

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Improving Those End Of Year Test Scores

from the American Counseling Association

As the end of the school year approaches, most students will be facing a variety of end-of-year tests. Some of them will be routine course exams, while others may be state-mandated standardized tests. But regardless of the type of test, they all tend to increase anxiety and stress for students.

While it isn't possible to remove all the anxiety, or to make test taking fun, there are things any student can do to make himself or herself feel less anxious and stressed out.

An important step is simply to be physically in good shape for test taking. A big test might not seem like an athletic event, but both have much in common. The test-taker needs to be well rested and well nourished to perform well.

The brain is not that different from one's muscles. If a person is overtired, has skipped breakfast, or has been loading up on high-sugar junk foods, studies have shown that mental performance is going to suffer.

It's also important to plan ahead for tests. Experts have found that last minute cramming seldom improves test grades, but often does a great job of increasing test anxiety.

The best advice is to start studying for a test early, and to spread the preparation out over several days. It's also smart to anticipate what will be on the test. No test covers everything about a subject. It helps to review class notes and important sections of the text book. If the teacher hands out a review guide or has a pre-test review class, that's the material to focus on.

It also helps to be mentally prepared for the test. A first step there is simply to try some relaxation techniques as the test approaches. Practice relaxing by closing your eyes, taking several deep breaths and thinking positive thoughts about how well you're going to do on the test. If you feel yourself getting tense during the exam, close your eyes again, take a few big breaths and focus on your posture and breathing before getting back to work.

Doing well on tests isn't magic. It takes planning, studying and relaxing. But if doing all this still doesn't help, you may suffer from moderate or severe test anxiety. In such cases, talk to the school counselor, or consider seeing an outside professional counselor for help in overcoming the problem.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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