A little nervousness before and during a test is normal. There’s nothing wrong with you if you feel nervous. In fact, a little nervousness can sharpen your attention and keep you alert. But the key phrase is “a little.” Excessive nervousness can turn into anxiety, which can interfere with your ability to recall.

WHAT ARE SOME CAUSES OF TEST ANXIETY?

Check the possible causes of your test anxiety:

_____ Poor study habits
_____ Inadequate preparation, which makes you aware that you’re more likely to do poorly
_____ Worrying several days prior to an exam about your performance
_____ Setting unrealistic expectations for yourself
_____ Succumbing to pressure from parents, siblings, friends, or classmates
_____ Pressure to maintain a certain GPA, because of scholarships, probation status, remaining in the major of choice, or graduate school acceptance
_____ Lack of knowledge about how to prepare for a test
_____ Uncertainty about the test. Unlike elementary and high school teachers who may prepare you for standardized tests, professors may not tell you what to expect on their tests.
_____ Limited knowledge of testtaking strategies
_____ Cultural, societal, or family attitudes about success in school
_____ Beliefs about grades and failing
_____ Concerns about the future

WHAT ARE SOME MANIFESTATIONS OF TEST ANXIETY?

Least harmful ⇒ behavioral manifestations, such as foot tapping or hair twisting

More harmful ⇒ physiological manifestations, such as headaches, nausea, sweaty palms, perspiration, rapid heartbeat, tense muscles, loss of appetite, and difficulty sleeping.

Most harmful ⇒ psychological manifestations (that is, how you think)

Some students experience a mental block (that is, they can’t remember what they studied) or difficulty concentrating.
HOW CAN YOU DECREASE TEST ANXIETY?

Check the suggestions that could help you decrease your test anxiety:

_____ Analyze the causes of your test anxiety.

_____ Use positive self-talk. Instead of saying, “Everyone else can do this except me,” say “I’m trying as hard as I can.”

_____ Improve your study methods:

_____ Avoid cramming! It’s the worst thing to do if you tend to be anxious about tests. So how do you avoid cramming? Begin studying from Day 1. Just like when you eat, it’s more satisfying to eat in little bites and savor the food, rather than devour it rapidly. And when you eat slowly in small bites, you feel better afterwards.

_____ Take control – and retain control – of your schedule each week, so you can complete all reading and studying. Vary your schedule as class assignments change, but be sure to allow ample time to complete all necessary work. And be sure to schedule time each week (perhaps even every day) to review regularly.

_____ Study in smaller blocks of time (20 – 30 minutes) and then take a 5- or 10-minute break and do something enjoyable like talk to a friend, have a snack, or exercise.

_____ Don’t allow yourself to procrastinate.

_____ Avoid daydreaming.

_____ Complete assigned reading early so you can ask questions in class.

_____ Very soon after each class, spend a few minutes reading over your notes.

_____ Prepare for quizzes and tests by trying to anticipate possible test questions.

_____ Over-study. When you think you know it, continue to review anyway. This improves your chances of recalling it under stress.

_____ Increase your concentration while you study by writing summaries, generating questions from your lecture notes or textbook, making study sheets, making maps, outlines, or charts of the material, and focusing on key terms.

_____ Develop test-taking skills. Know strategies that will help you do better on multiple-choice questions and essay questions.

_____ Familiarize yourself with what the instructor expects, what material will be on the test and what types of questions your professor writes. Write possible test questions as you study.

_____ Know how to get help early by . . .

_____ Joining or forming a study group.

_____ Exchanging phone numbers and e-mail addresses with classmates.
Decreasing Test Anxiety

_____ Seeing your instructors during office hours – without hesitation!

_____ Requesting a tutor in the Office of Academic Support (1st floor, Seton Hall).

_____ Consulting supplemental materials (such as reference books in the library, Internet sites, recommended reading at the end of textbook chapters) to reinforce what you are learning.

_____ Work on your confidence and self-esteem. Tell yourself, “I KNOW I CAN DO WELL!” Negative thinking can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

_____ Pay attention to your breathing. Don’t change it – just pay attention to it while you are calm. This can transfer to a test situation.

_____ Find out as much as you can in advance about the format of the test.

_____ Avoid arriving too early for a test. Students may exaggerate about how they didn’t study or how late they stayed up to study. Such remarks can heighten your anxiety.

_____ Get adequate sleep the night before a test.

_____ Eat a protein-rich breakfast before a morning test. Avoid caffeine and high-sugar foods.

_____ Wear comfortable clothing.

_____ Practice relaxation techniques in the days prior to the test or do a relaxation exercise the evening before a test. Look at one of these:
http://www1.wne.edu/artsandsciences/index.cfm?selection=doc.4639
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0CkYqNjSpg&noredirect=1 (10 minutes)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwdHu0dS_BA (3 minutes)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9MwfoFIBO0 (5 minutes)

_____ Try not to worry, because it will not solve anything. Worrying diverts your attention from the material that you need to recall for the test.

During the test . . .

_____ When you get the test, scan it and plan your time (for example, 15 minutes for Section A, 30 minutes for Section B).

_____ Quickly write down anything you’re afraid of forgetting on the back or in the margins.

_____ Circle or highlight the key words in the directions.

_____ Do the questions you know first, to build your confidence.

_____ If there’s time, give yourself a brief break or two. Visualize yourself in a place or situation that you enjoy.

_____ Breathe deeply to relax.

_____ Focus.

_____ Periodically stretch your arms and legs, wiggle your toes, flex your ankles and rotate your neck.

_____ Praise yourself.

_____ Visualize success.

_____ Keep the experience in perspective. In twenty years, will you (or anyone) know how you did on this test?