

STRESS SOLUTIONS: **Proven Methods for** **Raising Test Scores**

by Jeff Goelitz



**Students who are able to reduce the stress
and anxiety in their lives can
significantly improve their test scores
and academic performance.**

Scientific research at the Institute of HeartMath (IHM) and other institutions demonstrate one basic solution applies to all age levels.

HeartMath has been doing exactly that for over a decade with its widely acclaimed TestEdge® Interactive Learning Programs for the classroom and home. TestEdge has undergone the scrutiny of national testing at schools across the nation through a federally supported demonstration program.

More than 100,000 students in elementary, middle and high school and colleges and universities have been raising their test-taking confidence and success by practicing TestEdge's easy-to-learn tools. Charter school and homeschool students are among them.

This e-booklet outlines important facts about test anxiety and key elements and tools of the TestEdge programs that help boost students' confidence before and during exams - ultimately contributing to higher scores.



The anxiety associated with test-taking is universal. Depending on the individual, it may be experienced as mild nervousness or outright dread. It is quite common for everyone to feel a significant level of stress before tests.

Researchers say test anxiety can lead to a host of serious problems - stomach upset, headache, inability to focus, fear, irritability, anger and even depression. Scientists at IHM have made significant discoveries about how anxiety and other forms of emotional stress affect learning.

Anxiety and other stressful emotions create a kind of noise or mental static in the brain. This results in blockage of our ability to retrieve what's stored in the memory and severely impairs comprehension and reason.

Most of us can relate to a time when we couldn't stop thinking and worrying about a test the next day or walking into a classroom with a terrible sinking feeling. Ever read a test question over and over and over because your mind could not stop wandering? **I knew didn't study enough. Why can't I remember this stuff?** Or the all-time No. 1: **What if I fail?**

Stop Those Negative Thoughts and Feelings

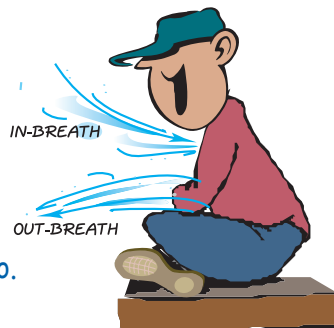
Indicators that your anxiety level is rising in the days or weeks before a test include an increase in negative thoughts about the outcome and fear of not remembering the material studied. You absolutely can stop such thoughts quickly. Here's how.

The HeartMath Heart-Focused Breathing Technique.



- 1. Heart Focus:** Focus your attention on your heart. Breathe a little deeper than normal, in for 5 or 6 seconds and out 5 or 6 seconds. You can place your hand over your heart to help maintain your focus there.
- 2. Heart Breathing:** Now imagine that you're breathing through your heart. Picture yourself slowly inhaling and exhaling through your heart.

As you breathe, try to find a calm attitude about an impending test. If these or other distracting thoughts or anxious feelings return during the test, regain control by simply doing Heart Breathing again for a minute or so.

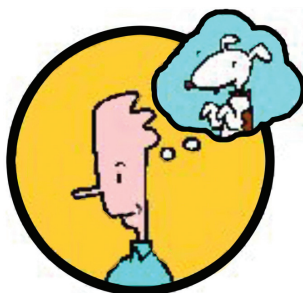


Enter Your Optimal Performance State

Scientists say positive emotions such as appreciation and care can make our brains work better. Activate one of these feelings by recalling a time when you felt good inside. Try to re-experience the feeling you had at a special place you've been to or the love you feel for a close friend or family member or treasured pet.

Add the following step to Heart-Focused Breathing to clear confusion and improve your thinking the day of a test.

As you do Heart Breathing, activate a feeling of appreciation or care. Truly experiencing this feeling helps you enter your best performance state. Remember: Maintain your Heart Breathing with this feeling.



Heart Breathing helps bring you back when you get off track.

It can unlock your mind when you get stuck on a question.

Practice it before, and when necessary, during tests.



Taking Care of Your Body and Brain

1. Eat a healthy dinner the night before the test.



2. Get 8 to 10 hours sleep. A tired body can slow down the brain.



3. Eat your normal breakfast on test day, steering clear of sugary foods, which can inhibit concentration.



4. Get some exercise before the test to increase the brain's oxygen availability.



5. Arrive early. You won't feel rushed and you'll have time for Heart-Focused Breathing!



HeartMath: the Research

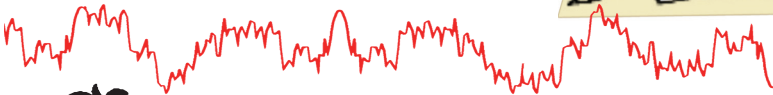
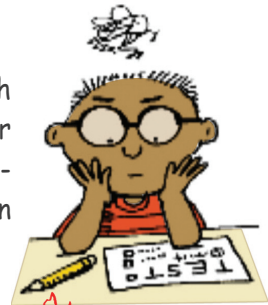


Scientists at IHM have researched how children learn and found that coherence, a measurable physiological state, can greatly enhance learning.

What is Coherence? It is a state of synchronization between your heart, brain and autonomic nervous system. You can think of coherence as a simultaneous state of relaxation, readiness and revitalization. Coherence improves performance, health and emotional well-being.

Heart Rhythms and Coherence

When you experience stressful emotions such as tension, anxiety, irritation and anger, your heart-rhythm pattern becomes irregular and incoherent, negatively affecting your health, brain function, performance and sense of well-being.

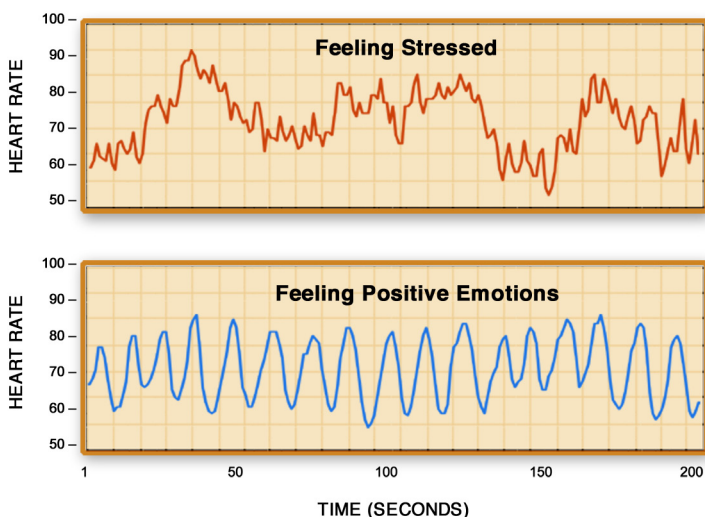


When you experience positive emotions such as appreciation, care, joy and love, your heart-rhythm pattern is more ordered and coherent.



Heart Rhythms Indicate Coherence Levels

Graphs show heart rhythms when stressed compared to heart rhythms when feeling positive emotions.



Ordered and harmonious heart rhythms are an indicator of your “coherence level.” High coherence is a state associated with positive emotional attitudes. These send signals to the brain that reduce reactions to stress and improve cognitive function, hormonal balance, immune response, coordination, reaction times and your overall sense of well-being.

Recommended Self-Regulation Technology: Students with the [emWave@2](#), [emWave@Pro](#) or [Inner Balance@Trainer](#) will increase the benefits of Heart-Focused Breathing significantly by using them during their practice four or five times a week leading up to important tests. This easy-to-use software program with heart-rhythm monitor is based on recent evidence that emotions are reflected in our heart-rhythm patterns. Among the environments in which self-regulation technology is particularly effective include at home, regular and special education classrooms, counseling programs, test preparation and after-school programs.



The Institute of HeartMath

is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education organization whose mission is to help establish heart-based living and global coherence by inspiring people to connect with the intelligence and guidance of their own hearts.

The HeartMath System,

developed over more than two decades, is a set of practical techniques and technologies that enable adults and children to lower stress and anxiety while helping improve their performance in all areas and the quality of their lives.

Visit www.hearthmath.org.

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