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# How to Manage Test Anxiety

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# Introduction

## Good News!

Managing test anxiety is a **skill** which you can learn.

The goal is to manage anxiety, not get rid of it completely.

# What is Anxiety?

**A normal and complex human reaction**

Which contains physical and mental elements

Physical symptoms:

- Perspiration/ sweaty palms
- Accelerated heartbeat
- Queasy stomach
- Hand and feet tapping/shakiness
- Tightness in shoulders or chest/Muscle tension
- Easily fatigued

# Mental Symptoms:

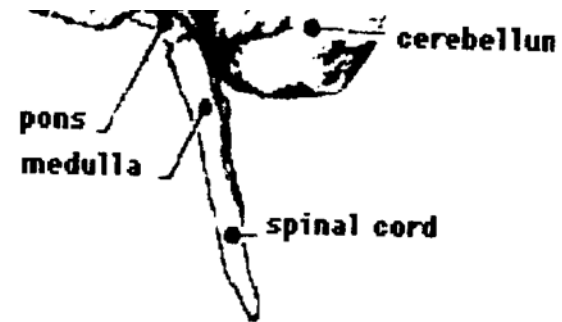
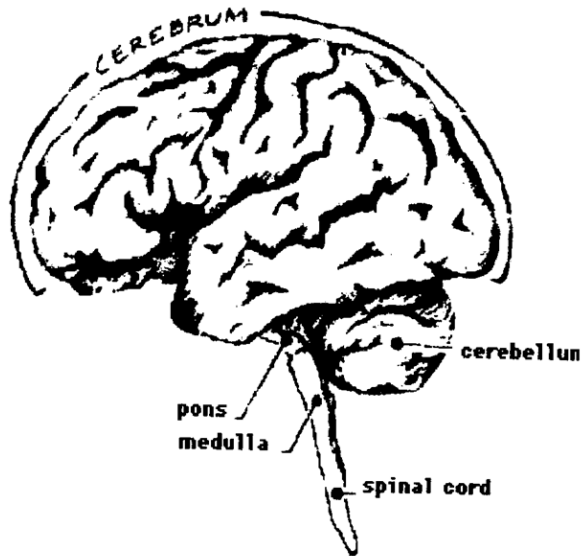
- Worry
- Obsessive thoughts
- Self doubt
- Restlessness
- Going blank
- Irritability
- Sleep disturbance

Test Anxiety Triggers This Natural Response

# Fight, Flight, Freeze



# Your Brain on Stress Hormones



# Where Does Anxiety Come From?

## Likely From Two Places:

### Genetics

- Anxious parent/s, family members, ancestors
- Evolutionarily anxious people survived

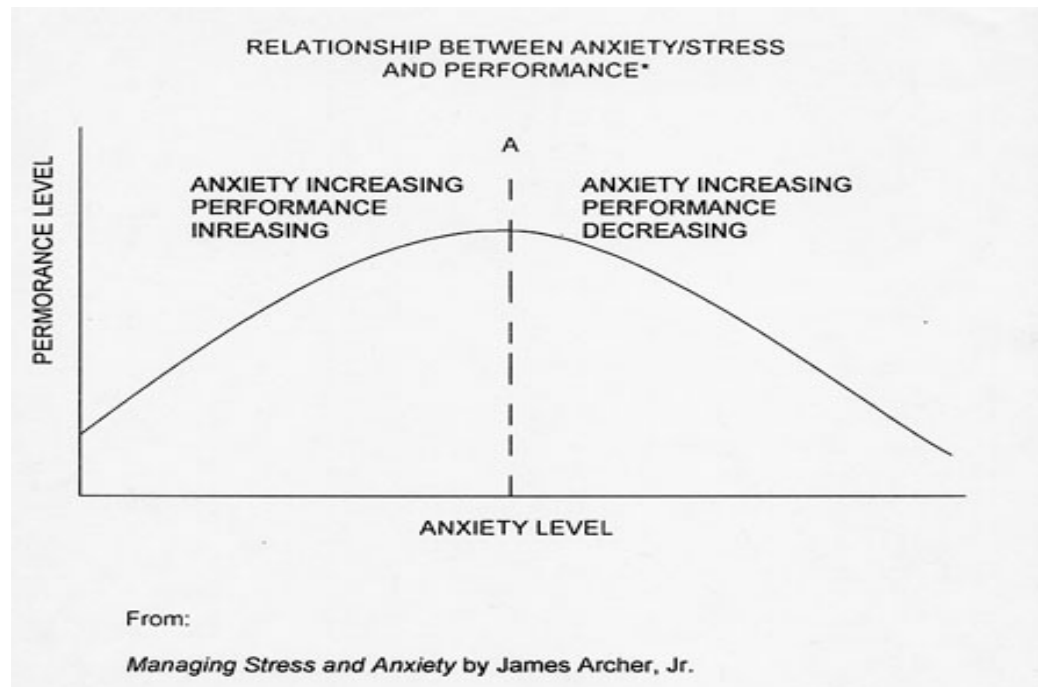
### Socialization / Learned Behavior

- Failed (or watched some fail) in the past and received (or watched someone receive) negative feedback from parents, teachers, friends.

\*Speed of life Constantly connected to screens

# The Paradox of Anxiety

Everyone needs some level of stress or anxiety in order to motivate and energize them. However, if these levels become too high, they can interfere with academic performance



When the point of diminishing returns is reached is varies from individual to individual



# Test Anxiety Symptoms:

- Going blank
- Being unable to concentrate
- Feeling light headed (shallow upper-chest breathing hyperventilation)
- Feeling exhausted when the test is finished (our bodies use more energy when anxious)

# Common Sources of Test Anxiety

- Lack of preparation (justified anxiety)
- Self-defeating thoughts and beliefs
- High stress lifestyle (overextended)
- New/unfamiliar environment

# Coping Strategies to Manage Test Anxiety

1. Lower overall stress level
2. Improve study skills, overall preparation
3. Manage self-defeating thoughts
4. Learn and practice relaxation techniques
5. Seek professional help

# 1. Lower Overall Stress Level

- Volcano
- Airplane
- Examine your priorities
  - ← Stop or postpone most non-essential activities.
  - ← Remember: changing what we do may take some re-negotiating of responsibilities with our family members and friends

# Lower Overall Stress Level Continued...

- Eat Well
  - Avoid excess caffeine, alcohol, sugar
  - Nutritionist Kim Raring on staff in Wellness Center 609-652-4701
- Exercise
  - Weights, Cardio, Intermural sports, Sport clubs, Zumba, Yoga, walking paths all available free of charge on campus
- Get Enough Sleep

## 2. Improve Study Skills

- Review over time try to avoid cramming the night before
- Procrastination is a choice
- Learn test taking strategies
  - Schedule time to study
  - Break down the exam preparation into manageable units
  - Focus your preparation; you may be setting yourself up for anxiety if you expect to learn "everything" learn most not all
  - Look over the entire test, READ THE DIRECTIONS

# Improve Study Skills Continued...

- **Practice is key.** You may want to write your statements on a 3x5 card or a small piece of paper so that you can carry it in your wallet or purse.
- Look at cards three times a day
- Learn what learning style works best for you
  - Audio Record and Listen to class lecture and make digital voice flashcards
  - Experiential Learn and teach a friend
  - Visual 3x5 cards

### 3. Managing Self Defeating Thoughts

Catastrophic Thought	Evidence For	Evidence Against	Alternative or Balanced Thoughts
I'm going to fail this test and then have to drop out of school	<p>I failed a test in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade</p> <p>I feel really anxious right now</p> <p>This professor is tough</p>	<p>I have practiced relaxation skills</p> <p>I have a positive thought to focus on</p> <p>I've put in the work studying over time</p>	<p>While I will likely feel some test anxiety before and during the test, realistically, I will do well on the test, especially since I have put in the work studying as well as building my stress management skills.</p>



# Managing Self-Defeating Thoughts

Common unhealthy thought patterns

Black or white – entirely good/entirely bad

Exaggerating – self-critical statements that use words like *never*, *nothing*, *everything*, or *always*

Filtering – ignoring the positive but focusing on the negative

Discounting – rejecting positive experiences as not important or meaningful

Catastrophizing – blowing expectations out of proportion in a negative direction

# Managing Self-Defeating Thoughts Continued

Judging – being critical of self with heavy use of words like *should*, *ought to*, *must*, etc.

Mind reading – making negative assumptions regarding other people's thoughts

Forecasting – predicting events will turn out badly (self-fulfilling prophecy)

Feelings are facts – because you are feeling a certain way, reality is seen as fitting that feeling

Labeling – calling self or others a bad name when displeased with a behavior

Self-blaming – holding yourself responsible for things not completely under your control

# Managing Self-Defeating Thoughts Continued...

- We cannot control what thoughts arise, however, we can control how we react to them
- Use Centering techniques to let go of obsessive or perfectionistic thoughts
- Use positive self-talk [e.g., I've prepared for the exam/I can calm myself if I get nervous/Just relax and remember what you've learned]
- Create healthy alternatives to negative thoughts
  - "I'm a failure I will just freeze up and flunk"
  - "I've studied and am doing well in my course work, I can do this"

# 4. Learn and Practice Relaxation Techniques

## Deep breathing/Breath Meditation

Download Tactical Breather App

Insight Timer 5 minutes 2x per day

Chakra timer

Meditation instruction available weekly on Campus

**Yoga** 6:30-7:30p.m. Lodge at Lakeside (Tues) TRLC (Thurs)

[YouTube Gentle Kripalu Yoga Class with Megha Nancy Buttenheim](#)

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

**Visualization**

**Centering**

# 5. Seek Professional Help

Anxiety disorders are highly treatable. Most people respond well to therapy, medication, or both.

If you think that you may be experiencing a clinical anxiety disorder, seek professional help.

On campus, resources are available through The Wellness Center J-204 609-652-4722 (Free and confidential)

If diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, you may be eligible for academic accommodations. Contact the Learning Access 609-652-4988 (also in J-204).

# In Summary:

- No magic wands or tricks to get rid of test anxiety
- Reducing test anxiety will take hard work & practice
- The important thing to remember is—you **can** learn to manage test anxiety.