

Managing Your Test Anxiety

This Mural is designed to explain the phenomenon of test anxiety and provide suggested strategies through which students are able to combat this and perform better in their academics. Through this mural we seek to help students have a deeper understanding of test anxiety and equip them with useful skills and tools to combat it. First, we do a deep dive into various aspects of test anxiety, ranging from debunking common myths, providing actionable frameworks for students and digital resources.

What is test anxiety?

Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which people experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations. While many people experience some degree of stress and anxiety before and during exams, test anxiety can impair learning and hurt test performance.

7 things to know about test anxiety

Usually, test anxiety has two components, mental and physical. The mental component of stress includes all your thoughts and worries about tests. The physical component includes feelings, sensations, and tension. If you freeze during tests and flub questions when you know the answers, you might be suffering from test anxiety. A little tension before a test is good. That tingly, butterflies in the stomach feeling you get from extra adrenaline can sharpen your awareness and keep you alert. Sometimes, however, tension is persistent and extreme. It causes loss of sleep, appetite, and sometimes even hair. That kind of tension is damaging. It is a symptom of test anxiety, and it can prevent you from doing your best on exams. Other symptoms include nervousness, fear, dread, irritability, and a sense of hopelessness. These are important points to take note of in order to effectively understand how test anxiety works.

- Test anxiety is a learned behavior.
- The association of grades and personal worth causes test anxiety.
- Test anxiety can come from a feeling of a lack of control.
- Test anxiety can be caused by a teacher embarrassing a student.
- Being placed into course above your ability can cause test anxiety.
- Test anxiety develops from fear of alienation from parents, family, and friends due to poor grades.
- Test anxiety can be caused by timed tests and the fear of not finishing the test, even if one can do all the problems

Who gets test anxiety?

- A student with good study habits who does not have problems in encoding and organizing the information but, rather, have a major problem in retrieval for a test.
- A student with poor study habits who have problems in all stages of processing

Results indicated that highly test-anxious students showed a disadvantage in organization of course material, in comparison with other students. (Naveh-Benjamin, M., McKeachie, W. J., & Lin, Y. 1987)

The twelve myths of test anxiety:

These are 12 common myths regarding test anxiety that many students fall into the trap of believing.

1. Students are born with test anxiety.
2. Test anxiety is a mental illness.
3. Test anxiety cannot be reduced.
4. Any level of test anxiety is bad.
5. All students who are not prepared have test anxiety.
6. Students with test anxiety cannot learn math.
7. Students who are well prepared will not have test anxiety.
8. Very intelligent students and students taking high-level courses, such as calculus, do not have test anxiety.
9. Attending class and doing my homework should reduce all my test anxiety
10. Being told to relax during a test will make you relaxed.
11. Doing nothing about test anxiety will make it go away.
12. Reducing test anxiety will guarantee better grades

How to combat test anxiety?

The role of physical and mental preparation

Combating test anxiety requires carefully curated test preparation strategies that involve both the mental and the physical. One must also prepare mentally and physically for the exam. One's physical and mental states may drastically affect the effectiveness of preparation activities. For instance, one can't prepare if one can't stay awake. Physical and mental states may also profoundly impact exam performance, regardless of how well one prepared. All the preparation in the world will do little good if one is coughing uncontrollably or experiences an anxiety attack during the test. General guidelines for physically and mentally preparing for tests are provided below. (Mashayekha & Hashmi, 2011)

Physical Preparation

- Good physical health requires that one regularly eat balanced meals.
- Avoid excessive amounts of junk food, caffeine, cigarettes, and alcohol.
- Adequate sleep is also necessary for good health in general but also as well as the night before the exam.
- Exercise helps to maintain good health and to release tension.

Mental Preparation

- Studying in the test room often helps student to feel more comfortable about the test
- Visualize every aspect of studying and taking the test.
- Don't worry about what other students are doing, and don't listen to negative comments made by other students.
- Engage in positive self-talk.

- Don't dwell on past testing failures; learn from them and leave them behind. Focus on past successes instead.
- Have confidence in one's preparation plan.
- Gather and organize the necessary supplies ahead of time

Test Preparation

The most proven, yet least used, way to study for exams is practice tests. Sample questions allow one to assess one's retrieval success before the exam; areas of weakness are identified and addressed prior to taking the actual test. Students may make up their own questions, or they may answer questions on old tests or in the textbook or student workbook accompanying the text. Practice tests have many benefits. This strategy may be used to prepare for nearly any type of test. They help one to anticipate what the test may look like, reducing anxiety and stress. Practice tests are a valuable way to assess one's understanding of the information, distinguishing what is known and what needs to be learned. Writing one's own questions requires that one thoroughly understand and evaluate the information.

When used effectively, practice tests improve one's mental preparation for an exam, bolstering confidence and positive attitudes. Finally, writing and/or answering practice questions forces one to repeatedly review the material, which enhances memory registration and recall.

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Resources:

Forest www.forestapp.cc

Forest provides an interesting solution to save you from Internet addiction. You can plant a seed in Forest. In the next 30 minutes, this seed will gradually grow into a tree. However, if you cannot resist the temptation and start to browse the websites on your Blocklist, your tree will wither away. With this interesting mechanism, the sense of achievement and responsibility will drive our users to stay away from the distractions with no pain.

Headspace www.headspace.com

Headspace is your guide to mindfulness for your everyday life. Learn meditation and mindfulness skills from world-class experts and choose from hundreds of guided meditations on everything from managing stress and anxiety to sleep, focus, and mind-body health. Build your practice your way with meditations for every experience level and lifestyle.

Insight Timer insighttimer.com

Sleep for insight timer also offers meditation courses for sleep. Improve your relationship with rest and sleep through the night with a number of courses that teach you how to: Sleep effortlessly, overcoming insomnia, Redefining approach to sleep, sleep with meditation and much more.

Calm www.calm.com

Calm is the perfect mindfulness app for beginners, but also includes hundreds of programs for intermediate and advanced users. Guided meditation sessions are available in lengths of 3, 5, 10, 15, 20 or 25 minutes so you can choose the perfect length to fit with your schedule This app provides an avenue through which students are able.

MySSP uoft.me/myssp

U of T My SSP provides students with real-time and/or appointment-based confidential, 24-hour support for any school, health, or general life concern at no cost to you. You can call or chat with a counsellor directly from your phone whenever, wherever you are. Get in touch if you are feeling overwhelmed!

References:

Klein, P., & Warner, M. (n.d.). Building your resilience and well-being: An Introduction to Positive Psychology Workbook. Canada: ForHealth.ca.

Mashayekha, M., & Hashemi, M. (2011). Recognizing , Reducing and Coping with Test Anxiety : Causes ,Solutions and Recommendations. Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2149-2155.

Naveh-Benjamin, M., McKeachie, W. J., & Lin, Y. (1987). Two types of TEST-ANXIOUS Students: Support for an information processing model. Journal of Educational Psychology, 79(2), 131-136. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.79.2.131

Paul D. Nolting, Ph.D., Math Study Skills Workbook, Your Guide to Reducing Test Anxiety and Improving Study Strategies, 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company

Resource developed by Ash A (Study skill peer coach)