*
- *I am smart enough to do well.*
- *Even if I don't do well, it's not the end of the world.*

### **3. Visualize Success**

Success can be visualized to reduce test anxiety. Elite athletes visualize themselves succeeding in competition. You can do the same to overcome test anxiety. While studying, imagine yourself feeling confident and clearheaded in the exam. Visualizing yourself doing well on the test can help you to make it happen in real life.

### **4. Relaxation Strategies**

Use deep breathing for self-help. Make use of relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) and guided imagery. Use these strategies in the weeks leading up to a test, and during the testing situation as needed.

### **5. Stay Healthy**

Exercise such as yoga may reduce anxiety. When faced with multiple tests or exams you might start to neglect your physical health. Don't fall into this trap! Regular exercise, adequate sleep and good nutrition are all important components of a lifestyle that will keep stress at a minimum. The day of a test, be sure to eat an adequate breakfast and avoid caffeine as it will only contribute to anxiety.

### **6. Arrive Early**

Be early for your exam to reduce anxiety. Nothing will heighten anxiety like the feeling of rushing to get to a test. Arrive at least 10 minutes early. If waiting for the test to begin makes you nervous, bring a magazine or something along to keep your mind occupied. Avoid people who are anxious before a test and do not second guess what you know.

### **7. Focus During the Test**

Maintain focus during a test. During the test, do everything you can to maintain focus. If you find yourself becoming anxious, stop and regroup. Sharpen your pencil, ask a question or focus on taking deep breaths. Remember to take your time but check your watch to pace yourself. Before starting the test, do a quick review and read directions twice. Start with the easiest questions first.

## **8. Accept a Little Anxiety**

Accept that you will have some test anxiety. Recognize that a little bit of anxiety before a test is a good thing. If you did not feel nervous at all, you might not be motivated to do your best. It is only when anxiety becomes unmanageable that it is a problem.

## **9. Expect Setbacks**

Don't let test anxiety stop you from pursuing your goals. If you have a bad experience, realize that there will always be roadblocks along the way. Plan for a better experience next time and know that one bad test result does not mean that you can't improve in the future.

## **10. Reward Yourself**

Reward yourself for facing your test anxiety. Plan a reward for yourself after the test. Take some time to relax and clear your mind. Do not dwell on mistakes you may have made or worry about how you did. Whenever possible, give yourself a break before starting to study for another test.

Source:

Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Test Anxiety. Accessed February 28, 2016.