

What does test anxiety feel like?

- Some students experience mainly physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, etc.
- Others experience more emotional symptoms, such as crying easily, feeling irritable, or getting frustrated quickly.
- The major problem of test anxiety is usually its effect on thinking ability; it can cause you to blank out or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.
- Although many students feel some level of anxiety when writing exams, most can cope with that anxiety and bring it down to a manageable level.

What can you do to control test anxiety?

- Be **well prepared** for the test.
- Include as much **self-testing** in your review as possible.
- Maintain a **healthy lifestyle**: get enough sleep, good nutrition, exercise, some personal "down" time, and a reasonable amount of social interaction.
- As you anticipate the exam, **think positively**, e.g., "I can do OK on this exam. I've studied and I know my stuff."
- Engage in "**thought stopping**" if you find that you are worrying a lot, mentally comparing yourself to your peers, or thinking about what others may say about your performance on this exam.
- Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, make sure to **collect together anything that you will need** for the exam -- pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc. Double check the time of the exam and the location.
- Set the alarm clock and then get a **good night's sleep** before the exam.
- Get to the exam **on time - not too late but not too early**.
- **Don't talk to other students** about the exam material just before going into the exam.
- Sit in a **location** in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.
- As the papers are distributed, **calm yourself down** by taking some slow deep breaths.
- Make sure to **carefully read any instructions** on the exam.
- As you work on the exam, **focus only on the exam**, not on what other students are doing or on thinking about past exams or future goals.
- If you feel very anxious in the exam, take a few minutes to **calm yourself down**. Stretch your arms and legs and then relax them again. Do this a couple of times. Take a few slow deep breaths. Do some positive internal self-talk; say to yourself, "I will be OK, I can do this." Then direct your focus on questions; link questions to their corresponding lecture and/or chapter.
- If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to **focus and just do your best**. It might be enough to get you through, even with a reasonable grade!
- When the exam is over, **treat yourself**. If you don't have any other commitments, maybe you can go to a movie with a friend. If you have to study for other exams, you may have to postpone a larger break, but a brief break can be the pick up that you need.

You can take control of test anxiety so that your performance on a test reflects your real standing in that course. If interfering levels of test anxiety persist, however, talk to a counselor for some specialized help.

From the Student Development Centre at The University of Western Ontario. Available online at <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/>

Additional resource:

The University of Texas at Dallas Student Counseling Center <http://www.utdallas.edu/counseling/testanxiety/>