

Test Anxiety: Sweaty Palms and Upset Stomach

Introduction

You walk into the classroom and you glance at the perfectly straight rows of desk. On the desk there lies your doom! The test is waiting for you as you begin the exam. All of the sudden you start to have “butterflies” in your stomach and a wave of nausea rushes through you. Either you have the flu or symptoms that contribute to test anxiety. Test anxiety is a psychological illness that affects everyone from third graders in elementary school to seniors in a prestigious college. The overview of test anxiety, causes, treatment, side effects, and ways to reduce the anxiety is contributing to the overwhelming amount of people who acquire test anxiety.

What is Test Anxiety?

Test Anxiety is a psychological disorder that comes from taking exams and having a hard time concentrating on them (Cherry). Test anxiety comes from different sources, including poor study habits, past performances on tests and overall anxiety towards

exams (Cherry). Even if it is the easiest part of the test, one starts to get nervous and falls apart. Results in test anxiety can ruin test performances and damage the person’s learning capacity. Some nerves are helpful in taking tests because one can stay alert and

on top of their game, however extreme fear can lead to not remembering answers on your test.

Also, it will be hard for you to concentrate on the assessment. Test anxiety falls into the

performance anxiety category (Cherry). This means that when the pressure is on to pass the exam



(Figure 1) This cartoon shows what kinds of circumstances people will go through to not take exams. (cartoonstock.com)

a person becomes unable to do their finest. Other examples of performance anxiety include basketball players who become nervous before an important game or a violin student who becomes anxious before their recital. Test anxiety impedes not only academic testing but sports, musical performances, actors and speakers (Cherry).



(Figure 2) Panic attacks are one side effect from having test anxiety. This is a serious side effect for people who have test anxiety. (qualityhealthguides.com)

Even though the test taker is confident with the material and comprehends the information, their anxiety overcomes them and impairs their ability to perform (Cherry). The seriousness of test anxiety can range from

person to person. A young girl might have “butterflies” in her stomach while a teenage boy might become nauseous. The worst is when people become prone to panic attacks and a racing heartbeat.

What are the causes of test anxiety?

Different causes are the reasons people have test anxiety. What it boils down to is biological differences in the body. The anxiety interferes with the thinking process and causes symptoms to happen like upset stomachs, and muscles tightening up (Osband). This causes the brain to not retain information. Test anxiety can come from biological, hormonal, chemical, or muscular changes in the body (Education.com). Thinking processes such as remembering, problem solving, and inference skills can become disturbed by the human body. As more anxiety is building and the brain is overwhelmed, it shuts down completely. Thinking ahead to the test date also has an impact on the brain. This is called the mental state. For example, a fifteen year old boy is preparing for a geometry test on Monday. He already has the mind set he is going to

perform poorly on the examination and fails to not study for the test. This person has emotional reaction consistent with that expectation.

Avoidance or procrastination is another cause of test anxiety. People shy away from studying until the last minute and begin to worry about not studying enough.

Cramming can lead to one's brain scrambling to find the

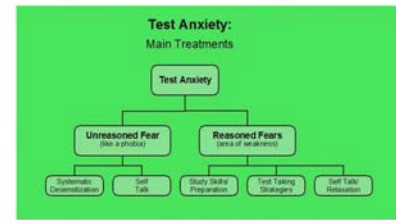
right information for that text. This "vicious cycle" continues until your brain is overloaded with information. The main cause of test anxiety is the factor of focusing on not passing. The stronger the feeling the more anxiety you will have (Natural Remedies). In the back of your mind there is that feeling of fear and not passing the exam. The head becomes filled with those negative thoughts that distract you from passing. In the end there is an increase of not performing well on the test.

What types of treatments are being used?

Parents and teachers are concerned with the rising rate of test anxiety. They want to help the students in any way possible to help them get relaxed before an arduous exam. Becoming prone to test situations may not cure the anxiety completely because some students are just not prepared to take exams (Osband). They need study skills to help them get through the test.

According to Ergene, it is important to assess academic preparation and test anxiety before finding a program. Successful test performances began with study skill tips and lowering the emotions in testing areas. Desensitization was one of the first treatments in test anxiety research (Education.com). It uses relaxing tips and increased levels of aversive stimulus. Researchers

Types of Test Anxiety



(Figure 3) This web chart depicts the breakdown of test anxiety. The chart shows the levels of two types of fears of test anxiety.

(mun.ca)

have studied and come up with two models to test anxiety research: the inference model and the skills deficit model

(Birenbaum). The inference model says that students become stricken with self doubt and become bothered about the test thus forgetting the information. The other model is the skills deficit model; it is different in that the anxiety comes before the test. The test taker becomes

insufficient in their performance before the test and then becomes worried. The skills deficit model is all about the persons emotions that turn into awareness for not being prepared for the exam (Birenbaum).

Another treatment that is increasing is in the field of test anxiety are the medications people use to calm their anxiety. The medication for test anxiety people is similar to what people take when men and women have anxiety. People should be careful deciding what type of medication they need. Conventional prescription medication is the route most people use when finding treatment (Natural Remedies). Natural Remedies can be the most helpful for people who have test anxiety. The remedies are a “no side effect” way to get better. Maintaining the brain and the nervous system can help the overall treatment (Natural Remedies).

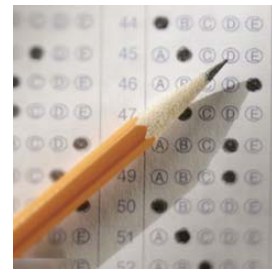
What are the mental side effects to test anxiety?

People with test anxiety have a mental side effect to the problem. The most important factor is thinking positive about the exam. Motivated words and letters are helpful in getting the test taker calm and collected. The student expectation on the exam is what can lead them forward or backwards to passing the test. If a student believes he/she will do badly then chances are they will become more anxious and not do well (Cherry). The students go through a lot of pressure

(Figure 4) This picture is a type of medication that patients with test anxiety can use to calm the nerves. (nativeremedies.com)



when experiencing test anxiety. They begin to feel like their not living up to expectations. They typically are the type of people who put a great deal pressure on themselves to do well and are perfectionist (Natural Remedies). Being great students in the past, many experience low self esteem and perform badly (Osband). The testers may find it difficult to accept the mistakes they have made in the past or strive to get nothing less than an “A” paper (Natural remedies). Studying is put off until the last minute and thus becomes that vicious cycle. Self- doubts and irrational beliefs result before the big test. Females are more prone to test anxiety than males are (Cassidy). People that have test anxiety become more worried about the anxiety than the test itself. It distracts the test taker and they become divided from the test requirements and the worry they have from the test (Jing Chen). This causes a negative outcome.



What can you do to reduce your test anxiety?

Reducing the test anxiety in a student can lead to a positive outcome. Parents, teachers, and friends can help their student in countless ways. Positive outlooks and encouraging their efforts can help them feel good about themselves (Education.com). Other ways that are beneficial to the student is to reiterate their strengths. Repeating their assets of good memory and their sense of comprehension can uplift their spirits before a hard exam. Tell them that the poor test scores do not show what a person is worth, but the scores show the educational performance (Education.com).

(Figure 5) Multiple choice testing is a kind of test that students can get stumped on and have testing issues.
(family.go.com)

Conclusion

Test anxiety affects everyday people. The overview of test anxiety, causes, treatment, side effects, and ways to reduce the anxiety is contributing to the overwhelming amount of people who acquire test anxiety. From this research test anxiety is a true illness that anyone can get before, during, or after an exam.

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