Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is a very common type of performance anxiety and most of us have or will experience it at some point in time when we feel a lot is at stake with the outcome of a test or exam. If self-help strategies below appear insufficient, please contact the University Counseling Center or by phone at 701-777-2127.

Good Stress

Experiencing some mild test anxiety symptoms such as butterflies in the stomach, nervousness, and slightly dreading the test can actually serve as a motivator and improve performance, attention, concentration, and memory.

Bad Stress

Experiencing more severe levels of test anxiety may be more debilitating and can cause your mind to go blank when starting a test, or you may even shut down entirely and not be able to concentrate and recall information you know you studied well. Fear of failure, poor test history, or lack of preparation can contribute to higher levels of test anxiety.

Test Anxiety Symptoms:

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<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Cognitive Behavioral</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Nausea</td>
<td>• Feelings of Anger</td>
<td>• Difficulty Concentrating</td>
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<td>• Rapid Heartbeat</td>
<td>• Headache</td>
<td>• Thinking Negatively</td>
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<td>• Dizziness/Light Headed</td>
<td>• Stomach Ache</td>
<td>• Comparing Yourself to Others</td>
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<td>• Feeling Faint</td>
<td>• Excessive Sweating</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hyperventilation</td>
<td>• Shortness of Breath</td>
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<td>• Panic Attacks</td>
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Managing Test Anxiety

Stay Healthy: Sleep 7-8 hours a night, eat healthy meals, add 30 minutes of exercise (walking counts too) into your schedule, and keep a steady work/study routine.

Spread it out: Spread your study sessions out over the course of the term, avoid cramming (see also the Test Preparation Strategies worksheet published by UND’s Learning Services).

Think positive: Replace negative thoughts by positive thoughts, try “I’m excited” instead of “I’m nervous”. Your thoughts are extremely powerful, as Henry Ford once said: “if you believe you can or you believe you can’t, you will both be right”.

Relax: Before the test practice deep breathing, do a body scan and start with your feet and intentionally relax every part of your body. If you feel exceptionally stressed during the test try the 54321 method (see separate handout in Tips & Tools).

Test-taking strategies:

1. Focus on the test, don’t get distracted by other students (i.e., when they leave within 10 minutes, this says nothing about your ability).
2. Read directions carefully, check to see how many questions there are in comparison to the time you have to complete the test.
3. Answer easy questions first.
4. Write an outline for essay questions before starting to write to make sure you get all elements in.
5. Take time to reason through the harder questions based on what you know.
6. Find and underline key words in the question to help identify what the question is trying to ask.