

TEST ANXIETY

What is Test Anxiety?

Test anxiety is the feeling of distress in relation to taking exams. Symptoms may appear while taking an exam or even when studying or thinking about taking an exam. It is important to keep in mind that a moderate amount of anxiety is actually healthy and may help you perform better on exams by increasing your focus and making you more active or productive. This is normal and necessary for motivation, mental alertness, and physical energy. However, when stress becomes excessive, it may negatively impact your ability to accomplish day-to-day tasks. The first step to overcome test anxiety is to recognize the signs and to identify what may be triggering your distress.

Signs

- **Physical:** Headache, stomach upset, sweating, shortness of breath, increased heart rate, muscle tension, “butterflies,” clammy hands
- **Cognitive:** “Freezing,” confusion, self-defeating thoughts, worrying and doubts, trouble concentrating
- **Emotional:** Low self-esteem, depression, anger, hopelessness
- **Behavioral:** Fidgeting, tapping, walking quickly, avoidance of difficult assignments/exams, restlessness

Causes

- Lack of preparation
- Fear of failure
- Poor testing experiences in the past
- Concerns about how others are doing on the test
- Concerns outside of school (family pressures, obligations, stressors)
- Poor eating, sleeping, and exercise habits
- Ineffective study methods

Strategies to Manage Test Anxiety

Physical:

- Deep breathe
- Eat before you take an exam (Eat fruits, vegetables, yogurt, lean meat; Avoid energy drinks, processed foods, fried food)
- Tense and relax muscles throughout your body
- Learn the difference between anxious nausea and true nausea
- View your stress response as helping you be alert and focused

Cognitive and Emotional:

- Visualize yourself doing well
- Strive for a relaxed state of concentration
- Reframe negative thoughts into positive ones
- Practice self-compassion
- Focus on the task at hand
- Use positive self-talk

Behavior:

Before the exam:

- Consistently allocate study time each week
- Put in the time to study
- Create a study plan
- Form study groups
- Mimic the exam environment (complete homework and practice exams without notes)
- Get a good night's rest
- Arrive 30 minutes early to acclimate to room and to deep breathe
- Ask about structure of exam

During the exam:

- Carefully read the directions
- Survey the test and budget your time
- Remain positive and focused
- Continue to deep breathe
- Answer the questions you know first
- Give yourself a mental "pep talk"
- Leave 3-5 minutes at the end to check for simple mistakes
- Ask questions if something is not clear

After the exam:

- Celebrate your success!
- Analyze your answers and the test after you receive feedback/grade
- Identify strategies for improvement
- Talk with your instructors about any areas of confusion

Dos & Don'ts

Don't:

- Panic – there may still be points out left in the semester to affect your grade!
- Go into denial – you need to identify how to improve, not ignore it
- Wait until it's too late to get help
- Skip class or fall further behind
- Skip assignments and give up easy points
- Take time from your other classes

Do:

- Examine how you have prepared and analyze your study habits (be honest)
- Review the material and discuss with instructor during office hours or by appointment (what's going wrong? How do you change?)
- Compare errors with notes (if what you missed wasn't in your notes, adjust note-taking!)
- Develop a plan
- Commit more time and effort
- Minimize distractions
- Attend class regularly
- Study a little bit each day, before and after class
- Set realistic goals

For more information and support, contact:

Academic Advising & Exploration Center: 262-472-5220, 2054 Roseman, advising@uww.edu
University Health and Counseling Services: 262-472-1305, Ambrose Health Center, 710 Starin Road
After hours counseling (after 4:30PM M-F or on weekends): 800-365-1587