

LETTING GO OF STRESS, ANXIETY, AND FEAR DURING STUDY AND TEST TAKING

First, not all stress or anxiety is bad. In fact, if you have no stress in your life, one of two things are happening: either you are asleep or you are dead. However, out of control, stress and anxiety are powerful deterrents to effective learning and to successful test taking. The good news is that you have the capability to let go of the negative emotions that keep you from the successes that are yours to achieve.

Below are described ways of letting go of anxieties and stresses. Given first are techniques that are the most immediate and most effective, especially on a short-term basis. That is, the moment you feel emotions of panic or anxiety you can intervene by deciding to apply these techniques. But, you take control only by a conscious choice. These techniques work best, like most other things, through deliberate practice. Through practice, you will be able to let go of the victim-like feelings that too often overcome us when feelings of panic and anxiety want to diminish our brain's capability to use stored memory and thinking power.

BREATHING AND RUSH SICKNESS

First, and this will seem too simple, or you will say, Oh, I've heard this before. Perhaps you have, still, it works. Simply said, you can control at least 85% of all anxiety responses through breath control. Most of us walk around breathing too shallowly which leaves the brain on the edge of oxygen starvation. The anxiety you feel when taking a test is the same anxiety signal the brain launches when you hold your breath for a long time, 60 seconds plus. If you are anxious, your breathing will likely be rapid and shallow. Intercept anxiety by filling your lungs, slowly, deeply from bottom to top, then exhaling, slowly and relaxed. Make deep breathing the normal way you breath. Anxiety will hate it, but the brain and your memory will love you for it.

Second, do away with "rush sickness." By dilberatly slowing down your movements, and your thinking, you will feel anxious feelings die away. You will feel yourself in mental and physical control. Couple this strategy with deep, comfortable breathing. Together they make a great team to lessen anxious, stressful feelings and allow you to learn better and keep your studied memories alive during tests. Practice slowed down thinking. You will sense greater thought power. The same goes for writing and reading. The instant you feel jerky movements in your writing or your reading begins to skip---pause, slow, slow, slow down. Quit the rushed feeling. That kind of hurry kills the brain's ability to form and keep memory.

Through deep, slow, controlled breathing and also, letting go of rush sickness, your thinking will be enhanced and you will be able to study more effectively, more relaxed, and with greater confidence. On tests, your memory will be stronger and focused on the **now** of the test rather than the "what ifs" created by anxiety.

OTHER WAYS TO ANXIETY PROOF YOURSELF

As you study, pay attention to emotions. When studying is going particularly well, spend time exploring how you feel physically as well as mentally. Remember the “feel” of that time and try to create that feeling each time you study or take a quiz or do a practice test. Then, when the test comes, recreate that feeling and take it into the test with you.

Avoid playing negative outcomes in your mind. Don’t prophesy that you are going to do poorly on the test because_____. The brain does not deal well with negative information coming from you. Focus, instead, on reasons why you plan to do well, and study and work with that “in mind.”

Make your practice and your learning as good as you can. Test your knowledge often. Be deeply honest and ethical about your progress and about your knowledge level. Do not kid yourself. Take the time and make the effort you need. Too often the tendency is to under estimate how much time and effort it takes to truly master subject matter. **Under**-preparedness is a key reason for anxiety during a test.

When you study, BE IN THE NOW MOMENT. You know you are living in the now when what you are doing flows, is enjoyable, does not drain your emotions, nor does what you are doing feel like physical drain. All of this does not mean that what you are attempting is simple nor does it mean that you have full understanding. It means that you are focused deeply on study or on the test and that you are not allowing past negatives to nag you nor are you thinking future possible “what ifs.” These tend to build anxiety and cut you away from your natural gift to learn and lessen your ability to apply well what you have learned during a test.

You cannot force concentration or being in the now. As soon as you say, I am now concentrating, you are not. Permit yourself to be interested or drawn into the ideas, the topic, or process at hand. Then, the brain will do what it does well: learn well and, yes, do well on tests—without anxiety.

Study and practice for each class everyday. Cut study times into shorter sessions but do them more often. Rather than one two hour session, which will drain you unless you love the subject, split the two hours into perhaps four, thirty minute sessions. This will allow the brain to grow the dendrites needed for learning. You will be surprised how much more you learn in the same total length of time. Also, you will feel less anxiety and stress. The added number of learning/practice times will better prepare you for tests.

Have a powerful dream, the why or reason you are doing what you are doing. Keep that dream, the why of your learning in mind, especially during difficult or challenging times. If your dream is strong and compelling, you are equipped to step beyond the challenges or disappointments to personal success. The anxieties and stresses will be drown out by your dream. It is a paradox, but your dream will allow you to live in the NOW moment, to enjoy the journey, moment by moment, moving from one new challenge to the next.

TEN GENERAL STEPS TO LESSEN STRESS AND ANXIETY

1. Set realistic expectations—think time needed, think level of existing skills matched against your expectations.
2. Exercise regularly—aerobic, weight training, stretching. In years past when the work people did was physically intensive, they dealt little with the emotions we call stress and anxiety.
3. Get plenty of rest/sleep. We underestimate how much rest we need. A good wholesome eight hours each night will go a long way to diminish stress and anxiety.
4. Plan ahead, prepare with time to spare because learning and test preparation almost always demands more time, practice, and persistence than we think.
5. Take breaks throughout the day. You will be more positive and you will learn better.
6. Learn how to relax and do it at regular intervals. Relaxation and meditation will make a profound difference in ways too numerous to mention. Just do it and see.
7. Watch your caffeine intake. Too much can cause jitters or increase anxiety.
8. Go for a balanced life. Work and study, we must; but leisure is key to being happy and successful with work and study.
9. Laugh, make time for friends. But be honest to your dream , too. Acknowledge your commitment to it, but not at the expense of living each moment. Stay in the moment. And that means be in the moment whether you are laughing or studying or....whatever the moment is supposed to be.
10. Be willing to share your feelings. When we are locked up inside ourselves, it will do anything but reduce our feelings of anxiety and stress, or any other negative feelings. It also is good to share happiness and joy. It builds those feelings even bigger and better. However, if after you feel you have done all you are able to do and still anxiety, fear, stress, or other negative emotions continue to build, seek professional help. Getting help is neither a sign of weakness, nor a sign of giving up. It is just plain smart.

SOURCES

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