Test / Exam Stress and Anxiety

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Just so you know…

• If you get worried about exam:
  – You are not alone
  – Most students experience test anxiety to some degree
  – Adrenaline can be your friend
  – Knowing a few tricks can keep anxiety or stress to a minimum
How does stress affect us?

- **Cognitive:**
  - Blanking out, racing thoughts, etc.

- **Emotional:**
  - Irritable, frustration, crying, etc.

- **Physiological:**
  - Headaches, nausea, stomach upset, etc.

- **Behavioural:**
  - Fidgeting, pacing, sleeplessness, etc.
Some Stress Responses

- Lack of energy
- Headache/migraine
- Insomnia/fatigue
- Muscle ache
- Digestive upset
- Skin rash
- Increased sweating
- Withdraw socially
- Drug/alcohol

- Eating or not
- Irritable/emotional
- Distrust
- Anger/hopelessness
- Self critical
- Worrying and anxiety
- Forgetfulness and confusion
- Depression
- Relationship conflicts
With any perceived threat, the stress reaction is triggered and hormones then flow.
Test Anxiety Cycle
Reduce Test/Exam Stress & Anxiety

• Be aware
• Develop good study habits and strategies
  – Take a step-by-step approach to build strategies & not get overwhelmed
• Manage your time
  – Address procrastination and distractions
• Exercise regularly
• Value regular sleep
• Make healthy food/diet choices
• Review your past performance on tests/exams to improve and learn from experience
• Try relaxation strategies
Before the Test

– Keep things in perspective and understand the power of your thoughts

– Be prepared. Learn the material thoroughly and organize what materials (pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc.) you will need for the test. Double check the time and location of the test/exam. Use a checklist.

– Approach the test/exam with confidence. Use strategies you can to personalize success (visualization, logic, talking to yourself, practice, team work, journaling, etc.)

– Allow yourself plenty of time, especially to do things you need to do before the test and still get there a little early

– Avoid thinking you need to cram just before the test. Use this time to relax, catch your breath and get focused. Cramming will likely confuse you just before a test/exam.
Before the Test

– Set an alarm to wake up and get a good night’s sleep the night before the test/exam

– Don’t go to the test/exam with an empty stomach; fresh fruit and vegetables are recommended to reduce stress.

– Expect some anxiety. It is a reminder you want to do your best and it can provide energy. Just keep it manageable.

– Be cautious about talking to peers about the material just before going into the exam, especially if this will make you more anxious

– Engage in ‘thought stopping’ if you find that you are worrying a lot
Resources

• Science Daily website, http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/11/121121145400.htm

• University of Windsor website, http://www1.uwindsor.ca/nutrition/2012-10-23/healthy-eating-tips-for-exams

• Wilfred Laurier University website, http://www.thecord.ca/talking-mental-health-self-care-during-exams/

• BBC International website, http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/eating-exams

• University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign website, http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/self-help-brochures/academic-difficulties/test-anxiety/

• University of Florida website, https://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/test-anxiety.aspx