

COMBATING TEST ANXIETY

Test anxiety is a special form of psychologically induced anxiety. Up to a certain limit, anxiety increases test scores by speeding up the thinking RATE. Above the optimal level anxiety interferes with test taking ability by blocking an individual's ability to recall information, reducing the test taking speed due to distraction.

Worry and physical response are two components of test anxiety. Both are present in most people but one or the other is usually predominant. While taking a test, worry interferes with concentration causing negative self-feedback. Examples: "This test is too hard" and "I won't finish this test." As the frequency and intensity of negative feedback increases, an individual's ability to concentrate decreases. Concentration decreases because the individual is spending more time and energy on the effects of failing the test than working on the test.

Test anxiety is a learned physical response to negative emotions associated with a history of past failures. The physical response blocks the ability to recall test material because the individual is concentrating more on the way his/her body feels than on answering the test questions. Test anxiety can be replaced by substituting another behavior mechanism, Relaxation Response, in its place. The following is an overview of six separate techniques for combating test anxiety. The most effective for long term results is the Qued Response method. The other five are short term, stop-gap, immediate intervention type procedures. The key to making this work is to pick the technique that works best for the individual. This can only be done through trial and error.

The five short-term relaxation procedures are Count to Three, Tension Differential, Doctor's Method, Palmary, and Cognitive.

1. Count to Three works by slowing down the breathing rate.
 - a. Inhale through the nose to a slow count of three.
 - b. Hold this to a slow count of three.
 - c. Exhale through the nose to a slow count of three.
 - d. Hold (without inhaling) to a slow count of three.
 - e. Repeat several times.

2. Tension Differential works by physical relaxation of muscles.
 - a. Place feet flat on floor in sitting position.
 - b. Hold the under side of the chair with hands.
 - c. Push down with feet and pull up on chair at SAME TIME.
 - d. Hold to a slow count of three.
 - e. Repeat two to three times.
 - f. Then relax all muscles in body.

3. Doctor's Method works by modifying breathing rhythm.
 - a. Inhale through the nose until the lungs cannot retain any more air.
 - b. Quickly, with the mouth open, breathe in an extra breath.
 - c. Slowly exhale through the mouth.
 - d. Repeat three times.

4. Palmary works through positive visualization.
 - a. Cover the eyes with palms of hand. Do not touch the eyes.
 - b. Visualize a relaxing, peaceful scene as observed through the individual's own eyes.
 - c. Keep this image for one to two minutes.
 - d. Uncover the eyes and take the test.

5. Cognitive works by increasing self-confidence.
 - a. Before the test, the individual says these types of positive feedback phrases to him/herself.
 1. "I prepared for this exam."
 2. "Tests measure the knowledge of an academic area, not my worth as a person."
 3. "I am going to relax and think positively and do the best that I can do on this test."
 - b. During the test, remember these phrases and relax.