

Overcoming nervousness and anxiety

Examination nerves

Let's tackle this issue head-on by registering an inescapable truth: *almost everybody feels nervous and anxious about examinations*. Certainly I have never met anybody who did not, and it would be very strange if this were otherwise, because examinations are usually a special sort of test which put us under a lot of pressure. They are an important assessment, and a one-off occasion requiring our best possible performance. When we take an examination therefore we have good reason for feeling anxious – wondering if we will be able to do ourselves full justice.

Nevertheless, some people feel so apprehensive and nervous that it prevents them from giving their best, and it might even block them completely. They might have put lots of effort into their studies and produced all the necessary coursework, but their fear of exams is so intense that they spend more time worrying than revising. Then they worry that they haven't done the necessary preparation; they feel a growing sense of paralysis as the Big Day approaches; and they may even worry that they have been worrying. The scope for an accumulation of self-doubt, anxiety, fear, and trepidation is almost limitless.

What we will do in this chapter is look at the phenomenon of nervousness and anxiety in these circumstances, then try to dispel a few myths which surround the topic of examinations. Then we will consider some tips on what are basically methods of promoting feelings of calmness and relaxation. We can't get into people's psyches through the written word, but it might be possible to offer help in promoting a more relaxed and self-possessed state of physical being.

On this phenomenon of nervousness before an important test it might be helpful for those who do not already know it to learn that many actors, public speakers, and even champion athletes suffer from nerves before a performance or an important event. Stand-up comedians who seem supremely confident on stage sometimes admit to being physically sick with anxiety in their dressing rooms before facing an audience. Olympic contestants can often be seen in very agitated states, pacing around and unable to remain still as they wait for their events to begin. What these two groups of people have in common is that they are about