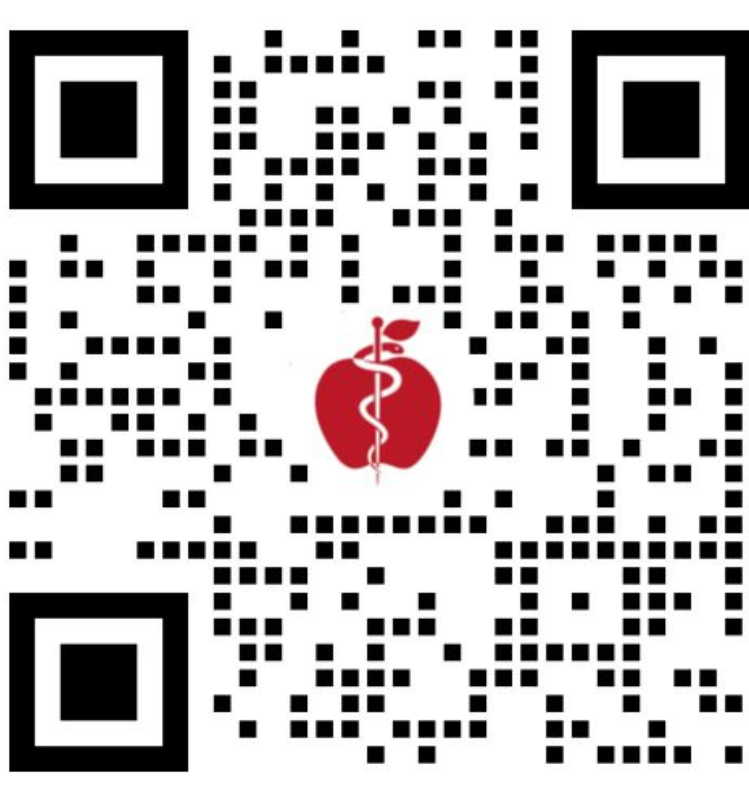# Top Tips for Battling TEST ANXIETY
## *Recommendations from Experienced USMLE & COMLEX Tutors*
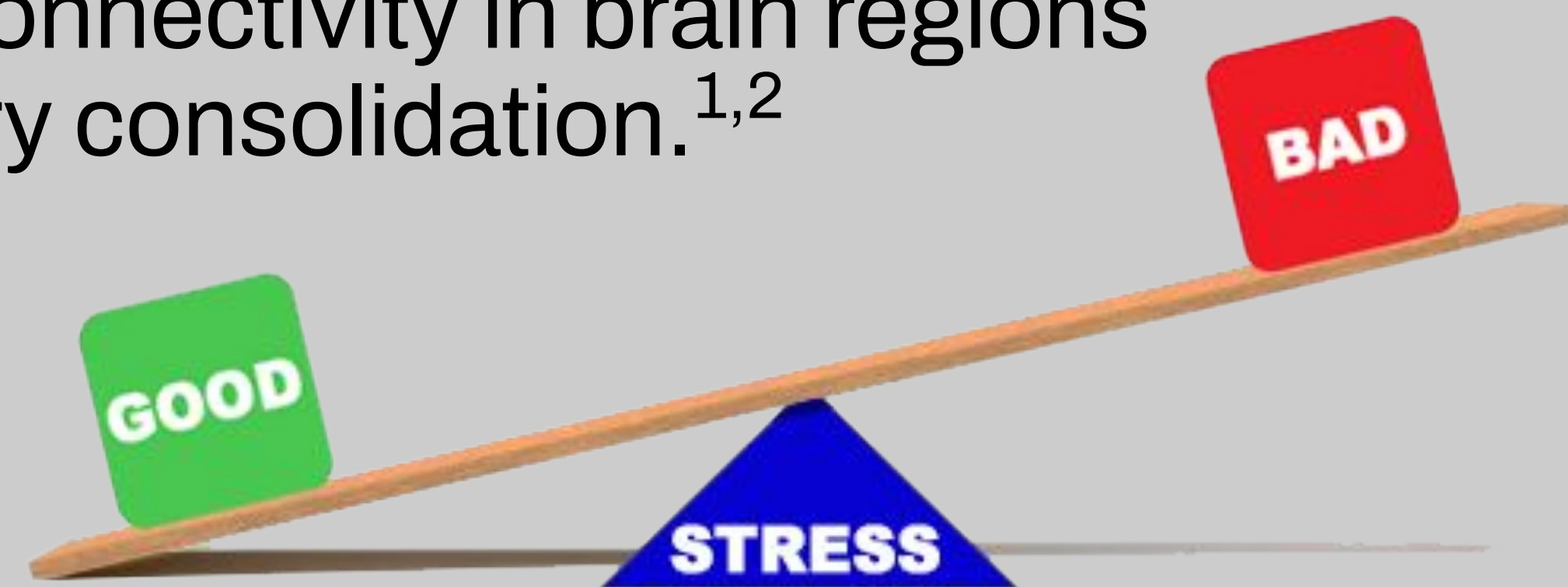
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## Is all Anxiety bad?

**Low levels of stress**
★ contribute to memory formation
★ increased synaptic connectivity in brain regions associated w/memory consolidation.[1,2]

**Higher levels of stress**
★ detract from memory formation
★ memory consolidation is impaired, undoing memory gains from low levels of stress.[3]

**Bottom line: Normal study stress is physiologic It helps you**

BAD
GOOD
STRESS

## How can we reframe it?

TEST ANXIETY

**Reframing helps us lower stress intensity**
★ leading up to test day
★ during the test itself leading to better results

**Humanize the Questions:**
Q is written by a person who wants you to succeed.

**Bottom line:** Reframing can lower anxiety, but sometimes can be so intense that additional techniques may be needed.

## Practical techniques

### "SKIP 10" APPROACH START IN THE MIDDLE
On 40 Q test block:
- start w/ Q#11 on each section,
- go thru to Q#40,
- then finish out remaining 10 Qs

### SKIP LONG QUESTIONS, MARK THEM AND COME BACK LATER

KEEP CALM AND SKIP QUESTIONS WITH LONG STEAS

Two goals are accomplished:
1. Avoid wasting time better spent on Q's more in
2. the student's wheelhouse
3. Prevent loss of precious minutes drilling yourself into an anxiety hole

Brain says "ahhh! I don't know this! Do I know *anything*?

**VERY IMPORTANT:** Never leave a Q unanswered
If skipping a Q → choose a default answer.
Not answering a Q → 100% way to get the Q wrong No penalty for guessing.

### 4 STEP APPROACH
1. Read last line of vignette
2. Review Answer Choices
3. Decide: Answer or Skip
4. a) Actively read vignette→ Answer
4. b) Mark answer choice, flag & move on

### REMIND YOURSELF OF THE GOOD STUFF

★ At end of every study day write down at least 1 cool thing learned from studying
  ○ Doesn't have to be high yield
  ○ Just a reminder of things you like about this field.
★ Reconnect with your purpose of doing medicine in the first place can
  ○ helps remain motivated even when dealing w/ less interesting or harder to learn topics

### DEVELOPING YOUR 'GUT' YOUR INTUITION

★ Practice answering Qs based on your intuition
  ○ w/o changing answer choices even if unsure
★ Gut-based choices often lead to correct answers
  ○ builds confidence in test-taking abilities
★ 'Logical brain' can always find reasons an answer could be wrong
★ Practice doing 'intuitive' Q sets
  ○ develop your 'gut sense' & see how it feels[4]

### MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

#### BOX BREATHING

Breathe in for 4 seconds
HOLD FOR 4
HOLD FOR 4
Breathe out for 4 seconds
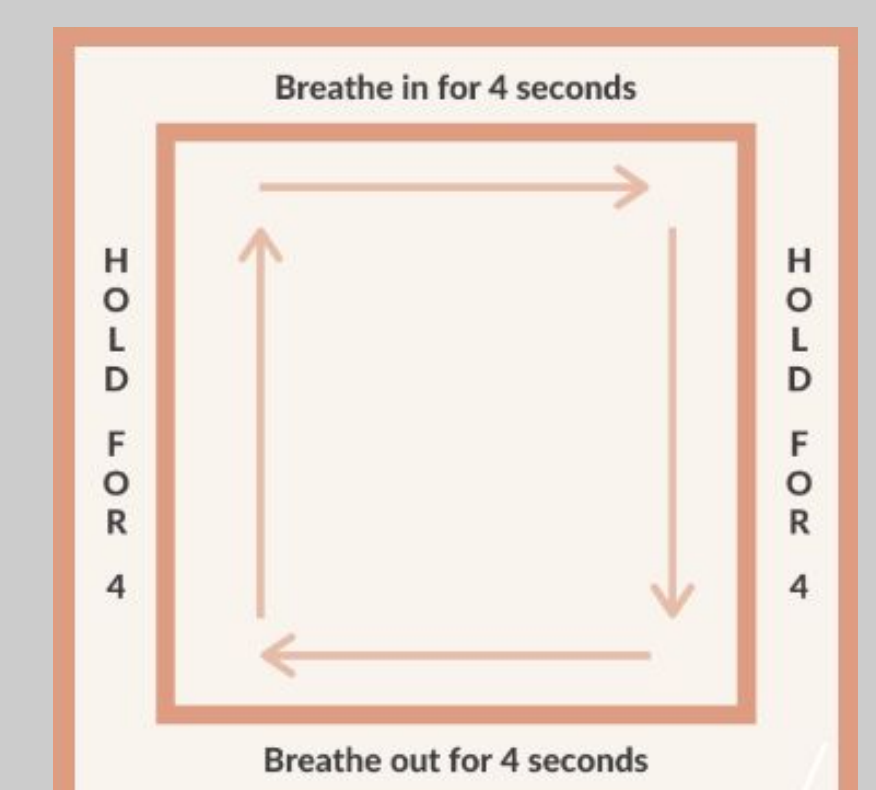
★ Takes 16 seconds per cycle
★ Used by:
  ○ Elite athletes
  ○ Navy Seals
  ○ Performers

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