

Strategies to Reduce Your Test Anxiety

Almost everyone experiences some form of anxiety when it comes to taking an exam. A high degree of stress or anxiety can be harmful and hurt your performance. However, a small amount of anxiety or stress can actually be beneficial. "Stress increases cortisol and adrenaline levels in the body..." and "Adrenaline can improve both attention and cognitive functioning at optimal levels." (Prakash Masand, MD. inspiyr.com). Research has shown "... moderate and short-lived stress—like an upcoming exam or preparing to deliver a speech in public—improves cognitive performance and memory." (Peter Jaret. Greatergood.berekeley.edu). Manageable anxiety/stress can help your performance on an exam.

So, what are some ways to manage test anxiety and keep it at a low to moderate level. First, the most important factor is to **be prepared** for the exam—and this does not mean an all-night cram session the day before the test. Cramming actually increases testing anxiety.

• Preparation strategies

- Read for understanding: learn and understand the material—do not just memorize
- Improve study habits: see various handouts in SSS office (reading a textbook, note-taking, study cycle, test taking, etc.)
- Adopt good time management: set specific times each day to review course material; review often
- Study with classmates: choose those who are working hard and trying their best in the course
- Use tutoring services: SCC provides **free** tutoring
- Master course material: if you do not understand, ask—ask the instructor, another student, LAC Learning Consultants, or your tutor
- Get plenty of sleep the night before and eat a healthy meal prior to an exam

If you are prepared, try some of the strategies listed below to help reduce any testing anxiety:

• Relaxation techniques

- Deep Breathing: it's easy and deep breaths in and out relax muscles and increase the flow of oxygen to help energize your brain. Only takes a moment—try it!
- Progressive muscle relaxation: starting at the top of your body and working down or start at the bottom and work up – tense a muscle (or group of muscles) and then relax that muscle or group.
- Imagery: using your imagination to relax
 - Mental rehearsal: use your mind to imagine yourself relaxed and taking the exam and doing well
 - Visualization: imagine yourself in a relaxing scene, whatever yours may be—the ocean, a river, a meadow, etc. Try using all your senses to bring your imaginative scene alive.
- Make sure to take time for yourself—go for a walk, play with a pet. Just make sure you do so in moderation and do not let time for yourself extend into review time for exam.
- Exercise: physical activity is a fantastic way to reduce stress/anxiety.

• Cognitive strategies

- Avoid self-defeating thoughts (ex: "I never do well on tests." or "I'm just not that smart.")
- Use the power of positive self-talk (ex: "I'm prepared and I've got this." or "I'm smart, I've worked hard in class, and I understand the material.")
- Put the test in perspective—if you do not do as well as you hoped, will it actually be the end of the world? Ask yourself, "Will this one test, in one course, in one semester really derail my whole future?" (Minnesota State University)

According to Dr. Masand, "*Stress presents two options: it can be a major disruption in your life, or you can learn to deal with it in a way that enhances you, makes you mentally stronger and ready to handle everything that life throws your way. Don't let stress be your enemy—let it be your friend.*" (inspiyr.com)

Ultimately, being prepared is the best way to avoid some test anxiety!

Sources

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