

LEARNING

DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESS

Managing Test Anxiety

What does test anxiety feel like?

- Some students experience mainly physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, etc.
- Others experience more emotional symptoms, such as crying easily, feeling irritable, or getting frustrated quickly.
- A major problem of test anxiety can be its effect on thinking ability; it can cause a person to 'blank out' or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.
- **Western students are strongly encouraged to seek assistance in the [Student Development Centre](#) if you experience interfering levels of anxiety prior to and/or during tests and exams.**

What can you do to control test anxiety?

- Be **well prepared** for the test.
- Include as much **self-testing** in your review as possible.
- Maintain a **healthy lifestyle**: get enough sleep, good nutrition, exercise, some personal "down" time, and a reasonable amount of social interaction.
- As you anticipate the exam, **think positively**, e.g., "I can do OK on this exam. I've studied and I know my stuff."
- Engage in **"thought stopping"** if you find that you are worrying a lot, comparing yourself to your peers, or thinking about what others may say about your performance on this exam.
- Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, **organize anything that you will need** for the exam -- pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc. Double check the time/location of the exam.
- Set the alarm clock and then get a **good night's sleep** before the exam.
- Get to the **exam on time** - not too late but not too early.
- **Be cautious about talking to other students** about the exam material just before going into the exam, especially if this will make you more anxious.
- Sit in a **location** in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.
- As the papers are distributed, **calm yourself** by taking some slow deep breaths.
- Make sure to **carefully read any instructions** on the exam.
- As you work on the exam, **focus only on the exam**, not on what other students are doing or on thinking about past exams or future goals.
- If you feel very anxious in the exam, take a few minutes to **calm yourself**. Stretch your arms and legs and then relax them again. Do this a couple of times. Take a few slow deep breaths. Do some positive internal self-talk; say to yourself, "I will be OK, I can do this."
- If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to **focus and just do your best**. It might be enough to get you through with a reasonable grade.
- When the exam is over, **treat yourself**. If you don't have any other commitments, maybe you can take the night off. If you have to study for other exams you may have to postpone a larger break, but a brief break may be the "pick up" that you need.