

### *Simultaneous Contraction*

This method involves contracting several of the muscle groups in each of the four body areas (arms, neck, mid-section and legs) at the same time e.g. contract all the muscles in your arms as they remain straight by your sides. Hold each tensing position for seven seconds and relax for twenty seconds. Now tighten and relax your neck, your mid-section and your legs.

### Helpful Hints That Help To Curb Test & Exam Anxiety

- Remember experiencing some anxiety under test or exam conditions is normal.
- Understand that under test situations you may view questions that you can't answer. Don't feel anxious and upset.
- Don't do last minute cramming. This is guaranteed to increase your stress and anxiety levels, which does little to improve your test score.
- Physical wellness is important - eat food with nutritional value. Never diet on the day of the exam. Make sure you eat something before the test or exam.
- Limit your intake of harmful substances such as alcohol or nicotine as these negatively impact on concentration, mood and have many other adverse side effects.
- Get enough sleep as lack of sleep will impact negatively on your concentration and memory.
- Ensure you have prepared sufficiently for the test or exam - anxiety is often caused by inadequate or ineffective exam preparation. Read self-help pamphlet "Succeed in your tests & exams" for some helpful information on test & exam preparation.

### Reducing Anxiety in the Test & Exam Room

- Identify those questions you are able to answer and answer them first - this will boost your confidence.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, ring it and move on. You can go back to the more challenging questions later. Importantly, remember to go back to the skipped questions.
- Examine the marking scheme and divide your time accordingly. This will give you the opportunity to answer all questions.

- Shut out the world – keep your focus on writing your test or exam.
- If you start to feel anxious and/or panicky during the test or exam - put down your pen, sit back and relax. Close your eyes and focus your attention on your breathing. Remember, the abdominal breathing technique you read about earlier. Try to think about nothing and do not worry about the other students writing. Once you have calmed down sufficiently, resume your test or exam.

Please remember if you need any help with overcoming test and/or exam anxiety, or would like to talk about any study-related or personal concerns please do not hesitate to make an appointment at the Student Counselling Centre.

*This is an initiative of the*

Student Counselling Centre  
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### REFERENCES

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# beat test & exam anxiety

# Beat Test and Exam Anxiety

It is normal to feel anxious and experience “butter-fly feelings” in your stomach before a test or exam. A certain amount of nervous tension, which causes a release of adrenaline, increases alertness and focus, helping you to perform to the best of your ability (Butler & Hope, 2012). HOWEVER, too much anxiety can have a negative affect on your ability to think, blocking thoughts, and decreasing concentration. Increased anxiety can also lead to feelings of panic and can negatively impact your academic performance.

To beat exam anxiety during tests and exams, you need to be able to:

- Understand the link between thoughts, feelings and physical sensations
- Deal with irrational self-talk
- Create a more truthful statement
- Know how to practice relaxation exercises

Your thoughts affect the way you feel emotionally and physically. Thinking about exams can produce anxiety (emotion), which may cause the following physical sensations:

1. Chest tightness
2. Increased heart rate
3. Sweaty palms
4. Feelings of jumpy or shakiness

Anxiety can be dealt with by a change in thoughts or by a change in the way you react physically. Your thoughts can also be referred to as self-talk. Becoming aware of your self-talk requires time, patience and practice.

## Identifying Thoughts & Beliefs about Exams

Thoughts about exams are supported by certain underlying beliefs that you have. These beliefs come from past experiences (e.g. failures and successes). Some examples of beliefs & thoughts are:

BELIEF: *“I am powerless”*

THOUGHT: *“It does not matter how hard I study, I still won’t do well in this exam”*

BELIEF: *“Life is a struggle”*

THOUGHT: *“Studying for exams is going to be too difficult”*

BELIEF: *“I don’t believe that I am academically talented”*

THOUGHT: *“I am going to fail this test”*

QUESTION: *What are you saying to yourself (your self-talk) when you are busy learning for or writing test/exams?*

IMPORTANT: Irrational thoughts need to be challenged

## Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety about exams could be due to illogical thinking. Examine your possible illogical thoughts using the following eight questions:

1. Do I really think that this thought is true?
2. What is the evidence that this thought is true?
3. What is the evidence that this thought is false?
4. Have I had this thought in the past?
5. How does this thought prevent me from being successful?
6. If I go against this thought, what is the worst thing that could happen?
7. If I go against this thought, what good things might happen?
8. What is the belief behind this thought?

## Creating a More Truthful Statement

Substitute your irrational thoughts with thoughts that are closer to the truth. Try the following exercise:

Write a statement about exams that is directly opposite to your irrational thought.  
Ask yourself what it would really mean if you believed this statement.  
Repeat the statement as if you really mean it.

## Decreasing Anxiety and Increasing Calmness

### Practicing Relaxation Techniques

#### Abdominal Breathing

When you are anxious and afraid, your breathing becomes shallow and located high up in your chest. This may make you feel as though you are not getting enough oxygen. Instead of taking deeper breaths, you may take shallow breaths more quickly. This could lead to a state called hyperventilation, which causes you to feel dizzy or disorientated. Breathing deeply from your abdomen will cause you to inhale more oxygen. This means that:

More carbon dioxide and other wastes are removed from your body because oxygen reaches the bloodstream. More physical energy is generated because more oxygen goes to the muscles. Greater clarity of mind is experienced because more oxygen reaches the brain.

#### Assessing Breathing Quality

Try to assess the quality of your breathing. Are you breathing deeply? Is your chest moving when you breathe? Your abdomen?

Place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest. As you breathe, your hand on your chest should remain fairly still and the hand on your abdomen should rise when you inhale and fall when you exhale.

Continue to gently breathe in and out at a pace that is natural to you.

After a couple of minutes, begin to count each time you exhale. After ten exhales start again. Continue this for about ten minutes.