

Test Anxiety

Taking a test can, and often does, produce a stressful situation called “test anxiety.” By knowing what “test anxiety” is and familiarizing yourself with some tips to relieve it, you should be able to overcome, or at least reduce, it.

Definition

Test anxiety is “a special, intense kind of nervousness that arises from the total test situation.” Some excitement for tests is normal and even beneficial. But quite a bit of test anxiety is probably the result of pressure to maintain, or get, good grades. However, if you are well prepared to take a test, you will not have much to fear. Knowing and using good test taking procedures usually helps to reduce anxiety.

Symptoms

Recognizing the symptoms of test anxiety is the first step in overcoming it.

These symptoms are:

1. You feel tests are more of a threat than a challenge.
2. You have a lot of worrisome or negative thoughts about what might happen if you do poorly.
3. You have physical reactions (butterflies, sweaty palms) when you are about to take a test.
4. You have trouble keeping your mind on test items or remembering ideas you learned recently.
5. You worry about other people scoring higher than you on the test, or leaving the room before you do.
6. Your worries about tests have not decreased as you have matured.

These symptoms produce mental interferences that allow you neither to think clearly nor to concentrate on the test items.

Stages

All anxiety is acquired in five stages:

1. We are conditioned to become anxious in the presence of certain stimuli.
2. When a situation arises that we recognize as threatening, we respond with our bodies by preparing for flight or escape.
3. Insecure feelings become a factor because we feel the muscle tension, gland secretions, and nerve signals.
4. These body reactions are disagreeable sensations which we want to be rid of.
5. All these reactions create motivation to find relief in safety.

Test anxiety can be stopped at any of the five stages.

Combating Test Anxiety

People who feel nervous about tests act in two ways. 1) They say negative things to themselves, and, 2) they react physically to these anxiety-arousing self statements. Studies have shown that if you expect a certain event or outcome to occur, your expectations may help to bring it about!

You can do several things to ease your test anxiety.

First of all, you must learn to be aware you are making self-threatening statements. Let your physical and emotional feelings be your guide initially.

Secondly, make it a habit to challenge negative self-statements. Dismiss each one with a logical reason. Remind yourself that you are intelligent, you studied, and you can do this.

Third, relax your muscles. Get rid of residual tension and try to relax. Breathe! Breathe deeply 3 or 4 times before beginning your test. Inhale deeply through your nose, expanding your stomach, count to 5 as you inhale; exhale through your mouth, pulling your stomach in, again count to 5 on the exhale. Repeat 3 or 4 times. This restores oxygen to your brain, relaxes you, and reactivates memory.

Fourth, get organized. The brain needs organization to retrieve information. Organize yourself physically and mentally: where do you study, where are your supplies, what are good times of the day for you to study to remember better.

Fifth, get a good night's sleep. The day of the test get up early enough to get to class without rushing, review key points before the test. Sit in a location that is distraction free, ignore others, and breathe!

Psychology

Part of the problem of test anxiety is that you become too sensitive to certain aspects of being tested. Some are physical, and some reside in your imagination. This threatens the ego. "Desensitization" can often be helpful. In this process, an individual is exposed to anxiety-arousing stimuli while continuing to remain in a physically relaxed state. The effect after repeated sessions is that the stimulus ceases to arouse anxiety. If the common things you can do not reduce your anxiety, see a counselor to discuss desensitization.

Remember! Anxiety directs thoughts inward to think about discomfort; good test-taking methods direct thoughts outward to think about answering questions correctly.

And, remember, the best thing to offset test anxiety is to STUDY, and study, and study some more. Over learning is the secret to making information your own.