Reducing Test Tension

Reducing test tension involves controlling two elements--physical and mental. The mental aspects include thoughts and worries. The physical aspects include feelings, sensations, and bodily tension. Both the mental and physical elements work together to prolong and intensify test tension in a cycle that can be difficult to control.

However, there is hope! One important key to remember is to be well-prepared for the test. If you feel that you have studied effectively and still feel anxious about the test, then you may suffer from test tension. To control test tension, one needs to experiment with the following exercises and techniques.

I. Mental Aspects--Dealing with thoughts

If you can think to yourself--“Stop,” this will help you become focused on your anxiety-producing thoughts. You can clear your mind of these thoughts by focusing on them, and:

1. **Daydreaming.** After you have focused on the clutter and mayhem in your mind, you can daydream about something pleasant and replace the worries with good thoughts. Imagine yourself at the beach or a place that you enjoy. Essentially you are replacing the negative thoughts with positive ones.

2. **Visualize success.** When you have successfully stopped the cycle of worry and confusion, then you will be able to replace that with positive visualization. Mentally picture yourself preparing for the test in a calm manner, taking the test and knowing the answers; in essence, see yourself performing well!

3. **Focus your thoughts on a particular detail**--a view from a window, a pretty color, a pleasant sound, the texture of your shirt or your textbook. This concentration on one detail will not leave room for anxious thoughts.

4. **Praise yourself.** Consider your self-talk. Much of what we think and say to ourselves is negative: “I can't remember anything.” “I never do well on tests.” Instead try filling your mind with encouragement and positive self-talk: “I am working on becoming a successful test-taker.” “I know this information, and I am intelligent. Therefore I can succeed.”

5. **Consider the worst.** What is the worst thing that could happen if you do poorly on the test? Will you fail the course? Will you be suspended? Will you go to jail? Will you be subject to public ridicule? By considering the very worst scenario, you may be able to view the test and the anxiety in a new light. In other words, you will see that one test alone is not that serious.
II. Physical Aspects--Dealing with feelings

1. **Breathe.** You can control the anxiety that your body feels by concentrating on each breath as you inhale and exhale. Notice whether you are taking short, shallow breaths. If so, then slowly breathe in deeply in long breaths. Slowing and deepening your breathing will also help you grow calmer.

2. **Be aware of the tension in your body.** Beginning with your feet and continuing up the remainder of your body, determine whether each part is tense or relaxed. Think “Relax” to all parts that are tense.

3. **Tense and relax.** Release tension also by consciously tensing and relaxing the already-tense body parts. For example, if your shoulders are tense, then tense them even more tightly. After you relax them, you will allow yourself to relax more.

4. **Describe your anxiety.** Concentrate on the anxious feelings in your body. If your stomach is nervous, or your palms sweaty, (or whatever your physical sensations), then focus on that particular feeling. You may say to yourself, “OK, I have a nervous stomach.” Often, just noticing or allowing the feeling will enable you to lessen the effects of the sensation.

5. **Exercise aerobically.** While you are studying and feeling tense, exercise is an excellent way to release tension. Try some activity that will increase your heart rate by 100% and keep it at that level for 15 or 20 minutes. Exercise will also enable you to maintain calmness and positive energy throughout the day.

--Hints excerpted from *The Master Student* by David B. Ellis

While test tension ranges from mild to severe, it can be an impediment to success and happiness in college. If you find that these tips are not affecting your level of test tension, come to the Center for Student Success for an individual appointment or contact a member of the staff at Counseling Services. Help is available!!

Center for Student Success 503-5070 Smith 103
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