

Back-to-school tips: Childhood test anxiety

September 12 2018, by From Mayo Clinic News Network, Mayo Clinic News Network



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It's normal for both adults and children to feel nervous once in a while. A little anxiety prior to an event like a presentation or test is common—and normal.

"For some, a little nervousness can actually be helpful," says Dr. Tina Ardon, a Mayo Clinic family medicine specialist. "But, for others, they struggle a bit more with what we call 'test [anxiety](#).' "

Test anxiety can affect anyone from primary and secondary school students to [college students](#).

While symptoms are varied, and can include trouble concentrating and sleeping the night before a test, Ardon says some individuals struggle significantly. Some even experience physical symptoms.

"There are people who have trouble focusing during a test but others who experience trouble breathing, stomachache, headache, elevated heartrate," she says.

The challenge for many parents, especially of younger children, is confirming whether a complaint of headache, stomachache and other ailment is related to an actual illness or anxiety.

"For younger students, it may be hard to determine if they are struggling due to test anxiety or other issues. I always suggest parents talk to their child first," she says.

Ardon also advises reaching out to your child's teacher. "It's helpful to get insight into what they see in the classroom, if the [student](#) is having trouble taking tests in the moment," she says.

Ardon offers these tips for helping to prepare children for tests and alleviate mild test anxiety:

- Be prepared. "Having ample time to prepare and study is important to reduce stress," says Ardon.

- Create a consistent routine before a test.

- Try relaxation techniques. Before the big day, try different techniques to help your child ease nervousness.

- Be familiar with the test format. "Is it multiple choice, short answer, an essay? Knowing that can help alleviate some of that anxiety, as well, and help students prepare.—Get plenty of rest and eat well. "It's really important to get a good night's sleep every day, but especially the night before a [test](#). And make sure you have really good breakfast the day of, as well," she says, adding it's best to avoid sugary foods and drinks, as well as caffeine.

- Seek professional guidance. If your child's anxiety is not improving or your child seems to be struggling with learning overall, Ardon recommends talking to your [health care provider](#). "Ask them about their symptoms to make sure it's not something else that needs to be addressed."

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Citation: Back-to-school tips: Childhood test anxiety (2018, September 12) retrieved 15 May 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-back-to-school-childhood-anxiety.html>

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