



TIP SHEET: TEST ANXIETY



Some nervousness before a test can be a good thing – it helps motivate you to study, and gives you energy and focus.

Sometimes, however, worries and anxious thoughts can get in the way of studying. A stressful situation like a test can trigger “fight or flight” responses. Your body thinks you are in danger and it automatically reacts so that you can either fight or run away. The blood rushes from your brain to your limbs, your heart rate increases, you breathe faster and you are sensitive to every noise and movement. This would be great for escaping a wild animal, but is not very useful in a test!

With practice, you can learn to manage the effects of anxiety on your body and your brain. Here are some steps you can take before, during and after a test.

BEFORE THE TEST

Think about **how** you study

- Review class notes regularly
- Create study aids, like flash cards
- Meet with a peer tutor or access the college learning commons to get advice on improving study skills

Learn about the test

- Look at your course outline and talk to your instructor – the more you know about the test, the better prepared you will be, and the more confident you will feel
- Find out the day and time of the test, the type of questions (multiple choice, short answer, essay), what will be covered, whether you can refer to books and class notes and what percentage of your final grade it will be

Look after yourself physically

- Eat well and avoid sugary drinks, caffeine and alcohol
- Get a good night's sleep
- Take regular exercise to stay healthy and produce stress-relieving endorphins
- Build in some time to relax and do the things you love

Practice relaxation techniques

- Using these techniques takes practice, so choose one to try at home first, and then start to practice it in public places and more stressful environments.
- Focussing on breathing can calm the physical effects of stress. Take a few deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the air filling your lungs and start to expand your chest to bring in as much air as possible. When you breathe out, imagine your anxiety leaving your body.
- Think of a place where you feel happy and relaxed, perhaps on a beach, or in a cozy sitting room next to the fireplace. Picture yourself in that scene and imagine what you would see, hear, smell and feel. Your stress will be replaced with a feeling of well-being.

Think positive

- Notice when you have negative thoughts, like "I'm going to fail" or your worries are getting out of control. Tell yourself "STOP!" and give yourself a break. Replace them with positive thoughts, like "I'm really well prepared and I'm going to do my best".
- Visualizing success can help you to be successful in real life. Picture yourself walking into the test room, answering all the questions and getting a great grade.

Take away the pressure

- Test grades do not measure how intelligent you are or how much you're worth. They just measure how well you did in a test. Keep reminding yourself that a low grade is not a disaster. You will perform better if you don't put too much pressure on yourself.

During the Test

- If you feel the physical effects of nerves, like butterflies in the stomach and shallow breathing, don't worry. Tell yourself "nervousness will help me stay sharp and do well in this test".
- If you're still feeling anxious or distracted, use your relaxation technique. After some practice, this will reduce stress and help you to focus on the test.

After the Test

- It's good to remember that life will continue after the test!
- Ask for feedback and take time to reflect on what worked well and what you could improve. You might not get the grade you want this time, but you can learn from the experience and do better next time.
- Plan a reward for yourself – you were nervous, but you did it!

If you try these techniques but you are still feeling anxious or have feelings of depression or hopelessness that last for more than a few days, contact the Manager of Student Learning Support and Disability Resources or your Family Doctor.