

Relaxation Techniques for Test Anxiety

A little tension before an exam is good. Sometimes, however the tension is damaging. When it is, you are suffering from test anxiety, a condition that prevents you from doing your best on exams. Test anxiety has two components, mental and physical. The mental component of stress includes all your thoughts and worries about tests. The physical components include feelings, sensations, and tension.

The following two components are designed to help you overcome test anxiety.

1. **Dealing with your thoughts. *Mental anxiety***

Yell, "stop!" Mentally yell "STOP", when you are aware that your thoughts are racing, your mind is cluttered with worries and fears, and your thoughts are spinning out of control. This action will momentarily break the cycle of worry.

Daydream. When you fill your mind with pleasant thoughts, there is no room left for anxiety. If you are worried about an upcoming test, substitute those worry thoughts with thoughts or visions of what you like to do.

Visualize success. Most of us live up to our own expectations, good or bad. If you spend a lot of time mentally rehearsing what you will do when you fail, you increase your chances for failure. Once you have stopped the cycle of worry, take time to rehearse what it will be like to succeed. Be very specific. For example, visualize taking a test successfully.

Focus. Focus your attention on a specific object. Concentrate all of your attention on one point. Do not leave room in your mind for anxiety-related thoughts. It is also important to praise yourself. By so doing, you are encouraging yourself to work harder at succeeding and you are thereby elevating anxiety.

2. **Dealing with your feelings. *Physical anxiety***

Breathe. You can calm physical sensations within your body by focusing your attention on your breathing. This is done by concentrating on the air going in and out of your lungs. Do this for two to five minutes. If you notice that you are taking short, shallow breaths begin to take longer and deeper breaths.

Scan your body. Simple awareness is an effective technique to reduce the tension in your body. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Start at your feet. Focus your attention on the muscles in your feet and notice if they are relaxed.

Tense and relax. If you are aware of a particularly tense part of your body, or if you discover tension when you are scanning your body, you can release this with the tense-relax method. To do this, find a muscle that is tense and make it even more tense, then relax. The net result is that you will be aware of the relaxation and allow yourself to relax more.

Use guided imagery. Relax completely and take a quick fantasy trip. Close your eyes, relax your body, and imagine yourself in a beautiful, peaceful, natural setting. Create as much of the scene as you can. Be specific and use all your senses.

Remember, when these techniques do not work, when anxiety is serious, get help. Anxiety and depression are common among students. If you become withdrawn, get depressed, or stay depressed for more than a few days or have feelings of hopelessness, see a counselor.

Good Luck!

Ellis, David B. (1985). Becoming a Master Student (p.166-171)