

# Total Wellness Program



## Managing Test Anxiety

### Test Anxiety

Note that the title of this handout is about managing test anxiety, not eliminating it. Anxiety is a natural reaction to an important test and can help you feel “up” for an exam so that you have more energy and focus. Some students, however, prepare well for a test but still experience levels of anxiety that interfere with learning and test taking. There is a great deal you can do—from positive self-talk to relaxation to visualizing test success—to reduce test anxiety to a manageable level.

### Positive Thinking

Research shows that the self-talk of test-anxious students almost always tends to be negative and self-defeating. Program your mind for test success with positive self-talk and visualization.

- Pay attention to what you say to yourself. If you have negative thoughts, write them down and then dispute each one with a positive statement. In general, be as supportive of yourself as you would be of a friend.
- Create positive associations with tests by visualizing yourself doing well on an exam.
- Detach your self-esteem from your academic performance by reminding yourself that you are much more than a medical student. Think about your unique talents and what is special about you as a person.

### During the Test

- Walk into the test with confidence. If you find yourself having negative thoughts, replace them with positive ones that you have practiced.
- Read the directions calmly to settle your mind and get your thinking going.
- Focus on one question at a time. Don’t let yourself assess how you are doing or compare yourself to other students.
- If you don’t know an answer, mark the question. Tell yourself that you studied it and the answer will come to you when you get back to it.
- Give yourself small breaks to shift your position and stretch out your muscles and take a few deep breaths.
- If you feel yourself beginning to panic, use one of the calming strategies that you have been practicing (see below). Remind yourself that you know how to deal with the panic.
- If you freeze up, get up and go to the bathroom, wash your face, and refresh yourself.

## Relaxation Techniques

- There are many techniques for calming down before or during a test using meditation, relaxation, deep breathing, and visualization. Find one or two techniques that work for you and practice them so that they become second nature. Following are a few simple relaxation techniques. For more ways to stay calm and focused during a test, search the Internet or make an appointment with Dr. LaPierre in the Student Affairs Office.
  - Take a few minutes a day to practice deep breathing when you are driving, going to bed, in class, or wherever. For five counts each, breathe in through your nose and expand your lower diaphragm, hold your breath and pause, exhale through your mouth and imagine releasing the tension from your body.
  - Take time to do a body inventory and notice where you hold your stress. Stretch it out and release the tension.
  - Practice visualizing scenarios where you feel confident and calm. Remember occasions when you worked hard, challenged yourself, and succeeded--like getting into medical school.
  - Stop for a minute and pay attention to your five senses. What do you hear, smell, taste, see, and feel? This takes you out of your head and puts you in the present.

## Test Panic

If the above techniques don't resolve episodes of extreme anxiety leading to test panic, make an appointment with Dr. LaPierre in the Student Affairs Office to discuss a method of systematic desensitization of test panic.

Sometimes these strategies are not enough. If your anxiety is really getting in the way, you may need to talk to a therapist or a doctor. There are many effective techniques that a therapist can teach you and useful medications to lower your anxiety. We are always available here at Student Affairs to talk or suggest referrals.