

PART 1: IDENTIFYING TEST ANXIETY

PSYCHED UP, BUT NOT PSYCHED OUT!

In order to perform well in a challenging situation, you must be psychologically and physically alert. You certainly won't perform well on an exam or in an event if you are nearly asleep! This level of "alertness" is also called arousal. Some degree of arousal is essential for optimal performance. Increasing arousal is the idea behind "psyching up"- and it works - in many cases, psyching up enhances performance. The problem is that when the intensity of arousal gets too high, we often begin to feel nervous and tense and experience anxiety. At this level, anxiety becomes distracting and performance declines - we get "psyched out." For optimal performance, you need to keep your arousal at an intermediate level - psyched up, but not psyched out!

TEST ANXIETY ~ "PSYCHED OUT"!

Almost everyone feels nervous or experiences some anxiety when faced with a test or an exam. In fact, it is unusual to find a student who doesn't approach a big test without a degree of anxiety. Many students experience some nervousness or apprehension before, during, or even after an exam. It is perfectly natural to feel some anxiety when preparing for and taking a test.

Too much anxiety about a test is commonly referred to as test anxiety. Test anxiety is very common among students! It can interfere with your studying, and you may have difficulty learning and remembering what you need to know for the test. Further, too much anxiety may block your performance. You may have difficulty demonstrating what you know during the test.

Test anxiety can cause a host of problems in students. Although each person will experience a different collection of symptoms with differing degrees of intensity, the symptoms fall into a few categories.

- **Physical** - headaches, nausea or diarrhea, extreme body temperature changes, excessive sweating, shortness or breath, light-headedness or fainting, rapid heart beat, and/or dry mouth.
- **Emotional** - excessive feelings of fear, disappointment, anger, depression, uncontrollable crying or laughing, feelings of helplessness
- **Behavioral** - fidgeting, pacing, substance abuse, avoidance
- **Cognitive** - racing thoughts, 'going blank', difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, feelings of dread, comparing yourself to others, difficulty organizing your thoughts.

Stressful emotions can inhibit a student's ability to absorb, retain and recall information. Anxiety creates a kind of "noise" or "mental static" in the brain that blocks our ability to retrieve what's stored in memory and also greatly impairs our ability to comprehend and reason.

Research has shown that providing students with tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits when preparing for a test can help them overcome test anxiety and the associated symptoms, while improving their ability to prepare for and perform on critical testing.