TIPS FOR DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

What is Exam Anxiety?
Exam anxiety is a fairly common phenomenon that involves feelings of tension or uneasiness that occur before, during, or after an exam. Many people experience feelings of anxiety around exams and find it helpful in some ways, as it can be motivating and create the pressure that is needed to stay focused on studying. However, in some cases, anxiety can become so intense that it leads to disruptive symptoms that ultimately lead to a negative impact on one's performance. In these cases, it is important for students to attend to their symptoms and find a way to cope effectively, so that their schooling does not suffer any further.

What are the Symptoms?
Although anxiety can affect each person in different ways, there are several symptoms that are quite common. Some of these are emotional, which include feelings of fear, disappointment, anger, depression, or helplessness. Other symptoms are more behavioural, ranging from fidgeting or pacing to substance abuse or other self-destructive behaviours. There are also physiological symptoms, which include fast heartbeat, feelings of nausea, headaches, light headedness, sweating, and other disruptions in bodily functions. Finally, many people experience cognitive symptoms, such as negative thinking about oneself and racing thoughts.

Other symptoms include:
- memory blocks or “blanking out” on things that you have studied;
- fear of failing before the exam is even written;
- lower reading comprehension; and
- poor attention and inability to concentrate

Some of the strategies for coping with exam anxiety are quite practical and relatively easy to implement, such as avoiding people who speak negatively, arriving early to the exam and reading exam directions carefully. Students should also ensure that they are practicing good time management skills and managing their stress on a daily basis through exercise, good nutrition and enjoyable activities. If you work on what you have control over you can help to minimize exam anxiety. Following are some specific tips for surviving the exam experience.

Exam Anxiety Tip 1: Be prepared early

It is recommended that you review the main themes outlined in each of the five AMP Knowledge Domains and consider your comfort level with the content within each of the CAAMP National Competency Courses. Detailed outlines for each course can be accessed through the main CAAMP National Competency Program webpage. Furthermore, assess your comfort level with the practice examination questions, which can be found in a document on your main course webpage.

Exam Anxiety Tip 2: Sleep well

Regular sleep is one of the best ways to control stress. Getting up and going to bed each day at the same times ensures that your body and brain are getting the rest they need for optimal functioning. Students who follow a regular sleeping pattern have been shown to perform 30% better than students who stay up late or get up early to study.

Exam Anxiety Tip 3: Keep caffeine and sugar intake as usual

Keep caffeine and sugar intake the same during exam time. Don’t increase or decrease the amount of coffee, tea or cola that you normally drink as your body and brain are accustomed to getting a certain amount. Keep things in your life as stable as possible, especially during exam time.
Exam Anxiety Tip 4: Practice relaxed breathing to promote calmness
When you display any symptoms of anxiety during studying or during the exam, use relaxed breathing to calm yourself. Take your attention away from the task and take a few slow breaths.

Exam Anxiety Tip 5: Don’t “cram” the night before
Studying the night before an exam causes your anxiety level to increase. Unfortunately, it doesn’t decrease when you go to sleep. Reduce anxiety by taking the evening off to relax.

Exam Anxiety Tip 6: Have a plan before the exam
As part of your studying, think about how you will approach the exam, and what you will do when you run into trouble. Having a plan in place will assist you to worry less about failing, and help you to concentrate more on passing.

Exam Anxiety Tip 7: Aim to do your best
Do not aim for perfection – try to do your very best. Often, students start thinking negatively when things aren’t going well on an exam. This can lead to lower self-confidence and increased self-doubt. Recognize and turn off your negative internal dialogue. Focus on the task instead of on yourself.

References
The Real Estate Division gratefully acknowledges the input of the University of Alberta for providing tips to reduce anxiety.


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