

## Coping with Test Anxiety

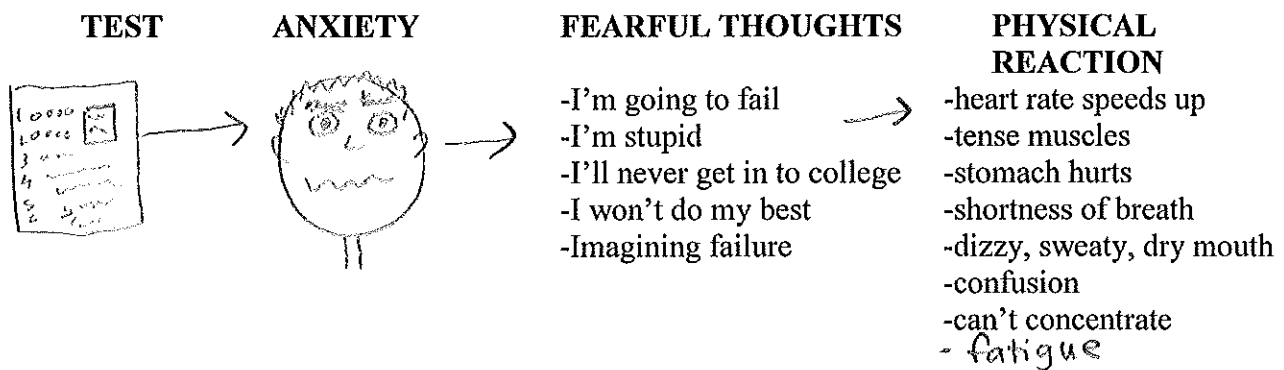
### Objectives:

- Familiarize students with directions to each section of the ACT
- Identify anxiety signals/the panic cycle
- Have students recognize their own anxiety signals
- Practice methods for coping with test-induced anxiety

**Procedure:** 9:20-10:10 (50:00)

--9:20-9:30 (10:00) What's normal versus what's not-normal? Discuss the panic cycle and introduce lesson objectives:

A **test** creates **anxiety**, anxiety creates **fearful thoughts** (exaggerated concerns about the consequences of failure—failure being defined differently for every student), those thoughts cause **physical symptoms**.

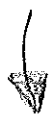


### WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

- When **fearful thoughts** occur, **epinephrine** from the adrenal gland pumps into the blood stream, getting ready to defend your body
- Unfortunately, this activates the primitive, defense mode part of your body instead of the part that stores and recalls all the information
- When people are in defense mode, they have difficulty recalling info
- Muscles tense up, causing even more “defense” epinephrine to flow, making it a bad cycle

### SO WHAT?

- IMPORTANT: If you can **CONTROL the physical tension** in your body, you can **STOP the release of epinephrine** in your body, GET OUT of defense mode, and start recalling info in order to test your best
- That is what we will learn today: to **recognize** when you are experiencing physical reactions to bad thoughts, and how to **control** them



### MY SYMPTOMS

Check the symptoms you experience when you become anxious about tests.

1. MY STOMACH FLUTTERS
2. I FEEL NAUSEOUS
3. MY HANDS GET COLD
4. MY HANDS SWEAT
5. MY HEAD ACHES
6. MY FACE FLUSHES
7. I GET DIZZY
8. I HAVE TO GO TO THE BATHROOM OFTEN
9. I HAVE TROUBLE EATING
10. I BREATHE RAPIDLY AND SHALLOWLY
11. I EAT AND EAT
12. MY MOUTH GETS DRY
13. MY HEART RACES

Symptoms 1-13 can be eliminated or reduced by controlling your breathing

14. MY HANDS QUIVER
15. I AM AWKWARD/SEEM UNCOORDINATED
16. MY HEAD ACHES—USUALLY ON ONE SIDE
17. THE MUSCLES IN MY NECK AND SHOULDERS ACHES
18. MUSCLES IN MY LEGS, CALVES, OR ARMS GET TENSE
19. I TAP MY FINGERS OR FEET
20. I CLUNCH MY TEETH OR GRIND THEM
21. I STAMMER OR STUTTER
22. MY MUSCLES IN MY CHEST ARE TIGHT
23. MY TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT ACHES (THIS IS THE JOINT AT THE HINGE OF THE JAW)

Symptoms 14-24 can be controlled by muscle relaxation

24. I BITE MY NAILS
25. I PICK AT THINGS LIKE LINT OR MY HAIR
26. I KEEP FORGETTING THINGS
27. I WANT TO RETREAT AND SLEEP, SAFE AT HOME
28. I CANNOT CONCENTRATE
29. I HAVE THE SAME THOUGHT RUNNING THROUGH MY HEAD REPEATEDLY

Symptoms 24-29 are the most resistant to change. To be successful you will have to stop your thoughts about tests, control your breathing, and relax your muscles. You will be taught how to control all of these symptoms

### What Happens to Your Body When You Get Anxious

#### A Test Is Assigned

You may begin to worry about the test days or even weeks in advance. This may produce a variety of physiological reactions including headaches, tense muscles, and an upset stomach. You may have minipanic reactions during this period. Also, you may not sleep well as you normally do and either under- or overeat.

For some students the anxiety does not kick in until the day of the test. What follows is an illustration of your anxiety reaction.

1. Thought: BIG TEST.
2. Epinephrine (adrenaline) is pumped into the bloodstream - to some degree this happens to everyone
  - oxygen level in blood increases;
  - carbon dioxide level decreases;
  - heart rate increases;
  - Muscles tense;
  - blood pools around vital organs;
  - blood sugar level increases; and
  - breathing becomes thoracic (upper chest).
3. Your body is ready for action
4. But, no physical activity burns the excess oxygen, and blood sugar.
5. Symptoms may increase and this may cause your anxiety level to go up, including
  - sweaty palms;
  - cold hands and feet;
  - dizziness;
  - irregular heartbeat;
  - can't "think";
  - legs weak;
  - numbness in lips, hands, and perhaps on the left side;
  - choking sensation; and
  - hyperventilating and passing out.
6. You may just hang on and finish the test.
7. Afterwards, self-criticism may occur because you knew more than the test showed.

Measuring Your Test Anxiety

100	_____	Extremely High
90	_____	Very High
80	_____	High
70	_____	Above Average
60	_____	Slightly Above Average
50	_____	Average
40	_____	Slightly Below Average
30	_____	Below Average
20	_____	Relaxed
10	_____	Very Relaxed
0	_____	Anxiety Free

Handout 6-5

Thought Stopping

As you now know, your scary thoughts produce bodily reactions that may increase your anxiety. It is a vicious cycle that you can stop. One important way to do this is to stop the fearful thoughts. The steps for doing this are as follows:

Step 1: Identify the automatic thoughts that are making you anxious such as

- I'll fail;
- I'll make a low grade, I'll be embarrassed; and
- I'll let my parents down.

Write your scary thought(s) here (you will not be asked to share these with others in the group):

\_\_\_\_\_

Step 2: Decide you do not want these thoughts any more.

Step 3: Snap your palm with a thick rubber band. It is important that you give yourself a good snap! This produces pain which interrupts the scary thought for a moment.

or

Subvocally yell, STOP!!! Also it will help if you visualize a stop sign at this point.

It will also help if you can get angry at your anxiety (not at yourself) at this point.

Step 5: Tell yourself to "get a grip." Then remind yourself that you are prepared for this test.

Repeat this process as often as you need to get control of the anxiety. Although the use of the rubber band is optional, "big" snappers are usually successful in stopping their thoughts.

Handout 6-6

Controlling Your Breathing

When you control your breathing, you signal your body to relax.

Controlling your breathing involves

- breathing no more than 16 times per minute;
- controlling the exhale by pursing your lips; and
- breathing diaphragmatically (from beneath the rib cage)

You can control your breathing using simple techniques. One of these is to count as you breathe as follows:

- As you inhale            1001--1002--1003
- Hold your breath        1001--1002--1003
- Exhale (purse lips)    1001--1002--1003
- Rest (don't breathe)    1001--1002--1003

The result is that you are breathing approximately 5 to 7 times per minute, you are filling your lungs from the bottom, and you are controlling the exhale.

Repeating this process for 5 -7 minutes will eliminate a racing heart, light headedness, most muscle tension, sweaty, palms, etc.

Why does this work? Because, when you breathe slowly, the liver processes the epinephrine (adrenaline) that comes into your blood-stream when you become anxious.

### Relaxing Tense Muscles

#### Introduction

Muscle tension is a normal part of the response to anxiety. In some instances the tension is so intense students feel as though they must get out of their seats and move around. You need to learn to control your muscle tension, not only to give you a sense of control over your body, but also to make you comfortable when you are taking tests

#### Relaxing Tense Muscles

**Step 1:** Identify the muscle that is tense.

**Step 2:** Increase the tension in that muscle and hold the tension for five seconds: 1001----1002----1003----1004----1005.

If you get tension in the following muscle groups you can relax them by using the procedure that was just described. If you get tension in the TMM: Stretch your lower jaw until your lower teeth extend further than your upper teeth.

**Throat:** Place your tongue in the roof of your mouth and push against the roof of your mouth hard as you can.

**Chest:** Pull your shoulders back and try to get your shoulder blades to touch.

**Upper back:** Put your elbows together just over your stomach.

**Muscle under rib cage :** Tuck the loose skin on your stomach (even if you do not have any) under your rib cage (this will cause very mild discomfort)

**Legs:** push your feet out in front of you and raise them a few inches above the floor. Then point your toes away from you.

After 5 seconds, rotate your toes and feet and try to point them at your chin. If it is difficult to raise both feet at once this exercise may be done one leg at time.

**Step 3:** Release the tension while saying subvocally (in your head)---  
RELAX

**Step 4:** Repeat the process until tense muscles are relaxed.

### Plan for Coping with My Test Anxiety

#### Pretest plan - anticipatory anxiety

Prior to a test I have the following symptoms:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
I plan to deal with these symptoms using the following techniques:

#### During the test

During tests I have the following symptoms:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
I plan to deal with these symptoms by using these techniques:

#### Evaluating my plan

I will know if my plan works if my anxiety score is lower or my grades go up

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Test-Taking Strategies

**Multiple Choice Questions**

- Cover answers as you read and try to answer the question without them.
- In many instances, your first impulse is correct. Put a mark by the answer that you first believe to be correct, but read all of the answers.
- Read all answers before deciding.
- Beware of answers that contain words such as *always*, *never*, *totally*, and *completely*. Try to remember if there are exceptions.
- Look for words such as *usually*, *sometimes*, and *frequently*.
- If two answers seem the same, one is probably correct. Study these carefully.
- Make calculated guesses after you have eliminated as many responses as possible.
- Make a mark by the answers that you are unsure of so you can check them later.
- You may get some clues from other test questions.

**True/False Questions**

- Look for words such as *always*, *never*, and *all*. These questions are often false. Questions with *usually* and *frequently* are more likely to be true.
- If the question contains two parts, read both as though they were one statement and remember if any part of a question is false, the entire question is false.
- Remember, double negatives in a sentence equal a positive. The statement, "George Washington was not unconcerned about the battle in Boston," means that he was concerned.
- Guess after you have done your best to recall the answer.
- Mark those answers that you are unsure of so you can come back to them later.
- Don't forget to check answers carefully after you have completed the entire test.

**Matching Questions**

- Read the directions very carefully to determine if items in the answer list can be used more than once.
- Read all questions and answers before you start.
- Look for words and phrases that provide clues to the answer.
- Answer the questions you are certain of first and as quickly as possible. If answers are to be used only once, cross them out as you use them.

- Then answer the questions that you think you know.
- Guess wisely. After you have answered all the questions you are know the answers to, then guess.

**Essay Questions**

- Read the question and ask yourself, "What is the test maker looking for?"
- Always write out a brief outline before you write the answers to either short or long essay questions. This saves time and keeps you from forgetting information as you write.
- If there are several parts to the question, make sure you answer all parts.
- Write legibly and make your points easy to find (e.g., number them).
- Read your answer to make sure you have included everything you know.
- Do not include unneeded information. Individuals scoring the test are not impressed with information that is not related to the question, and they may actually deduct points from your answer.

- I needed to complete when I studied.
- 5. I took breaks to keep fresh.
- 6. I previewed what I was to learn.
- 7. I quizzed myself over material that seemed important.
- 8. I said the things I needed to learn out loud.
- 9. I used memory aids such as Post-it™ notes to help me remember.
- 10. I asked for help when I needed it.

Handwritten notes on lined paper, including a large scribble and the word "ST" written in cursive.

Handout 5-11

The 10 Rules for Test Taking

1. Be prepared. Studying a little each day is the best way to prepare for a test.
2. Involve your ears. Hearing and seeing information will improve your memory.
3. Use memory aids such as flash cards and Post-it™ notes to remind you of facts, definitions, or lists of things that you need to remember.
4. Get a good night's sleep.
5. Eat breakfast.
6. If the test is after lunch, don't overeat.

7. Pace yourself during the test so that you can finish it.
8. Don't panic if there is a question you cannot answer.
9. If there is anything you do not understand about the directions or the test questions, ask the teacher.
10. Never cheat.

Overhead 5-1

A Shorthand System for Taking Notes

Common Words	Dimensions	Measurements
@ = at	wd = width	" = inches
2 = to	ht = height	' = feet
2gthr = together	< = less than	yds = yards
4= for	> = greater than	mi = miles
bef = before	blw = below	k = kilometer
ex = example	abv = above	m = meters
info = information	mnny = many	c = centimeters
p = page		l = liters
v = very		ml = milliliters
w/ = with		= = equal
u = you		
w/o = without		
thru = through		
thru/o = throughout		
----> = conclusion		
sum = in summary		