

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

End-of-Year Tests Don't Have To Be Stressful

from the American Counseling Association

Summer break is just around the corner, but most students still face one last hurdle -- the dreaded end-of-year tests. Whether final course exams or mandated standardized tests, for many students these represent a lot of anxiety and stress.

While big tests are never fun, there are ways to reduce the anxiety associated with testing, and to help students have their best chance for scoring well.

A starting point is simply to plan ahead. Final exams are never a surprise. Waiting until the last-minute to review and cram for the test seldom generates much of an improvement in grades. But last minute cramming will increase a student's stress levels and promote test anxiety, none of which improves grades. Instead, start studying early and spread it out over a number of days.

Another great tip is simply to anticipate what is going to be covered on the test. No test will cover everything about a subject or all the material taught over the year. Instead, the student should review class notes and the textbook, focusing on areas that were emphasized. If a teacher passes out a study guide, or holds reviews sessions, those are great road maps to what's going to be tested.

It's also important to get in shape for testing. No, that doesn't mean lifting weights or running ten miles. It means getting plenty of rest. It's only common sense that being well rested makes you feel better and gives your brain a better shot at remembering things.

In the same way, eating right can help improve test scores. The brain needs good nutrition to work at its best. Skipping breakfast, for example, has clearly been shown to impair brain function. Similarly, a diet loaded with high-sugar junk foods or overloaded on caffeine can also negatively affect test scores. Crashing from a sugar high isn't the path to better test taking. And someone who has used coffee, caffeinated soda or energy drinks to feel more alert is just as likely to feel jittery and nervous which will only make concentrating more difficult.

Doing well on a test depends on planning, studying and relaxing. Eat right, be rested, and review the likely test material without rushing and cramming. At test time, take a few deep breaths, then calmly focus and the result will be less stress and better scores.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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