

# COPING WITH STRESS<sup>1</sup>

## Calming Ideas

With a partner, brainstorm ways to cope with test stress. Then, using a separate sheet of paper, work together to write an acrostic poem to help you remember some of the methods you discussed. Use one letter of a word like *calm* or *stress* to begin each line of your poem. Share your poems with the class.

## Challenge Irrational Thoughts

If you're a person who experiences test anxiety, some of the irrational thoughts below may sound familiar.

Imagine that a classmate has come to you and voiced these thoughts. On the lines below each statement, write the argument you would use to talk your friend out of the discouraging thought. Share your ideas with the class. Then, the next time you have a similar thought before a test, you can turn back to this page and reread your argument.

1. It doesn't matter how hard I study. I still won't do well on this test.

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2. I'm the worst student in my class.

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3. What if I'm so nervous I can't remember any of the answers?

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4. No matter how hard I study, I'm just not smart enough to do well on this test.

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5. I'd rather stay home sick than go to school and take the test.

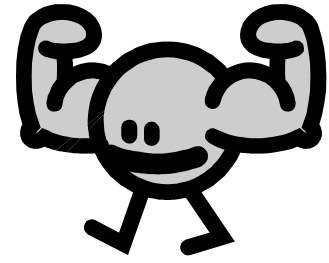
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<sup>1</sup> From *Take Charge, Level C*

## Relax Your Muscles

One way to cope with stress is to learn to relax your body. When you're anxious, your muscles tighten and store tension. You can learn to drain tension from your body. You do this by tightening all your muscles beyond their normal tension point and then suddenly releasing the tension.



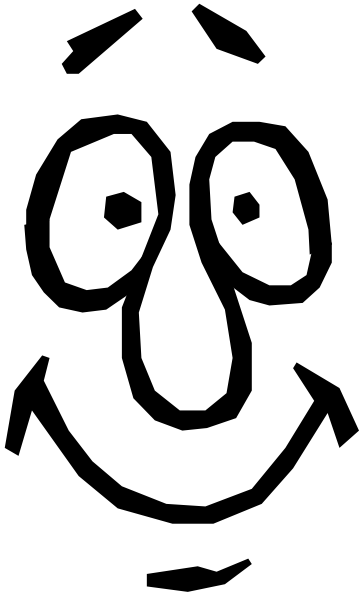
Try it for yourself. Sit or lie in a comfortable position in a quiet place. Close your eyes. Clench both hands tightly, making them into fists. Hold the tightness for seven seconds. Then let go. You can feel your tension being released.

Then squinch up your entire face as though you're trying to fit every part of it onto your nose. Hold the position for seven seconds and then release the tension. Repeat this same exercise with different muscle groups, such as your neck, shoulders, back, stomach, legs, and feet.

## Exercise Your Smile

There's another way to exercise the muscles in your face, and it's something you probably do often. You can exercise your face by using your muscles to smile. Smiling and laughing are two great ways to release tension. The harder you laugh, the more tension you release!

Is there a joke or mental picture that never fails to make you laugh? If so, you're ahead of the game. If not, maybe you need to rearrange your attitude to focus on things that are positive or funny. This is easier to do when you're already in a silly mood. When you're relaxed, think of things that make you laugh. Write them in a journal or commit them to memory. Then, next time you feel tense, open your journal or your mind, and pull out a memory that will help you smile and relax.



## **Be Prepared!**

"Be prepared" is good advice when you're getting ready to take a test or quiz. If you listen and take notes in class; schedule enough study time, and use your time wisely, you will feel prepared and confident when you sit down to take a test. And if you haven't prepared, no amount of relaxation exercises or positive thinking will keep you from feeling nervous.

Think like an Olympic athlete. You often hear athletes say, "I'm just here to have fun." . What they mean is that they've done all the preparation they possibly can. When the time comes to perform, they give their best performance by relaxing and doing what they've proven they can do in practice thousands of times.