

## First aid for test-taking jitters

By Tutor Doctor June 2011



Test-taking can be stressful for both students and parents. Most people are familiar with the butterflies that flutter up inside your stomach before taking a test. While it is normal for most students to experience some level of jitters before and during an exam, it has proven to become a real problem for others, affecting their scores so much that the tests can't be an indication of the student's ability.

There are many techniques that students can use to improve concentration and ease their nerves, and there are many ways in which you can help them.

The morning of the test, surprise your child with his own anxiety-busting first-aid test kit. This is a perfect way to start the day and show him that although you can't be there while he takes the test, you are there in spirit. It is a simple gesture that goes a long way toward comforting your child.

You can pack the kit in a colorful bag or box and even label it with the student's name. Inside the kit, place a notebook (moleskin notebooks work great), a healthy snack (something small and tasty such as an apple), and a little bottle of aromatherapy oil (I recommend lavender).

The **notebook** will help your child work through his anxiety. There are two ways in which he can do this:

- Write down anxieties before a test: A recent study in the journal *Science* explains that students can greatly benefit from writing down their anxieties before taking an exam. The study suggests that releasing anxieties onto paper will clear students' minds during a test and help them to focus.
- Counter apprehensions by writing down positive responses: In a guide to reduce dread before taking tests, Claire Stone, a Berkeley therapist, explains that it is beneficial to write positive responses to the negative anxieties or thoughts that students just wrote. This will ensure that all the negatives will be cleared from students' minds while taking a test.

The **healthy snack** is in the kit to remind your child not to take his test on an empty stomach. There are a few reasons for this:

- There is a correlation between positive test scores and a healthy diet: Students should be sure not to take an exam on an empty stomach, and should make sure that they are eating the right foods. Joe Landsberger, creator of the Study Guides and Strategies website, [www.studygs.net](http://www.studygs.net), offers fruit and vegetables as a recommended option to reduce stress. Avoid processed foods, artificial sweeteners and foods containing preservatives, as they are considered "stressful foods."
- A physically fit is more likely to be a good student: According to Lesley Cottrell, an associate professor of pediatrics at West Virginia University, children's physical fitness is associated with their academic performances. Students who stay physically fit during the week generally experience better test scores.
- Getting enough sleep makes the mind work better: Many students struggle to get adequate sleep at night, but it is important that they try to get between seven and nine hours.

"Sleep keeps students well-rested. It gives them a good attention span, along with a more stable mood, which increases concentration," says psychologist John Markovich. Getting enough sleep at night will help students focus while taking tests.

The **aromatherapy bottle** is to help your child activate his memory and approach the test from a calmer perspective.