

Test & Exam Anxiety

This is a problem experienced by most students. Almost every student who takes a test feels anxious, but for some the feeling is so intense that it impacts on their performance. A sensible amount of nervousness and anxiety generated during a test is good as this helps the academic performance by encouraging motivation.

However, if this anxiety causes you to blank out during a test or exam or generally make a mess of the answers, you may be suffering from test and/or exam anxiety.

Strategies to Curb Anxiety

- **Mentally shout 'STOP'** when you start to feel anxious. Eliminate negative self-talk, replace it with positive statements like "I'm studying and I did passably well during the term and should do well in this exam". This may curb your anxiety and bolster your confidence.
- Understand that under test situations **you will view questions that you can't answer**. Don't feel anxious and upset.
- **Focus!** If you can't answer a question focus on answering what you DO know.
- **Don't do last minute cramming!** This is guaranteed to increase your stress and anxiety which does little to improve your test score.
- **Physical wellness** – eat food with nutritional value. Never diet on the day of the exam.
- **Limit your intake of harmful substances** such as alcohol, nicotine and other harmful drugs as these negatively impact on your concentration.
- **Get enough sleep!** Lack of sleep will impact on your concentration and memory.
- **Focus on the task at hand** – focus on studying for and responding to questions on the exam rather than potential negative consequences.

- Adopt an organised approach to exam preparation. Anxiety is often caused by inadequate or ineffective exam preparation. You should be well prepared if you study effectively (see Time Management and Exam Preparation articles).
- Consider joining a serious study group. Review old test scripts. You will know what to expect in the test or exam. If you prepare you will be confident thus reducing stress.

Reducing Anxiety in the Exam Room

We've put together a few practical tips that may help you to reduce your anxiety levels in the actual test and/or exam venue:

- Identify those questions you are able to answer with ease and do answer these first - this will boost your confidence.
- Examine the marking scheme and divide your time accordingly. This will give you the opportunity to answer all questions.
- At all times focus on the goal of answering your questions rather than the end result.
- Shut out the world – If you feel an attack coming on during an exam, put down your pen, sit back and relax, close your eyes and shut out the world. Think of nothing. When you have calmed down sufficiently, resume your exam.

If you have any difficulties please pop-in and see one of our professionally trained psychologists at the Student Counselling Centre located at:

Lower Library Complex
(next door to Financial Aid)
Steve Biko Campus
031 373 2266