Ground Yourself:
Using Five Senses Technique to Cope with Test Anxiety among Nursing Students

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Purpose

To evaluated the effectiveness of the Five Senses Technique (FST), a grounding exercise, in reducing test anxiety among Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students.

Significance

- Test anxiety is common among nursing students and can hinder academic performance and well-being. Brief, evidence-based strategies are needed to support stress management.
- According to ACHA's (2023) fall 2022 health assessment, 31.7% of students without a formal diagnosis and 50.3% of those with a diagnosed anxiety disorder reported that anxiety negatively impacted their academic performance.

Methodology

- A one-group pretest–post-test mixed-methods design was used with BSN students in their first through third semesters.
- One week before an exam, students attended a 40-minute educational session on test anxiety and the FST (5-4-3-2-1) technique.
- Anxiety was assessed with the Test Anxiety Questionnaire (TAQ) one week before and one week after the exam. Post exam focus groups provided qualitative feedback.

Results

Quantitate:

- Ninety-four students participated
- 48 completed both pre and post Survey on Nist & Diehl's Test Anxiety Questionnaire (TAQ).
- Mean TAQ scores decreased by 4.7 points ($p < 0.001$)
- High anxiety prevalence fell from 23% to 4% ($p = 0.03$).

Qualitative:

- Students described FST as calming, simple, and useful for maintaining focus.

Test anxiety outcomes before and after Five Senses Training (FST) ($N = 48$)

Outcome	Pre-FST	Post-FST	*P*-value
Nist & Diehl scale	(28.5) 28.7 ± 9.5	(22.5) 23.4 ± 7.8	<0.001
Absence (10-19)	9 (18.8)	15 (31.3)	0.029
Healthy (20-35)	24 (50.0)	19 (39.6)	
Unhealth (>35)	11 (22.9)	2 (4.2)	
missing	4 (8.3)	12 (25.0)	
Perceived current level of proficiency in managing test anxiety (range: 1=fundamental awareness (basic knowledge) to 5=expert (recognized authority))	(2.0) 1.8 ± 0.9	(3.0) 2.8 ± 1.0	<0.001
FST effectively reduce anxiety levels **prior** to a nursing exam?			
Yes	-	30 (62.5)	-
Somewhat		12 (25.0)	
No		0	
missing		6 (12.5)	
FST effectively reduce anxiety levels **during** the nursing exam?			
Yes	-	26 (54.2)	-
Somewhat		13 (27.1)	
No		3 (6.3)	
missing		6 (12.5)	
Able to complete five steps of FST?			
Yes	-	25 (52.1)	-
Somewhat		12 (25.0)	
No		5 (10.4)	
missing		6 (12.5)	

**Note*. Numbers are (*Mdn*) *M* ± *SD* or *n* (%).

Conclusion

- This study demonstrates that a brief educational intervention, focused on test anxiety awareness and the 5-4-3-2-1 FST grounding technique, can lead to meaningful reductions in test anxiety among nursing students.
- The FST is a simple, adaptable tool that students can use independently, making it a valuable addition to nursing programs' efforts to support student success.

Implication

- Embedding grounding strategies like FST into the curriculum—possibly in collaboration with campus counseling services—may promote resilience and emotional well-being in the long term.
- Faculty can also play a key role in reinforcing these practices; for instance, instructors might begin exams or classes with a one-minute grounding exercise, signaling to students that it is acceptable to take a moment to center themselves. Such integration can foster a supportive learning environment and reduce the stigma around experiencing anxiety (Turner and McCarthy, 2017).

References