

Causes of Test Anxiety

What Causes Test Anxiety?

We all can experience some anxiety before taking a test. However, test anxiety, which can be expressed by cognitive, emotional and physical symptoms before and during examination, might become so high to interfere with a student's performance on a test.

Common causes of test anxiety include:

- Fear of failure
- Pressure to perform well on high-stakes tests
- Having only one test in class
- Focusing on negative consequences of failing a test
- Past negative experience with taking a test
- Lack of experience with failure, so potential failure causes anxiety
- Perfectionism
- Exam performance related to self-esteem
- Competitiveness and comparison with other students' scores
- Lack of preparation
- Inadequate time management
- Cramming before the exam
- Lack of sleep
- Failing exam for the first time in health professional school

Test anxiety can be conditioned and reinforcing. Students can become anxious during an exam, don't perform well on the exam and their anxiety become worse in the next exam. It is important to identify what is causing your test anxiety and recognize the symptoms so you can take steps to minimize it, and increase your performance during tests.

Adapted from Albert Einstein College of Medicine Office of Academic Support and Counseling