

Academic Support & Counseling and
Wellness Services Presents

A MED STUDENT'S GUIDE TO TEST TAKING:

TIPS &
STRATEGIES
FOR SUCCESS

What is the talk
about?

Test Taking Strategies
How to cope with anxiety
How to Develop a testing mindset
Self Care
Resources & Support

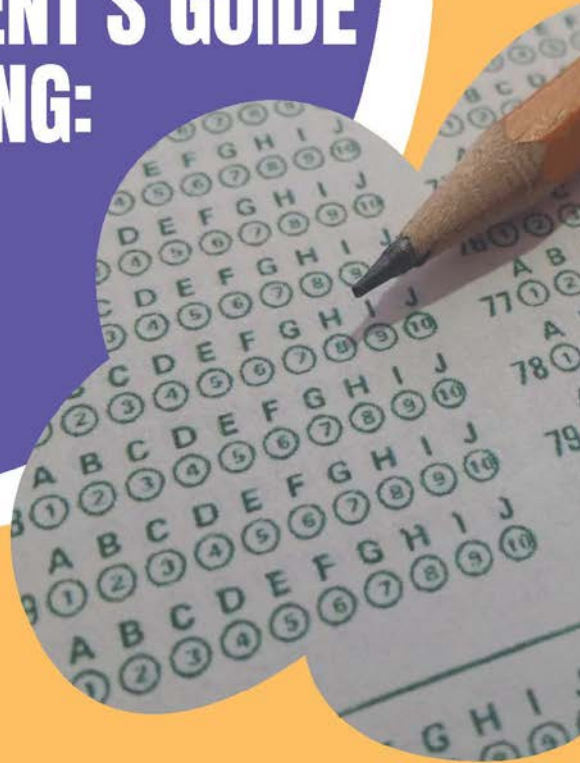
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Health Sciences Building T639

W
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

***Refreshments provided**



A MED STUDENT'S GUIDE TO TEST TAKING: TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



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INSTRUCTIONS FOR Q&A AND CHAT

- The speakers will not have the ability to review the chat during the presentation
- Questions from the chat will be reviewed at the end of the presentation
- Feel free to use the chat throughout the presentation
- Ask or type any burning questions at the end of the presentation
- Thank you!

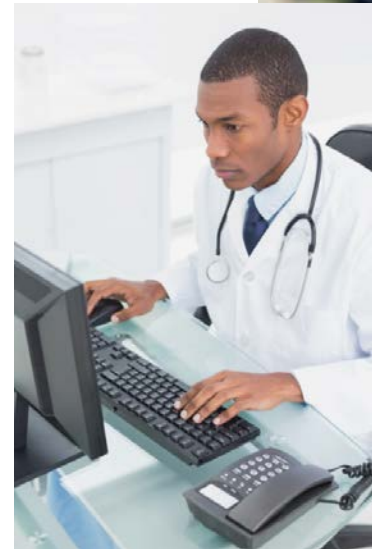
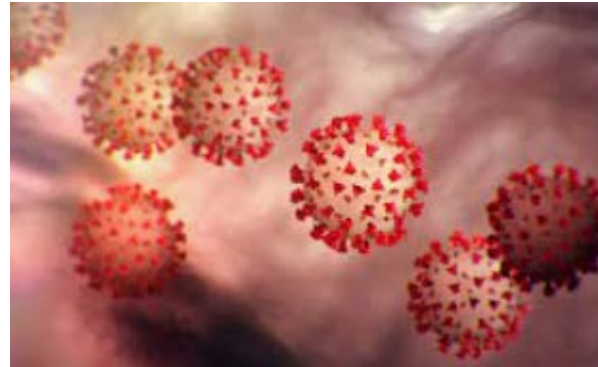
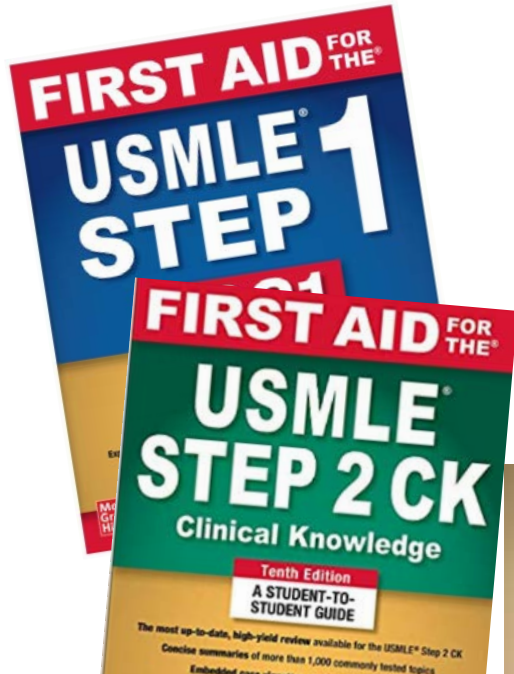


ANXIETY & STRESS IN MEDICAL SCHOOL

- Medical school is stressful, and there's no easy way around it.
- With endless amounts of content to learn and relearn; board exams; and rapidly changing clinical duties, the day-to-day can be exhausting.
- Add on family obligations, the uncertainty of COVID-19, maintaining some semblance of a social life, caring for pets, getting an occasional workout in, managing extracurriculars, doing research.....
- Suddenly, you've got yourself an overflowing plate!

ANXIETY & STRESS IN MEDICAL SCHOOL

- So much to do, so little time!



ANXIETY

- The American Psychological Association (APA) defines anxiety as “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”
- All anxiety is a reaction to anticipating something stressful. Like other anxiety reactions, test anxiety affects the body and the mind. **When you're under stress, your body releases the hormone adrenaline, which prepares it for danger** (you may hear this referred to as the "fight or flight" reaction)
- Knowing the difference between normal feelings of anxiety and when it is something more serious can be done with the help of a professional such as a physician or therapist.
- Under the broader category of anxiety, a student may experience challenges related to perfectionism, performance anxiety, test anxiety and imposter syndrome.

PERFECTIONISM

-
- Perfectionism is often seen as a positive trait that increases your chances of success
 - It is defined as the need to be or appear to be perfect.
 - It can lead to self-defeating thoughts or behaviors, cause stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.
 - This may stem from feelings of inadequacy or failure
 - It may be helpful to speak with a therapist

“Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be your best. Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgement, and shame. It’s a shield. It’s a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from flight.”

— Brené Brown, [The Gifts of Imperfection](#)

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

- Performance anxiety refers to a fear about one's ability to perform a specific task.
- You may worry about failing a task before it has even begun.
- Performing before others may make you feel vulnerable.
- You may fear that a mistake will damage your reputation and make you seem less than perfect or capable.



TEST ANXIETY

-
- Feeling nervous for exams is a normal feeling among college students.
 - However, extreme feelings of anxiety and stress before and during an exam can have unhealthy results.
 - Test anxiety is a combination of physical symptoms and emotional reactions that interfere with your ability to perform well on tests.
 - Many students experience varying levels of test anxiety for several different reasons.
 - Anxiety can be problematic when it prevents you from taking or doing your best on an exam, causes you to feel anxious all the time, or becomes extreme.

In a survey of 1st and 2nd year medical students (N=200) from a medical college in Asia, factors contributing to test anxiety include:

inadequate rest
(89%),

irrational thoughts
(67.50%),

excessive course
load (60%),

inadequate study
(44%).



Remarkably, researchers have surmised that other, seemingly related issues including lack of exercise and poor nutrition are the **result** of test anxiety as opposed being contributing factors.

Source: Prevalence of examination related anxiety in a private medical college. J AYUB MED COLL ABBOTTABAD 2013; 25(1-2) – Khan AN; Rasool SA; Sultan A; and Tahira I.

Impacts of test anxiety and test performance

“Test anxiety is modestly inversely correlated with USMLE step-1 scores.”

GREEN M, ANGOFF N, ENCANDELA J. TEST ANXIETY AND UNITED STATES MEDICAL LICENSING EXAMINATION SCORES. CLIN TEACH. 2016;13:142–146. [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1111/TCT.12386](https://doi.org/10.1111/TCT.12386).
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IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

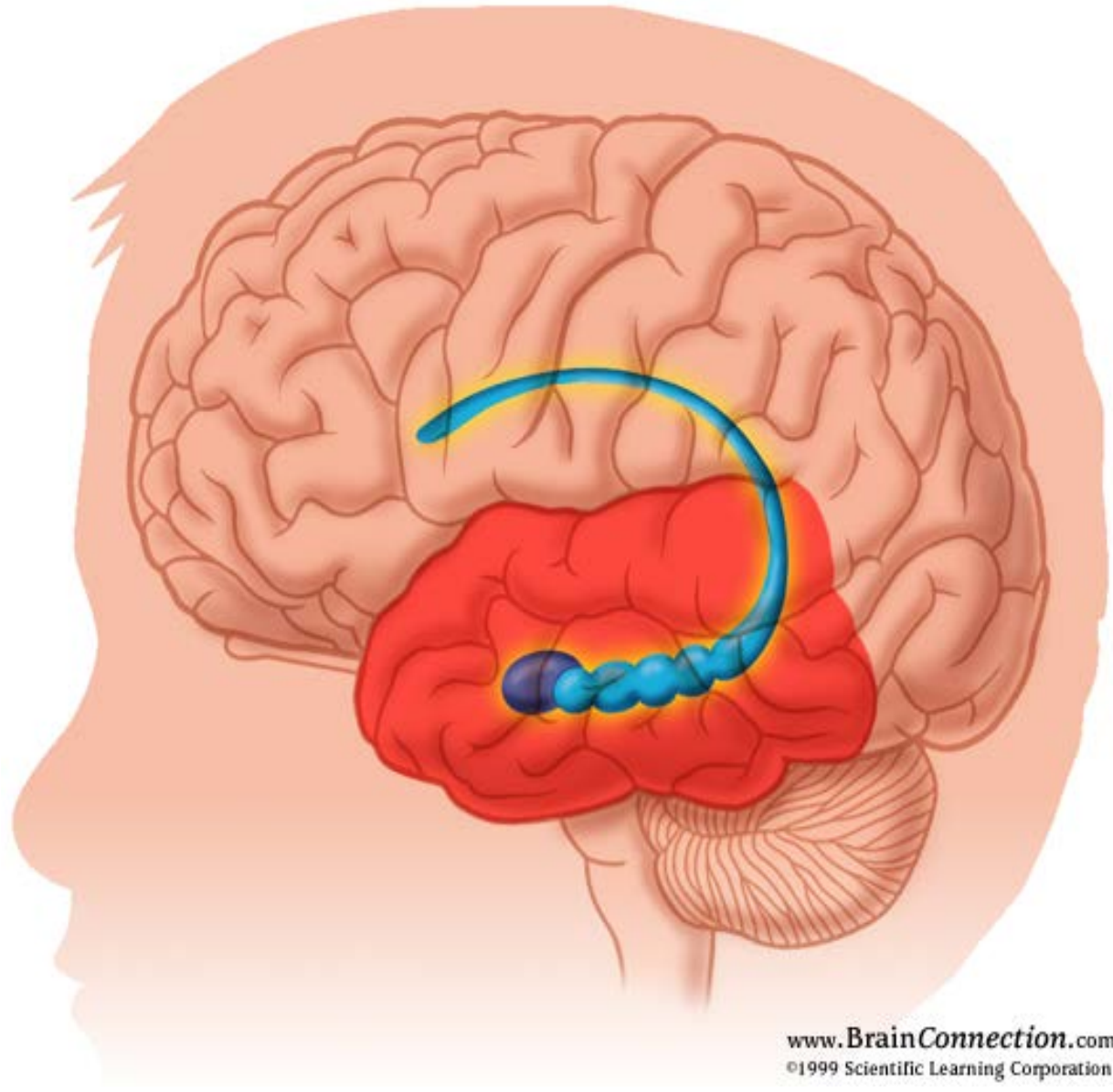
- Impostor syndrome (also known as impostor phenomenon) occurs when an individual doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud".
- External evidence of their competence does not lessen how they feel.



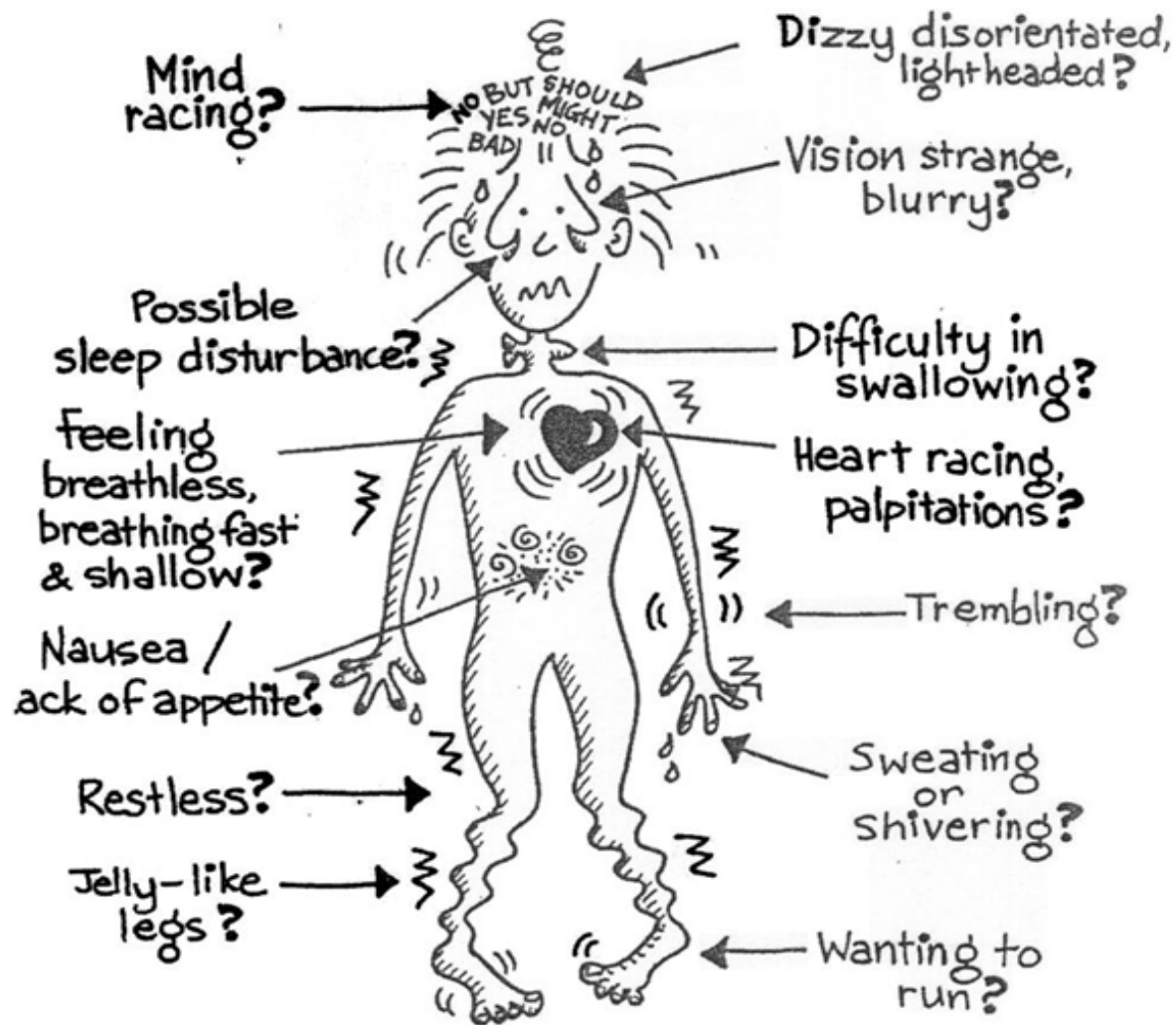
Source: Wikipedia

Brice

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM ACTIVATION IN RESPONSE TO A PERCEIVED THREAT



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COMMON PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

HOW DO WE EMOTIONALLY EXPERIENCE ANXIETY?



SYMPTOMS & REAL IMPLICATIONS

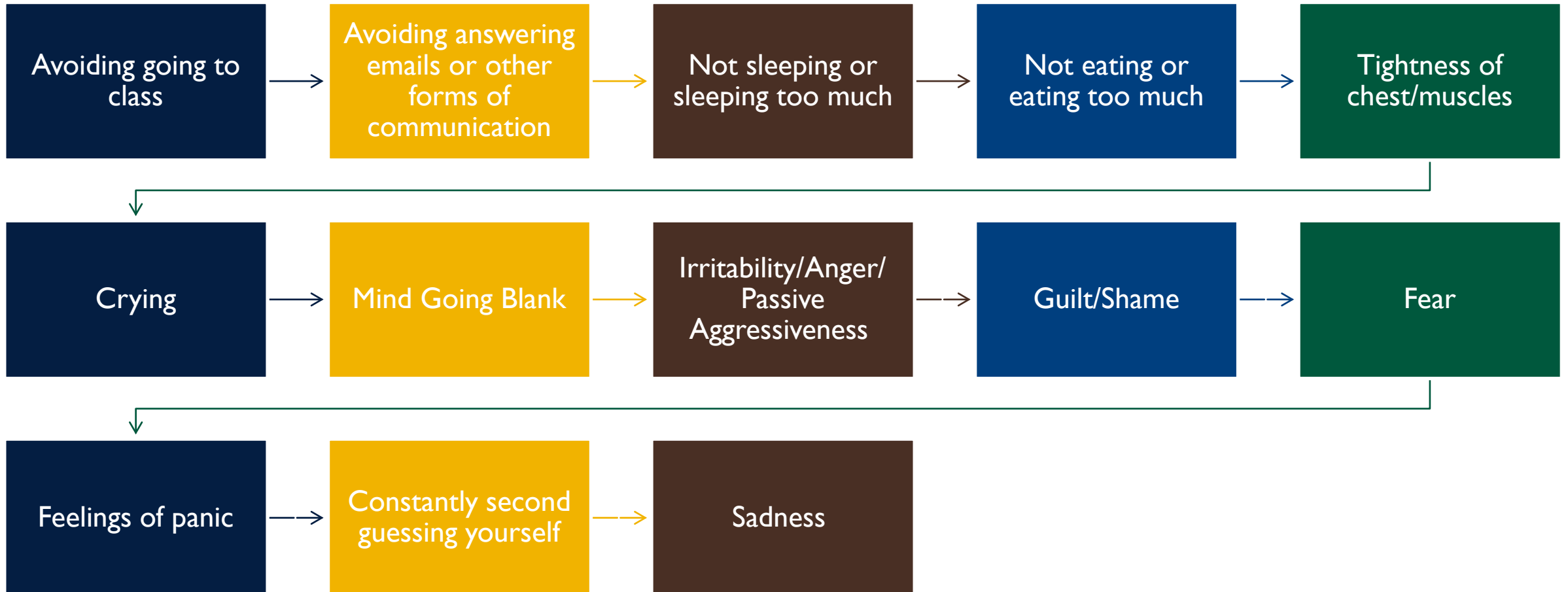
Physiological

- Insomnia
- Tense Muscles
- Hypertension/High Blood Pressure
- Fatigue
- Sweating
- Gastrointestinal Problems
- Increased Heart Rate
- Trembling

Psychological

- Impaired Processing Speed
- Avoidance
- Increased Doubt
- Rumination/Racing Thoughts
- Mind Fog / Blanking
- Disorganization
- Sadness
- Shame
- Fear

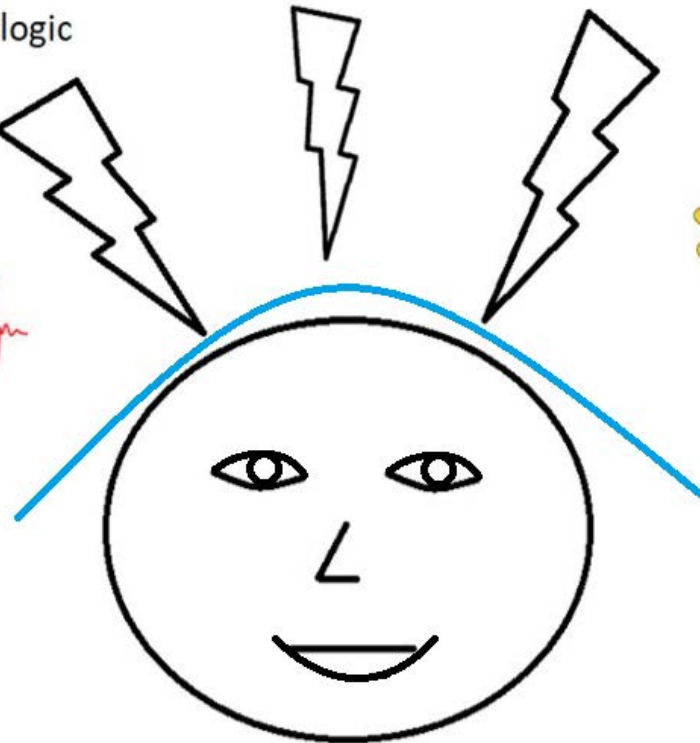
WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE FOR ME?





Negative thoughts

Physiologic



A row of light bulbs hanging from above. The bulbs are drawn in a simple, sketchy style. Most are unlit, shown in white outlines against a dark background. One bulb, positioned towards the right side of the frame, is glowing with a bright yellow light, indicated by several short, radiating lines around its base. A solid purple rectangular block is on the left side of the image, containing the text.

TECHNIQUES, STRATEGIES & SKILLS

PROACTIVE TECHNIQUES

Physical activities: yoga, tai chi, working out

Thought stopping

Cognitive restructuring

- Reframe it (this is a challenge vs. this is a threat)



Worry

Worry Time

- Set aside daily Worry Time for 10 minutes.

Record

Record yourself / write through your worries.

- Do not think about any positive alternatives, only the negative ones...
- Attempt to become as anxious as possible while worrying.

Continue

Continue to the end of each worry period, even if you run out of ideas and have to repeat the same worries over again.

Let go

At the end of ten minutes, let go of those worries with deep breaths, then return to other activities.

Go back and notice

At the end of the week, go back and notice any patterns or repetitions.



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

- Try to recreate the environment

- Try practice questions in a similar environment
- Try waking up at the same time
- Practice driving to the testing site
 - What did that feel like?
 - What can I try differently?
 - How was my timing?

For School exams, you can try doing practice questions in a lecture hall or at the Health Sciences Library

For USMLE Exams, you can do a practice test at Prometric

WAYS TO IMPROVE IN PERSON TESTING PERFORMANCE

- Be prepared – Arrive early, know the room number, get your testing space set up
- Dress for success – Wear comfortable clothing and layers
- Use skills and strategies in the moment to calm down
 - Deep Breathing
 - Pause and take a moment if you need to
- Be aware of your own timing; Find your flow
- Avoid Distractions (Classmates, Noises, etc.)
 - Baseball Stadium Analogy

**Familiar questions
first**

**Mark
challenging/longer
questions & come
back**

**When you're done
you're done!**

TTT:TEST TRIAGE TECHNIQUE

TEST-TAKING TECHNIQUES

BETHE ROBOT!

- Assembly line – think like a robot; don't overheat the machine
- Test strategies
 - What are they looking for?
 - Gather evidence
 - What are they looking for?
 - Answer in your head
 - Find the best answer



TEST TAKING TIPS

- Narrow your choices down by eliminating obviously wrong answers which are almost identical.
- Try to decide what the answer to the question is **before** you read all choices.
- Be sure to read all answers before selecting one. Sometimes two answers will be similar and only one will be correct. Find the BEST choice.
- Do not be afraid to change an answer if you feel strongly about it.
- Do not be discouraged if you cannot answer a question. Flag it and move on.
 - You may find the answer or clues to the answer in subsequent questions.
 - It may come to you later
- Beware of questions with “no”, “not”, and “none.” These words easily change the meaning of questions.



ANALYZE YOUR TESTING BEHAVIOR

- If you feel that you don't do well on tests, it's important to find out why.
- Identify the problem area so that you can work to improve your test-taking skills.

ANALYZE YOUR TESTING BEHAVIOR, CONTINUED

- **Information Gap** - I don't remember encountering this material at all or I glossed over it or did not have it in my notes.
- **Retention Gap** - I studied this but could not call it up from memory.
- **Misinterpretation of Information** - I incorrectly understood the information when I initially read the text or heard it in lecture.
- **Synthesis Gap** - I did not make connections between pieces of information.
- **General Vocabulary Gap** - I did not know the correct meaning or assumed an incorrect meaning of general vocabulary.
- **Jumping to Conclusions** - I did not fully consider all the responses.
- **Rushed Response** - I did not have time to consider the question carefully.
- **Over/Under Generalization** - I eliminated too much or did not eliminate enough.
- **Misreading** - I made errors in reading the question or response.
- **Miskeying** - I knew the correct answer but copied the wrong response on the answer sheet.

CREATING AN ADAPTIVE TESTING MINDSET

-
- Once a plan encounters a challenge it will often not survive, which requires adaptation and sometimes improvisation.
 - When you encounter resistance/difficulties, simplify your approach
 - Regroup
 - Reframe
 - Recharge
 - Minimize and actively address doubt.
 - Doubt is paralyzing
 - Paradox is you CANNOT positive self-talk your way out of it
 - Must act to overcome



BE IN THE PRESENT

- Visualize success and completing the exam
- Grounding
- Square Breathing

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- **Mindfulness Meditation:** Mindfulness is a process that leads to a mental state characterized by nonjudgmental awareness of the present experiences, such as sensations, thoughts, bodily states, and the environment. It enables us to distance ourselves from our thoughts and feelings without labeling them as good or bad.
- **Psychotherapy;** Working with a psychologist, counselor, or social worker can help you learn new ways to cope with anxiety in daily life
- **Medication:** Medication can help you manage the symptoms of anxiety and increase your quality of life. Research shows a combination of medication and psychotherapy can be extremely effective.
- **Exercise:** Exercise decreases stress hormones like cortisol. It also increases endorphins—your body's "feel-good" chemicals—giving your mood a natural boost. It also provides a great distraction from unhelpful thoughts.

Source: Anxiety.org; Therapy Group of DC; Very Well Mind

RESOURCES

-
- Counseling & Wellness Services
 - Academic Support Services
 - Learning Specialist
 - Tutoring
 - Disability Resource Services
 - College/Faculty Mentors
 - Personal Support Systems
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Classmates

WHAT SHOULD I TAKE FROM THIS?



Science isn't always perfect and neither are you.



There are no “miracle cures”



Commit to one or two techniques and practice them (daily)



Medical/counseling intervention if needed



Physical activity is a MUST!



You are a life long learner



QUESTIONS?

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