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image or cue is presented, such as: "You're taking your exam. As you're looking over the questions, you can feel the tension in the pit of your stomach. Your eyes are wandering around the room and your thoughts are jumping from place to place."

The group leader presents from 12 to 20 of these scenes, arranged in order from least tension-provoking to most tension-provoking. The first scene may be hearing about someone else who must take a test. The scenes progress to announcement of a test in your class in two weeks, studying for it, walking to the test site, seeing a question you don't know how to answer, seeing other people finish while you are still working, and finally talking it over with classmates afterwards.

In the final step of the program, students are exposed to the entire range of images, all the time exercising new-found powers of relaxation.

Those Nagging Doubts

Desensitization basically works by controlling the physical response to anxiety—muscle tension. Anxiety has mental and emotional responses as well, and some new treatment programs are appearing on college campuses which focus on the "worry" component of anxiety. (Most of these programs incorporate desensitiza-

tion into their sessions, too.)

One example is a "cognitive modification" program developed by Dr. Michael Weissberg, director of the counseling center at Grand Valley State College in Allendale, Michigan. Weissberg combines desensitization with "cognitive restructuring," a therapy which confronts and disarms irrational thoughts that feed anxiety.

Weissberg's program makes students aware of the thoughts and worries they are experiencing while taking tests and studying for them. Anxious students tend to worry about everything. They are quick to blame themselves when things go wrong. They often feel a strong need for others' approval, and link their performance with winning or losing that approval. They also tend to see grades and test scores as measures of their personal worth; doing badly means to them that they are worthless as persons. They fear that failure will bring dire consequences.

In Weissberg's program, students focus on their thoughts. The truth is separated from gross exaggeration, the rational from the irrational, the useful from the self-defeating. Then students are given "coping thoughts" they can use to counter irrational thoughts when they reappear.

"I think everybody has these kinds of irrational thoughts," says Weiss-

berg, "but a majority of people are able to cope with them. People without coping thoughts—thoughts that build up their self-esteem—continue to be anxious and get more upset and more down on themselves."

Both desensitization and cognitive restructuring have proved very effective in reducing anxiety. Interestingly, though, such programs by themselves do not improve the grades and test scores of students who complete test-anxiety sessions. For unknown reasons, most test-anxious students also have poor study habits. A test-anxiety program combined with counseling to improve study habits, however, has consistently improved student grades.

For everyone facing exam week, and especially for those with a bit of test anxiety, Dr. Suinn has some suggestions on how you can help yourself to do better:

1. Learn to be comfortable with your reasonable anxiety. If you have a fearful attitude, you can precipitate harmful anxiety in yourself.
2. Do not schedule stressful situations just before exams. Stay away from people who irritate you.
3. Get to the examination place a few minutes early: relax, clear your head and think calm, relaxing thoughts.
4. Talk to someone who settles you down, makes you feel good about yourself. ■

Just when everything is going well, you have that dream again. The one where someone hands you a test paper. Biology 202 Final Exam. Biology 202? You've never been to that class before!

You pull out your dog-eared class schedule and there it is—Biology 202, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Friday. How could you have forgotten to go to the class for a whole term?

But you have, and now you're staring at 50 true-false questions. The people around you are hunched over their papers, furiously scratching out answers. They've finished the first page already.

The questions swim in front of you. You check your brain's file folder on biology. It's empty. Boy, this is going to look great on your grade report—two "A's," three "B's" and an "F." Your eyes dart about, frantically searching for the nearest exit. You've got to get out of this nightmare!

"Don't leave!" says psychologist and dream expert Patricia Garfield. Stay in that dream classroom and cope with the test. If you run away, the nightmare will only sneak back

The Power of Positive Dreaming

to haunt you again.

According to Garfield, test-related nightmares strike many people—nonstudents as well as students. Even Freud relived biology and chemistry finals in his sleep.

These nightmares can leave you aching and anxious the next morning, she says. But with a little bit of effort, you can create a positive ending for the nightmare that will make you more confident and capable in waking life.

Garfield, author of the book *Creative Dreaming*, says the most important element in controlling bad dreams is to "confront and conquer" the frightening situation presented in the dream.

"Before you go to sleep," she advises, "repeat to yourself, 'I will not wake up or try to get out of my bad dream. I will stay there and face it.'"

Successful behavior in a dream carries over to waking life, Garfield claims. If you cope with a tough

exam in your sleep, you will wake up sure you can do it with both eyes open.

"Our dreams are behavior practice," according to Garfield. "And when we are practicing behavior of 'confront and conquer,' we are practicing coping with a real-life situation."

If, in your dream, you feel guilty about skipping Biology 202, perhaps you're neglecting something equally important in waking life. If getting an "F" in a dream bothers you, ask yourself what you're worried about failing in real life.

The next time you have an exam nightmare, don't panic and run for the nearest exit. Face the test. Cope with it. Perhaps in your dream you can arrange with the teacher to take the test later. Or have someone breeze through the door to tell you it was all a terrible mistake, and you don't have to take the test after all. If you put your mind to it, your dream *can* have a happy ending.

And when you wake up, think about what the dream was trying to tell you. The late, late show in your mind may give you an interesting perspective on your daily life. ■