

Strategies for Test Anxiety

We all experience some level of anxiety before a test. A little nervousness can actually help motivate us to perform our best. Too much anxiety can become a problem if it interferes with your performance on tests. Here are some strategies that are extremely useful if implemented into your exam-prep regimen:

BEFORE THE TEST, TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF:

- **Be prepared.** Study the material in advance; do not leave cramming for the day before your test. Do not do a last minute review.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** It is hard to function at your best when overtired.
- **Avoid any use of drugs or alcohol.** They can interfere with your mental ability.
- **Exercise.** Movement can increase your alertness and sharpen your mind- especially if you take breaks to stretch while studying and then do the same types of stretches just before the exam.
- **Have a moderate breakfast.** Fresh fruits and vegetables help reduce stress; avoid excessive caffeine, sugar and junk foods- these may make you jittery or sluggish.
- **Allow yourself plenty of time.** Arrive at the test location early.
- **Choose a seat.** The best option would be one where you will not be easily distracted, such as the front row.
- **Use abdominal breathing.** This can significantly help you reduce anxiety. Place one hand on your abdomen, right beneath your rib cage. Inhale through your nose and feel your abdomen fill like a balloon... count to three on your inhalation and then slowly exhale counting to four, feeling your abdomen contracting with the exhalation.
- **Do a reality check.** How important is this exam in the grand scheme of things? Put it in perspective.
- **Use positive affirmations.** Say a phrase to help keep things in perspective; "I've done this before, I can do it again." or "I have all the knowledge I need to get this done."

DURING THE TEST, TAKE A FEW MNUTES TO:

- **Quickly review the entire test.** Read the directions carefully.
- **Work on the easiest portions of the test first.** Skip over the more challenging questions and go back to them.
- **Pace yourself.** Do not rush through the test.
- **Multiple choice questions.** Read all the options first and eliminate the most obvious.
- **Essay questions.** Make a short outline. Begin and end with a summary sentence.
- **Take short breaks.** Tense and relax your muscles throughout your body.
- **Pause.** Do a few abdominal breaths and say your affirmation(s).
- **Stay in the present moment.** Do not let your thoughts wander.
- **Remind yourself there is no reward for being the first one done with the test.**

AFTER THE TEST, REWARD YOURSELF:

- Try not to dwell on your mistakes.
- Indulge in something relaxing and rewarding for a while.
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