

## **Live chat for encountering stress and anxiety during prep:**

### **Disclaimer:**

**All chat information is: generalized; only informational; and not professional medical advice.**

**For any health concerns, consult a qualified mental or physical health care professional. Any additional links or resources shared are not endorsed by LonePack or the professional as well.**

**Q:** How to avoid getting blank under time pressure?

**A:** Take a deep breath and start noticing things around you. Tell yourself 'I can handle this' - timely positive pep talks can do a lot more good than we think

**A:** The important thing that I found helpful was to remind myself that one question was not a complete 'make' or 'break' for my score. I knew that time management was difficult for me, so I tried to devise a strategy where I did not spend more than 2 mins on each question in Quant, and that helped me avoid situations that I knew would cause me stress. Additionally, practicing tests in real time conditions also helped me prepare for the D day

**Q:** So, stress can be in anything, some people feel stress even doing smaller things ..... how to avoid any such situation at all.... I really mean how to keep my nerve in check at any stressful situation.

**A:** Juggling two roles often cause me to be in super stressful situations where I feel overwhelmed. The technique that works for me is that I make a list of things that I need to accomplish and pick the top 3 or 5 things that I need to get done immediately. I then work on each of them one by one and try not to think of anything else at that point.

Doing so also helps me free up my mental space as I no longer have to my to-do list in my head.

**Q:** What is the best way to calm down when you have test-induced anxiety/stress?

**A:** I struggled with anxiety and stress quite a bit with my GMAT journey as well, especially because I had a huge fear of Quant. It took a toll in my first attempt where I made a lot of silly mistakes in Quant, lost track of time and allowed my anxiety to get the better of me. I scored a Q47. In the second time around, I was a lot more aware of the tendency to get anxious in Quants, esp with regards to time management. So, I devised strategies to deal with specifically. In short, be aware of what causes you anxiety, acknowledge it and try to devise strategies for it

**Q:** hoping that we hear something about mindfulness

**A:** I am glad that you mentioned Mindfulness. It can be an extremely helpful technique in handling stress and staying focused. If you could ask me something more specific on Mindfulness.

**Q:** Well I have started a mental technique. For me it is important to be able to properly define the correct mental state in my mind and have an anchor to put my mind in that place. I have started putting ear plugs in when I study. When I put the ear plugs in, I tell myself "Ok, my ear plugs are in. I can't hear outside noise, it is study time. I feel the pressure against my ear canal. Whenever I feel this pressure I know I am safe and am in test mode". I am hoping that this will help anchor me as ear plugs are available in the test center. I was wondering if you had any other suggestions on this type of thing.

**A:** this sounds interesting- we call it conditioning. If you are comfortable in that state- I would suggest you continue. There are various other mindfulness techniques that you can use as a supportive measure- practicing deep breathing- especially before you start off taking your tests (do it on an everyday basis)

**Q:** when i am solving question on gmat club i usually feel confident but if same question when given in test mode make me feel stressed

**A:** Is it the test itself that causes you to panic? Or is it seeing a question that you found difficult to solve?

**Q:** it is the test that make me panic

**A:** Test taking can be a nerve wracking experience. Taking multiple tests in "exam conditions" might be a good way to get your body conditioned to it. Like Bhavna mentioned, some conditioning techniques might also be helpful to "trick" your mind into treating the actual exam the same way you would treat a mock test

**Q:** When i start the exam, I go totally blank, i cannot even solve 2+2. For example, my veritas mocks give me 700+, when i give GMATPREP i get to 650 Veritas give me 700+, GMAT prep gives me 650. As in when i see my first question, my heart races, I go totally blank.

**A:** It is interesting that you don't seem to have that fear when you're writing your Veritas Mocks, and rather only your GMAT Prep Mocks. I have a ritual that I used to do before every mock test I wrote, and that 5-10 second gap was helpful for me myself down and get into the groove before clicking on the "Start" button.

**A:** redefine 'TEST', dealing with tests can be a difficult thing. Like what I mentioned earlier- write down the negative thoughts that come to your mind whenever you face the 'test'. Write down your emotional responses beside it- (increased heartbeat, anxiety, fear of performance, etc.) and then challenge it with a more positive thought like 'Hey, I think I was doing quite fine with mocks, test is similar'. Notice changes in your emotions after it. It will take a lot of time to track down your negative thought patterns as we are used to it since our childhood. But we can all take a step towards it

**Q:** Samiya, I read your de-brief! Congratulations on your wonderful score. Yes, all my mocks are GMAT Club tests, i.e. from the same provider. One day I get a Q48 and another day I get a Q44. I don't know if I am improving at all or not. Also, whenever I am solving a question, it's like I know how to do it for a second and thirty seconds later, I start doubting myself and start trembling.

**A:** Thanks for your question. I used to have the exact same problem of "letting go of a question" during my prep. It is especially hard when the question you're struggling with seems to be an 'easy' one. However, getting stuck up on one question is one of the worst things you can do. In my first attempt, I made a silly mistake while listing out numbers from 1-10 (I missed the number 8). I spent 3 extra minutes trying to figure out where I went wrong, and though I eventually figured it out, I paid a very heavy price for it in terms of my overall score. Hence, the next time round, I told myself that one question is not going to make an exponential difference to my score and forced myself to move on to the next question if I was taking more than 2/2:30 seconds for a question. Training yourself in this technique will help you to let go of that habit. Regarding your fluctuating scores, I think it would be helpful to check whether all the mocks are from the same provider (to ensure consistent levels of difficulty) as well as the circumstances you take them under. My scores were consistent in all the GMAT Mock Tests I took.

catch that negative thought 'I feel I am performing bad'. Our mind tends to come up with negative automatic thoughts during moments of stress. Try to track what are your negative thoughts or the 'HOT THOUGHT' at that moment- and challenge it immediately with something more positive. e.g.- 'Let me see what all do I know in this set' and then you will notice a change in the way your body and emotions react to that more positive

**Q:** One of my big issues with prepping for the GMAT is I find it hard to detach; Even when I'm done with my slotted time for GMAT, I am trying to look at questions or working through SCs. I've recently taken to doing some mindful coloring, but the effect seems to be waning. Any tips?

**A:** I've found that physical exercise to be extremely helpful. It not only allows me to come back refreshed to my books, but also keeps me physically fit. Remind yourself that the 'quality' of study time is just as important as the 'quantity' of study time. Also, if you just mechanically go through questions, you might just be functioning on auto pilot and not really "learning" as much as you could from those questions

**Q:** Samiya, the test itself panics me and stops me from taking mock tests. I always feel that let me complete my weak areas and then give the test with more confidence. I keep postponing the tests and keep solving more questions.

**A:** it might be happening for the fear of results, your entire focus may be centering around the result of your performance and hence, you may take resort to avoiding test itself

**Q:** Samiya, can caffeine intake in breaks can cause anxiety?

**A:** caffeine intake may interfere with your sleep patterns and sleep hygiene. It is of utmost importance during preps. We tend to deny ourselves that luxury of adequate sleep and healthy eating pattern. Try and avoid caffeine and keep it to a minimum.

**Q:** Samiya, I read your de-brief! Congratulations on your wonderful score. Yes, all my mocks are GMAT Club tests, i.e. from the same provider. One day I get a Q48 and another day I get a Q44. I don't know if I am improving at all or not. Also, whenever I am solving a question, its like I know how to do it for a second and thirty seconds later, I start doubting myself and start trembling.

**A:** If that's the case look deeper into the kind of questions where you went wrong and try to identify your patterns from there

**Q:** To the experts. I go blank in quant for the first few questions in quant. Even if it is a very easy question.

**A:** Not every change in your score is necessarily attributable to anxiety. (That is just your anxiety talking!) With my students, I have discovered that large fluctuations in scores are sometimes due to holes in your content understanding or strategies. Since the GMAT is not comprehensive, the "mixes" of some test emphasize different things. Look closer at the types of problems you miss, and you may discover it is not anxiety at all. In fact, a consistent, careful analysis of your performance -- focusing on fixable strategies -- can do wonders for test anxiety in the long run. What causes anxiety in some of my students is a frantic race to do as many problems or practice tests as possible, in the hopes that the sheer volume of effort will fix their weaknesses. But this sometimes just reinforces bad habits.

**A:** absolutely agreed, information overload like I said and can really lead to burn out

**Q:** I tend to panic it seems. I succumb to pressure easily even in my work environment. Any suggestions to tackle this? I have gone through dozens of self-help books, meditation sessions and what not. Nothing seems to work!

**A:** one to one professional counselling can be helpful if you have noticed a pattern in yourself

**Q:** What all substances we should not consume in breaks to avoid getting overly nervous and anxious? I am asking about eatables during breaks because last time I popped in pill to avoid getting anxious and result was that the strategy backfired, and I marked all answers to next section(verbal) like a zombie.

**A:** I think any medication that you take needs to be taken after consulting a professional doctor and getting a prescription with the change. Any self prescription can be extremely harmful. People have different food preferences, so try to pick something that suits you. I tended to have something light but high energy as anything too heavy could cause you to feel sleepy and sluggish. I had a small chocolate bar in my break to give my brain a quick boost.

**Q:** Samiya, and BSharma, - what i so far know, life style must do a lot with the way we handle stress... Such as regular yoga can make you to keep your nerves calm.....in general what are the ways to improve the life style and so does the anxiety levels.

**A;** This is a general strategy that I would like to highlight- Don't burn the candle at both ends, studying at every available opportunity can lead to information overload. Do some relaxation exercises, take adequate breaks and REWARD YOURSELF every time that you achieve short term goals in your plan. And be KIND to yourself, don't be too critical if you don't fair as expected.

Believe in yourself (you must treat yourself with self-love during times of stress)

**Q:** In verbal section, I almost give up, I feel anxious and this leads to reading. For example, in my first SC question of the verbal test, I just read the question then i re read it and then i read again. I stop comprehending and just keep reading. then, i feel like crying so i move on, guess and then that bad feeling of guessing a very easy question get over me. Hence, the downward spiral. The very next question again, i make the same mistake. Another issue, my mind gets out of test zone totally. I start thinking about my job, some nice movie or anything that does not make sense. I compensate this by just rereading resulting in non-comprehension of the topic. After this i start sweating, lose all my confidence and feel out of place. Recently, i have started meditating and its helping me a bit. I imagine myself sitting in the exam and rocking it. Is there any other lifestyle changes that i can make?

**A:** What you describe is a case of "auto pilot"; when you go through the motions of daily routine without really paying attention to what you're reading or doing. You can try some mindfulness techniques as they help you be in the "present" a little more, rather than lost in your own thoughts. Doing things calmly is not the same as doing things on auto pilot. Regarding feeling like you're spiraling: I often used to think that I got multiple questions wrong in Verbal. I could never be a 100% confident of my answer in many cases, but I always believed in giving it my best shot and then moving on the next question. Thinking about what I've already submitted is not going to help. So, think of it as a "brain refresh" every time you hit the "NEXT" button on the test

**A:** you have explained a classic example of 'catastrophizing', we tend to catastrophize and zone out. At that moment consciously 'do not re read the question', get on to the next one. Meditation is helping you so continue. You can start writing journals and expressing

**Q:** Hi experts! I recently sat my GMAT exam and didn't do as well as my official practice tests. The main issue for me is the Verbal section. On all six of the Official practice tests, I scored 720 or above. Quant was always a 49 or 50, but my verbal score fluctuated quite a bit, between a 37 and 41. On the exam day, I really struggled to focus on the verbal section and found it difficult to read the text and questions. I scored a Q48, but only a V27. I do struggle with Dyslexia and am wondering if this is just a worry that's constantly at the back of my mind. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

**A:** the thought that 'I have Dyslexia' will build up tension in you- don't panic! Do this tonight- write down about 3 of your personal best performances in the verbal section till date- and track your strengths. Build on it. don't pressurize/ label yourself.

**Q:** Would you suggest any sort of exercises or techniques to carry out a day or even few hours before the test to keep the anxiety/stress under control on the test?

**A:** That's a great question. When I get nervous/anxious I tend to have a surplus of energy that makes me feel very restless. Physical exercise is a great way to channel that energy into something positive that helps you feel even more refreshed. Additionally, I took the exam in the morning around 10-11AM as I wanted to get done with it earlier in the day rather than worrying about it for hours. That time also worked for me as I was used to studying during that time. Before the exam I spent some time talking to my mom and close ones, as that helped me distract myself. I only went through the overall formulas once and did not look at any of my mistakes/difficult questions as that would put me in a negative frame of mind. So just be positive and go for the exam with a calm mindset.

**Q:** if you could advise three things to help with anxiety, even in general terms, what would they be? Specifically, test anxiety.

**A:** Believe in yourself, don't try to be a perfect scorer, take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds, exhale audibly all at once, and let your head, jaw, shoulders drop- repeat the cycle twice. Planning and prioritizing also help. Keep adequate time to socialize and share, talk to people :)