

Test Anxiety Relaxation

Stop, Drop, and Roll Technique. The moment a student physically feels the "fire" of anxiety and stress, begin the student should **stop**, put their pencils down, and place their hands on their desks, while concentrating on the coolness of the surface; **drop** their heads forward; and **roll** their heads gently while taking three deep breaths. (try practicing while classical music is playing in the background)

Tips for Students

Practice the neutral tool: When you have uncomfortable feelings about whether you will do well on the test, practice the neutral tool. It's important to catch negative mind loops that reinforce self-doubt or uncomfortable feelings. Every time you catch a negative thought repeating itself, stop the loop and practice going to neutral. Start by focusing on the area around your heart. This helps to take the focus off the mind loop. Then breathe deeply. Breathe as if your breath is flowing in and out through the center of your chest. Breathe quietly and naturally, four-five seconds on the in-breath, and four-five seconds on the out-breath. While you're breathing, try and find an attitude of calmness about the situation. Do this in the days leading up to the test, right before and during the test.

Address the what-if questions: A lot of times before we have to do something like take a test, much of the anxiety we feel is a build-up from negative "what-if" thoughts. What if I fail, what if I can't remember anything, or what if I run out of time. Try writing a what-if question that is positive and can help you take the big deal out of the situation and begin to see things in a different way. Examples of these kinds of questions are, "What if I can remember more than I think I can?" "What if I can feel calmer than I think I can?"

Think good thoughts: Science is showing that good feelings like appreciation can actually help your brain work better. When you feel nervous or anxious, try this. You can do it as many times as you need to or want to. Remember something that makes you feel good. Maybe it is your pet or how you felt when you got a big hug from your mom, or how you felt after a super fun day at the amusement park with your friends. After you remember how you felt, hold that feeling. Pretend you are holding it in your heart. Let yourself feel that feeling for 10-20 seconds or more. It's important to let yourself really feel that good feeling all over again. Practice this tool right before the big test.

Get enough sleep: Big tests require a lot of energy and stamina to be able to focus for several hours. Make sure you get at least eight-10 hours of sleep the night before the test.

Have fun: Do something fun the night before to take your mind off the test, like see a movie, play a board game with your family or participate in a sports activity. That way your mind and emotions are more relaxed in the time leading up to the test.

Eat a hearty breakfast: The brain needs a lot of energy to maintain focus on a big test for several hours. Eat a hearty and healthy breakfast, including complex carbohydrates and protein to make your energy last as long as possible. Foods such as eggs, cereal and whole-wheat toast help energize your brain to think more clearly and much longer compared with the fast-disappearing bolt of energy from drinking a soda pop or eating a cookie for breakfast. For a snack food, bring simple foods such as peanut butter and crackers, cheese and crackers or a burrito to sustain energy until lunch.

Practicing these tools in advance of and during a test can help students limit test anxiety and perform even better on their school work.