

Overcoming Test Anxiety

Most people have some jitters when going into a test or exam. Test anxiety ranges in severity from minor symptoms like sweaty palms or butterflies in your stomach to hyperventilating or having a complete mental block. Anxiety becomes a concern when it interferes with your ability to test well. The good news is that you can address test anxiety. Here are some strategies for reducing, and possibly even eliminating, test anxiety.

- The first way to reduce test anxiety is to be prepared. Know the material. For information on how to study effectively and how to take tests well, see our guides on [Study Strategies](#) and [Successful Test-Taking](#).
- Make sure the time before the test is low-stress and peaceful.
 - Get a good night's sleep the night before. Don't stay up all night cramming.
 - Give yourself plenty of time before the test so you are not running late or rushing. Hurrying always increases stress levels.
 - Select your clothes the night before and lay them out.
 - Have your book bag packed and ready to go.
 - Purchase any test forms, like scantrons or blue books ahead of time and have spares.
 - Have plenty of writing utensils and good erasers.
 - Eat a nutritious, high-protein breakfast. Avoid caffeine or sugar if it makes you jittery.
 - Arrive early to the test and select a seat where you are comfortable. Try to avoid somewhere with a lot of distractions, such as a seat near the door. Bring ear plugs if noise easily distracts you.
 - Give yourself a pep talk to channel any anxiety into excitement.
- As you arrive for the test, do NOT spend time chatting with the other students. If you do, you'll likely compare the items you've studied, which will make you concerned that you did not study the right material or did not study well enough. Instead, use those minutes before a test to calm your nerves and prepare yourself mentally.
- Feelings of anxiety come when we think negative thoughts. If we can control our thoughts, we can control our anxiety levels.
 - Use your imagination and visualize yourself getting a good grade.

- If you begin to have thoughts like “I’m going to fail,” “I never do well on tests,” “I’m just not smart enough,” in your mind, say, “STOP!” Then purposely replace those thoughts with positive ones like “I am going to ace this test,” “I have studied and I do well on tests,” and “I am intelligent and I am a good student.”
- Have your own positive phrase that you repeat to yourself, like “I’ve got this!”
- Keep the past in the past. Remind yourself that past bad test experiences do not mean you will do poorly now.
- Don’t compare yourself with others. Other students may finish before you, but that does not mean they did well. There are no extra points for finishing first.
- If you begin to feel stress levels rising during the test, take a moment and calm yourself. Here are some de-stressing techniques you can use.
 - Deep breathing. Breathe in slowly through your nose, hold it a couple seconds and exhale slowly through your mouth. Deep breathing has a calming effect.
 - Progressive muscle relaxation- tighten various muscle groups, then relax them.
 - Take a mini-break. Put your pen or pencil down, roll your shoulders, stretch your hands and fingers, stretch your neck muscles, and even relax your eyes by focusing on something far away.
 - Close your eyes and go to your “happy place.” Visualize a peaceful scene such as a field of flowers, a beach, etc. Just be sure not to stay too long so you have enough time to finish the test!
- Read the test instructions and directions carefully. Some people even benefit from reading the questions aloud (very quietly) to themselves.
- Take it one question at a time. If you look ahead and see some difficult questions, it can distract you from the question you are on now. Focus on the question at hand.
- Pace yourself. Determine how much time you can dedicate to each question. That will prevent you from stressing because you have to rush at the end.
- Unrealistic expectations can create tremendous stress. You don’t have to be perfect all the time. Just focus on doing your best.
- Remember that your score on a test does not define who you are or how valuable you are. Do your best, but don’t get your self-worth from your grades.
- When the test is over, put it behind you. Don’t hang around and compare your answers with others. That will simply create unneeded anxiety.

- **After the test, reward yourself with a small treat- not for getting a particular grade, but just for doing your best.**
- **If you experience ongoing symptoms of anxiety that affect your quality of life, seek help from a qualified professional. All of us need to ask for help at times, and there is no shame in getting professional support in overcoming anxiety.**

A number of famous people dealt with anxiety and were successful. For example, Abraham Lincoln, Vincent van Gogh, and Emily Dickenson all battled various forms of anxiety. Their contributions to the world prove that anxiety does not have to stop us.

