

# Pre-test jitters might boost scores, study says

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A little anxiety seemed to help kids with good working memory, research found.

(HealthDay)—For students with a good memory, feeling anxious before taking an exam might actually lead to a higher test score, researchers have found.

In the new study, researchers in England used computer tests to assess [levels of anxiety](#) and [working memory](#) in 96 students, aged 12 to 14. Good working memory is generally associated with better school performance.

The students were then tested on their general thinking and [math skills](#).

The researchers found that in students with a good working memory, anxiety was associated with higher test scores. In students with a poor working memory, anxiety led to lower test results, according to the

report published Oct. 12 in the [British Journal of Psychology](#).

"The research is exciting because it enhances our knowledge of when, specifically, anxiety can have a negative impact on taking tests. The findings also suggest that there are times when a little bit of anxiety can actually motivate you to succeed," study author Matthew Owens, a researcher at the University of Cambridge, said in a news release from the British Psychological Society. Owens was at the University of Southampton when the study took place.

The findings could improve understanding of the impact that anxiety has on students, the researchers said. They estimated that between 10 percent and 40 percent of children have anxiety when taking tests, and suggested that those who are more likely to do poorly on tests could be given priority for receiving extra help in school.

While the study found an association between [anxiety levels](#) and test scores, it did not prove a cause-and-effect relationship.

**More information:** The Anxiety and Depression Association of America has more about [test anxiety](#).

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