Test anxiety is a result of worry and stress. It manifests itself physically through episodes of sweating, nausea or “butterflies” in your stomach, and psychologically through confusion, mental blocks and panic attacks.

Whatever the form, test anxiety most often arises for one of three reasons:

(1) **POOR STUDY SKILLS:**
A lack of efficient study skills can greatly contribute to exam stress. Organization and preparation are key in reducing test anxiety.

(2) **PRIOR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES:**
Let’s say you prepare a lot for a math exam, but when the exam time came and the test was passed out, you discovered that the questions are from material you did not review. As a result, you “bombed” the test. A bad past experience in a completing an exam may undermine your confidence and negatively affect your performance the next time you take a test.

(3) **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN:**
Not knowing what to expect on an exam is a fundamental source of anxiety. Things go much more smoothly when you have some idea of what to prepare for.
CONTROLLING TEST ANXIETY

PLAN YOUR ATTACK:
You will feel most anxious when you are least prepared. For that reason, it's important that you develop good study skills. Schedule your study time so that you are able to concentrate free from distraction and fatigue. Recognize your individual procrastination habits and learn to overcome them.

MAKE KNOWN THE UNKNOWN:
Often finding out additional bits of information about an exam can greatly reduce the anxiety you feel. Ask your professor beforehand about the type of questions that will be on the exam, how many points each question will be worth, how much time will be allotted and so on.

GIVE YOURSELF A PEP TALK:
Consciously try to stop yourself from thinking negative thoughts. Turn negative messages into encouraging ones. For instance, before the exam begins, instead of thinking, “I’ll be lucky if I get a ‘D’ in the class,” give yourself positive encouragement: “I’ve attended class, I’ve read all the material; I’ve studied as much as I could–I’m as prepared as I can be.” Say this to yourself out loud to help drive the negative thoughts away. Even if you don’t believe yourself at first, repeatedly encouraging yourself this way will help you to gain confidence.

VISUALIZE SUCCESS:
Visualization is a powerful tool for success. Instead of imagining yourself failing the test and feeling miserable afterward, turn that thought around. Imagine yourself turning over the first page and finding that each problem was exactly like a homework problem that you had previously practiced. Visualize yourself working through the questions confidently, answering each one, turning the exam in, and finally receiving a good grade. The key to effective visualization is detail. Be specific in imagining the good things that are going to happen.

FOCUS ON DETAIL:
Whenever you feel an excessive amount of anxiety—for instance, when the exam is being passed out—you can help yourself calm down by focusing your attention on some small detail. Study the face of your watch or concentrate on a specific noise in the room. Filling your attention with something leaves no room for anxious thoughts.

CONCENTRATE ON BREATHING:
Deep-breathing exercises are a well-known technique for combating nervousness and anxiety. Whenever you feel your heart racing or your forehead sweating, force yourself to slow down and take deep, calm breaths. Concentrate on the air flowing in and out of your nose and lungs. Do this for four or five minutes and you’ll find yourself feeling much more relaxed.

IMAGINE THE WORST:
Before the exam begins, imagine the worst that can happen if things go wrong. Will you get a “B”, a “C”? Will you flunk the exam? If so, will you immediately get kicked out of school, or will you have a chance to redeem yourself? Usually our fears are far more disturbing than reality. Explore your fears to the point of absurdity and they’ll seem far less frightening.

DON’T STUDY THE LAST MINUTE BEFORE THE EXAM:
You’ll find that studying right up to the last minute hurts more than it helps. In the last few minutes before an exam, you can’t learn anything new and you’ll mix up what’s already in your long-term memory. Frantically searching for that one last bit of information you think you need only results in more anxiety and confusion. Relax—you’ve studied as best you can. Give yourself only calming, positive messages before the exam.

DON’T GO INTO THE CLASSROOM UNTIL THE EXAM IS ABOUT TO BEGIN:
Often, while you’re waiting to go into the room, you’ll overhear other students talking about what might be covered on the exam. Although it’s a good study strategy to brainstorm with others in the days before the test, at this point, listening to all these guesses and assumptions may only reduce your confidence. Trust yourself—you’ve studied and reviewed!

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF:
Inadequate sleep, poor eating habits and insufficient exercise are destructive to your mind as well as to your body. Stay away from foods high in sugar and fat content; these make you lethargic (slow). Exercise, even if only by taking slow walks—it will energize your mind and body.