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Presentation Anxiety

Learn to control the fears and anxiety that can prevent the best results when offering presentations.

Written by L. John Mason, Ph.D., Author of the Bestseller; [Guide to Stress Reduction](#).

The fear of making a presentation is the most common phobia that exists. It ranks with the fear of death as a traumatic experience, probably because people unconsciously fear that the attention directed at them when they are making a presentation will somehow expose them to dangers that may lead to death! This unfounded fear (in most normal situations) paralyzes millions of people and keeps them from moving ahead in their careers or in their enjoyment of life. Certainly you can live without taking "center stage" but the quality of life can be disrupted by the possibility of being called upon to make a speech, a presentation, lead a prayer, or even confront a hiring committee.

To overcome this fear, you must become aware of how you handle stress and anxiety. Awareness is half the battle. The other half is learning how to "let go" of anxiety so you may take back control of the way you respond in difficult situations. Presentation anxiety can manifest in the same ways that panic/anxiety often occurs. Commonly people suffering from this anxiety will: change their breathing (short shallow breaths or hold their breath), tighten muscles, tighten their gut (slowing or stopping digestion and reducing normal reproductive activity), reduce blood flow to the surface of their skin in their hands and feet, increase heart rate, increase stress hormone secretion (increase blood sugar and reduce immune system function (over time)), and increase sensitivity to all environmental changes. You can learn to control each of these symptoms either directly or indirectly. By controlling these symptoms you learn to get back in control of your life!

The keys to controlling presentation anxiety are:

- Breathe slowly/diaphragmatically
- Remain in the present... in your body, in a positive way
- Regular deep relaxation with Biofeedback Temperature monitoring
- Use the special relaxation tape regularly!
- Learn to warm your hands and feet
- Avoid caffeine and stimulants
- Regular aerobic exercise Positive self-talk... not negative ruminations
- Get support in confronting this fear and then desensitizing yourself to fears/phobias of speaking in public.



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1. Learn to breathe diaphragmatically Place a hand over your upper abdomen:

- Push it OUT as you inhale...
- Let it move IN as you exhale Let your chest, shoulder, neck, and back relax as you breathe.
- Only on a very deep breath should these parts move in the breath.

This may be the most important Presentation Anxiety Control you can learn!

2. Use the Stress Management for Presentation Anxiety tape 1-3 times per day for 8-12 weeks.

Use some form of temperature training biofeedback on your hands to learn how to warm your hands with relaxation. When you can consistently get above 90 degrees Fahrenheit (93-95 degrees is ideal) then you can begin to master warming your feet to 90 degrees. When you can "let go" by relaxing and warming your hands and feet, you will be able to control if not prevent your panic episodes. Then you must develop the confidence in your control so the fear of panic during presentations will not control your life.

3. Regular exercise will help you to work off the effects of life's stresses.

3-5 times per week of regular exercise that can elevate your heart rate for 15-45 minutes would be best. Check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program if you have been inactive for a long while. Even though elevating your heart rate can be a little scary, the release of tensions and the strengthening of your cardiovascular system will have great benefits.

4. Eat regular meals.

Low fat and complex carbohydrates are better than fast foods with lots of sugar. AVOID CAFFEINE and other stimulants. Caffeine is found in coffee, black teas, cola drinks, chocolate, some over-the-counter pain medications, and other foods/drugs. Read labels. Eating as closely as you can to natural foods (lots of: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, etc.) will benefit any one.

5. Practice positive self-talk.

Do not let your fears escalate into you losing control of your body and your mind. By breathing slowly and staying in your body, in present time, you avoid falling into the negative pattern of fear and panic.



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6. Get support from your friends, doctor, and therapist if necessary.

Check your area for panic/anxiety support or treatment groups! Then consider joining a local Toastmasters group to desensitize yourself, slowly, to speaking in public. Desensitization to your fear can be started after you have mastered relaxation. When you know how to breathe diaphragmatically and can warm your hands and feet, you have the skills to begin the mental rehearsal called desensitization. After getting completely relaxed, maintain this comfort/relaxation, and begin to picture yourself preparing and then giving a presentation to a positive supportive audience. When you can do this mental rehearsal successfully, remaining relaxed, then you can begin to actually prepare for such an experience. This will take time and practice, however, overcoming your emotional fears to making a presentation will take much of the uncontrolled fear from the actual event. The secret to making a good presentation comes in the preparation. Repeated practice adds confidence! Humor or funny stories can help "break the ice" at the beginning of your presentation, but you need to rehearse even this part. Practice a strong closing that asks the audience for a call to action! You may even want to videotape a "dress rehearsal" so you can see your mannerisms and voice tones when you emphasize your main points. This extra work will be well worth the effort when you actually perform. You may even find that, after all this preparation, the event will be less stressful than you had expected. Indeed, the expectation of a future difficult situation is usually worse than the presentation itself.

DON'T BE A VICTIM TO THE FUTURE!

Live in the present, in your body, and under your control!

Remember! You can get back in control of your body and your life! You must make this a priority so you can avoid being a victim to this fear of making presentations.