

EXAM ANXIETY



Exam anxiety (fear of taking a test of one's ability, skill, or knowledge) can be a debilitating condition for school and university students and may have serious consequences for one's future goals.

Some people will have sleepless nights prior to a test. Others may find they feel nauseous before and/or during an exam or have full blown panic attacks. Some students are so stressed before and/or during assessments that they find their mind goes blank and they can't think/recall information.

Some students will be stressed because they fear failing, whereas others will be stressed because they fear not living up to their own, or others' high expectations.

SOME TIPS FOR COPING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

Don't stay up late studying the night before a test. Being tired will negatively impact on your judgement, concentration and memory.

Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine prior to an exam as these will exacerbate your anxiety.

Do some form of relaxation prior to the test. You may find it helpful to do some form of aerobic exercise such as jogging or power walking on the morning of the assessment. Meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and/or slow breathing may also be helpful.

Learn a relaxation technique that you can do whilst in the examination room, such as slow breathing and/or progressive muscle relaxation.

Do practice exams to accustom yourself to the test environment and the expectations of the examiner. VCE and university students should be able to access past papers, and VCE students may be able to access examiner's reports, which will give them insight into how they are expected to answer questions.

SLOW BREATHING TO DECREASE ANXIETY AND PANIC

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Many anxiety sufferers breathe too fast and shallow. When confronted with a feared scenario they breathe rapidly which leads to increased shortness of breath and further hyperventilation.

SOME SYMPTOMS OF HYPERVENTILATION

- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Lump in the throat
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Choking sensation
- Difficulty swallowing
- Racing heart
- Shaking
- Blurred vision
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Disorientation
- Tingly sensations or numbness in the hands, feet and mouth

People who chronically breathe too fast tend to sigh often, take deep breaths and feel short of breath.

Slow breathing can relieve anxiety and prevent you from having a panic attack, if you do it as soon as you notice yourself overbreathing or becoming anxious. Socially phobic and panicky people are advised to slow their breathing before tackling a feared situation or at any time they feel anxious.

When you are first learning this breathing relaxation exercise you may find it easiest to practice lying flat on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor and eight inches apart. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen.

Hold your breath and count to 10
Then breathe out and think 'relax' to yourself

Then inhale slowly through your nose for 3 seconds. The hand on your abdomen should rise whilst the hand on your chest should stay relatively still.

Then exhale through your mouth for three seconds, making a whooshing noise as you breathe out. Think "RELAX" as you exhale. The hand on your abdomen should fall as you exhale.

After a minute of breathing in and out in a six second cycle, hold your breath again for 10 seconds
Keep repeating this process for 5 minutes.

Once you feel you have mastered the technique lying down, then start practicing slow breathing whilst sitting or standing. Then you will be able to do slow breathing to relax yourself wherever you are in public.

Do this deep breathing for 20 minutes a day and any time when you feel yourself becoming anxious. Depending upon your commitments you might need to break up your 20 minutes during the day into 4 x 5 minutes relaxation segments or 2 x 10 minute relaxation segments.

Breathing exercises can help with a variety of anxiety issues such as a fear of public speaking, however they are only part of the work needed to cure anxiety. Contact our St Bede's College Wellbeing team for an initial appointment and coping techniques. In severe cases a referral to an external professional may be advised.

<http://www.anxietyaustralia.com.au/treatment-options/slow-breathing-to-decrease-anxiety-and-panic/>

Another breathing exercise is demonstrated on the link below.

<https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/>