

How to Handle Test Anxiety

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Nursing School is Scary!

- High stakes:
 - Time
 - Money
 - Emotional effort
- 24/7 commitment precludes other activities
 - Isolation
 - Worry

Recognize the Stressors

- Time is limited
- Prep Time:
 - Your brain can handle only so much at a time, then it needs a rest
 - Your body, too
- Testing time limits:
 - 72 seconds per item (NCLEX)
 - 60 in nursing school (except math – 120)

Accept What You Cannot Change

- Life Skill – it's no use wasting time thinking about things you cannot change
- Focus on the future
- Focus on what you have control over
- Promise yourself you will develop good mental habits

Understand the Problem

- Test anxiety is a response to a perceived threat
- Fight or Flight
- Our bodies cannot tell the difference between a psychosocial threat and a physical one
 - Sabre-toothed tiger
 - Car wreck
 - Loss of a romantic partner
 - Loss of a chance at a job

Recognize the Symptoms

- Preparing for the Test
 - Loss of focus while studying
 - Sleep disturbances
- During the Test
 - Nausea
 - Sweaty palms
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Difficulty remembering

Self-Regulation



Think About Your Last Test

- Anxious before you began the test?
- Upset tummy?
- Sinking in your seat?
- Heart rate elevated?
- Difficulty focusing?
- Fidgeting (inability to sit still)

Anxiety Reduction

- Lean back in the chair and take a deep breath (diaphragmatic breathing)
- Eat something
- Mantra (positive self-talk)
- Relaxation exercises
 - Physical
 - Mental
- Visualize success (guided imagery)

Successful People

- Practice self-regulation
- Use positive self-talk
- Breathe
- Find their calming center

Self-Reflection Takes Time

- Pause a moment
- Consider: What is working well?
- Consider: What is not working well?
- Keep doing what is working
- How can you change what is not working?



Plan to Improve Each Time

- Reflect about each test
- Identify any barriers and make a plan to remove them
- Meet with your study group or instructor to go over the items you missed
- Review/remediate each question

Study Environment

- Did you have any noise around you?
- Did you have your phone on?
- Did you surf the Web?
- Did you drink at the computer desk?
- Did you eat at the computer desk?
- Did you use your “Please Do Not Disturb” sign?

Do You Change Answers?

- How many times did you change your answer from correct to incorrect?
- What patterns are you able to identify?
- Unless you misread the question – go with your gut

Is Timing an Issue?

- Do you see a correlation between how long you stayed on a question and whether you answered it correctly or incorrectly?
- Did you run out of time?
- Keep an eye on the clock
- Two minute rule – pick one and move on

Timing Suggestions

- Once you eliminate an answer, do not go back.
- Ask whether the information you are thinking about is actually in the question.
- Note how often you know the correct answer but you don't choose it.
- Pat yourself on the back and have confidence in your answers.

How to Build Confidence

- We gain confidence by being successful
- Practice makes perfect
- Taking risks shows us what we can do and what we need to work on
- Listen to constructive criticism and ignore the unconstructive kind

R-E-S-P-E-C-T !

- Nursing is the most trusted profession
- Be proud of your choice
- Commit to lifelong learning, integrity, and constant progress
- Post your goals
 - Short-term
 - Intermediate term
 - Long-term