TEST-TAKING TIPS

Sometimes, it all comes down to the big day. Maybe you thought you had everything under control but now, just hours before a test, you're totally freaking. Or you have such a sense of nervousness and dread about this day that you don't even want to go to school.

These types of feelings can sometimes erase all the hard work and studying you've done. But here are some ways boost your confidence and keep the panic under control:

Get a good night's sleep. Getting a full night of sleep before a big test can be a HUGE help. You'll feel better, think clearer, and be in a better mood to tackle anything the test can throw at you. This is one of the best reasons not to put off studying until the last minute: you've got to go to bed on time the night before the exam.

Eat a healthy breakfast. Food is the fuel for your body and brain, so eat a balanced breakfast on the morning of the test. Load up on protein, but avoid junk food, too much sugar, or anything that might make you "crash" during the test.

Avoid caffeine. You may be tempted to gulp down coffee, cold coffee drinks, caffeinated sodas, or "energy drinks" before a test. Although these drinks can make people alert, they might also cause jitters and make you nervous at a time when you want to be cool and relaxed.

Forget the consequences. It's important to know how important a test is, how much of your grade it will account for, and what might happen if you fail. These things will let you know how hard you should be studying and how seriously you must take the test. But once the day of the test arrives, you should try to put all this information out of your mind. Worrying and stressing about things like, "If I fail this test, I fail the whole class!" will just distract you from the task at hand -- and that's doing the best you can on each and every question. Try to keep your mind on the test itself…not on what the test means to your future.

Just breathe. In the days before the test, practice taking deep breaths, especially at times when you feel stressed. Feel the air flow through your lungs and the calm move through your body. This is a skill you can use when you're sitting down for a test. Breathe in. Breathe out. Keep a level head.

Think of something peaceful. Have a picture in your head of something that makes you calm, relaxed, and happy. It might be your bedroom, or the ocean, or somewhere you once hiked in the mountains. If you feel yourself start to stress, close your eyes, go to this mental picture, and try to chill.

Think positive. Say things to yourself that will boost your confidence. Tell yourself that you know the material and you know what's coming. This test can't scare you and you're totally prepared to ace it. Push negative thoughts out of your head. If you think confident, you'll BE more confident.

Don't "cram." It's important to start studying long before the morning of the test, because rushed, last-minute "cramming" won't help much and will probably just make you panicky and nervous. If you know your stuff, just relax and concentrate on getting into a calm mindset before the test begins. Stay away from other students who are freaking out about the test, as their super-stressed attitude might rub off on you.