



Overcoming Test Anxiety

Tips to help you succeed when taking tests

- **Some anxiety is normal.** Most college students, no matter how well-prepared, experience some level of jitters or anxiety when taking tests. It can actually serve to sharpen focus at test time.
- **Test anxiety causes people to experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations.** Despite being fully prepared, students who suffer this psychological condition often experience such emotional and physical stress when sitting down for a test that their mind goes totally blank and they may have to literally run away to escape the overwhelming sensations.
 - **From the expert:** “It’s when the anxiety becomes more extreme that it goes beyond helpful, flooding the person with anxiety and impacting their performance and becoming so uncomfortable they’d rather avoid the situation than tolerate the feelings of anxiety that come along with it.”- Debra Kissen, Clinical Director, Light on Anxiety Treatment Center

Test Anxiety has many symptoms.

- Headache
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Dry mouth
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid heartbeat
- Excessive sweating
- Tense muscles
- Feelings of dread
- Racing thoughts
- Blanking out
- Feeling lightheaded
- Fidgetiness
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoidance
- Anger
- Negative self-talk
- Self-doubt
- Guilt
- Shame
- Hopelessness
- Low self-esteem
- Strong desire to escape

Tips to Overcome Test Anxiety

- ❑ **Eat well.** Skip the junk food and nourish your body and brain with healthy food, not just the day of the exam but always. Eat a nutritious, sustaining breakfast on test day, avoiding high sugar foods (like donuts) that can cause a sugar crash. NEVER drink coffee or energy drink before a test.
- ❑ **Get enough sleep.** Regularly, not just the night before. Sleep is directly related to academic performance and can soothe anxiety. An adequate amount will help you operate at 100 percent on test day.
- ❑ **Keep moving.** Everyone knows regular aerobic exercise has a myriad of benefits, including clearing the mind and decreasing stress levels. Go for a walk!
- ❑ **Engage in relaxation techniques.** Try deep breathing, tensing and relaxing different muscle groups, mindfulness work, meditation, visualization, positive self-talk or yoga.
- ❑ **Be prepared.** It may seem obvious, but study the lessons, review challenging concepts, know your material. This is an easy way to boost your confidence. Develop good study habits. Utilize study-skill classes, tutors and other resources. Start studying at least a week before the test to avoid last-minute cramming.
- ❑ **Arrive early.** Avoid adding to the stress by running into the classroom at the last minute. Allow time to get seated, get organized and take a few deep breaths before the instructor starts passing out the test papers.
- ❑ **Remember to breathe.** If anxiety starts to build, take a few deep, calming breaths and think positive thoughts.
- ❑ **Use good test-taking skills.** Read the directions carefully, budget your time and work at a comfortable pace (but keep an eye on the clock so you don’t run out of time), answer easier questions first then return to the skipped ones, stay focused and recheck your answers if there is time.

Should you seek outside help?

•**Seek help at your school.** Don't be afraid to ask for help from instructors, tutors or counselors. Anxiety disorders, including test anxiety, are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act and those affected may qualify for test-taking accommodations such as a quiet room or additional time. Check out the college's counseling services; they may offer support and/or study groups.

•**Seek help outside your school.** Make an appointment with your family physician to discuss whether medication might help alleviate your anxiety. Secure the services of a private therapist or look for support groups. Talking about your anxieties with a professional counselor or fellow sufferers may help defuse their powerful hold on you.