



Where can I get more help with test anxiety?

Counseling Services:

Student Health Services

Allan Hancock College

800 S. College Drive, Bldg. W-12
Santa Maria, CA 93454
(805) 922-6966, ext. 3212

Lompoc Valley Center

Student Health Services

One Hancock Drive, Bldg. 1-109
Lompoc, CA 93436
(805) 735-3366 ext. 5207

Referrals:

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

www.adaa.org

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov



References:

- http://www.swccd.edu/~asc/lrnglinks/test_anxiety.html
- <http://www.ufsa.ufl.edu/Counsel/Ta.htm>
- http://www.gwu.edu/~counsel/pdp/test_enx.html
- <http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/test-anxiety>
- <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/test-anxiety.aspx>
- <http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stresstestanxiety.shtml>
- <http://www.oregonstate.edu/counsel/test-anxiety>



Test Anxiety

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What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety is the fear of taking a test. When taking a test or even thinking about taking a test, students with test anxiety can have feelings of apprehension, worry, and uneasiness. Most students experience some anxiety but some students find themselves unable to concentrate and focus, experience symptoms such as pounding heart, upset stomach, and light-headedness. Test anxiety can result in poor performance on tests and lower grades even though the student has studied and knows the material well.

What are the symptoms of test anxiety?

Physical symptoms can include pounding heart, perspiration, sweaty palms, headache, upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea, tense muscles, dry mouth, light-headedness, and feeling faint. Test anxiety can even lead to a panic attack. Panic attacks are the abrupt onset of intense fear or terror, and the individual may experience symptoms such as heart palpitations, the feeling that it is difficult to breathe, may believe they are having a heart attack, and experience a fear of “going crazy.”

Emotional symptoms can include fear, anger, upset, helplessness, disappointment, and self-doubt.

Cognitive/Behavioral symptoms can include negative thinking, comparing oneself to others, and difficulty concentrating.

Performance symptoms can include experiencing mental blocking or going blank on questions and remembering the answer when the exam is over. Performance symptoms can also include having difficulty reading and comprehending questions, organizing thoughts, and retrieving key words and concepts.

What are the causes of test anxiety?

The causes of test anxiety can include past experiences with test taking such as difficulty retrieving answers and concentrating. Causes can also include poor study habits, poor test-taking strategies, problems with time management, failure to properly organize materials, and cramming the night before. Sometimes students with test anxiety lack confidence and do not believe in their own abilities or compare themselves to others. Negative thinking and the belief that one will fail also plays a role in test anxiety.

What can I do about test anxiety?

Relaxation

Take deep, slow breaths as you focus on your breathing. Slowly breathe out all your air and anxiety and then slowly fill your lungs again. Notice which muscles are tense and consciously relax them. Visualize yourself doing well.

Good Health Habits Including Exercise, Nutrition and Sleep

Eat healthy, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, and allow for personal time. A balanced life helps in handling stress and anxiety.

Test Taking Conditions

- Arrive early so you can sit where you are most comfortable.
- Bring items you will need such as pens, pencils, and water.
- Avoid anxious classmates who are talking about the exam.

Study and Preparation Skills

- Attend all your classes.
- Find out what you are expected to know and when the exams will be.
- Study in the same place all the time where you will not be interrupted.
- Develop a study schedule.
- Avoid “cramming.” Several short review sessions are more effective than one long one.
- Read textbooks effectively by underlining and reviewing important points.
- Use a method such as SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review) for reading your text books.
- Take efficient notes and review them right after class and periodically.
- Make flashcards and review them often.

Test Taking Strategies

- Look over the entire test and carefully read and re-read the directions.
- Focus your attention on the test.
- Plan your approach and schedule your time.

- Do not waste time and energy worrying, thinking about the consequences of not doing well or wondering what others are doing.
- Answer the easiest questions first.
- If you don't know an answer, mark the question and return to it later.
- Remind yourself that you studied the material, and the answer will come when you get back to it.
- For essay questions underline key words such as “compare and contrast,” “analyze,” “describe,” or “discuss.”
- Organize your thoughts in a brief outline.
- For objective questions think of your own answer before you look at the choices. Eliminate clearly wrong answers and make an educated guess.
- After you have answered the questions you know, return to those you have checked.
- Think about only one question at a time.
- Use all the time allowed.
- Only change answers if you are sure.
- Practice breathing and relaxing.

Awareness of Negative Thinking Patterns and Positive Self-Talk

- Remember that your self-worth does not depend on, nor is it defined by, a test grade.
- Avoid negative self-talk such as: “I'm going to bomb this test;” “Everyone in the class is smarter and faster than I am;” “I always mess up on tests;” or “If I don't do well on this exam, then I'll flunk the class.”
- Become aware of what you say to yourself and replace negative thoughts with positive and reinforcing statements such as: “I did it;” “It wasn't as bad as I expected;” “I'm learning to stay calm;” “I'm proud of how I handled it.”

Stay Focused

Concentrate on the test and not on other students or extraneous sounds and activities. Avoid talking to other students before or after the test.