

# Performance Anxiety

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# What is Performance Anxiety?

Performance anxiety is fear about one's ability to perform a specific task. People experiencing performance anxiety may worry about failing a task before it has even begun. They might believe failure will result in humiliation or rejection.

*Fact: Around half of all performing musicians are affected to some degree by performance anxiety.*





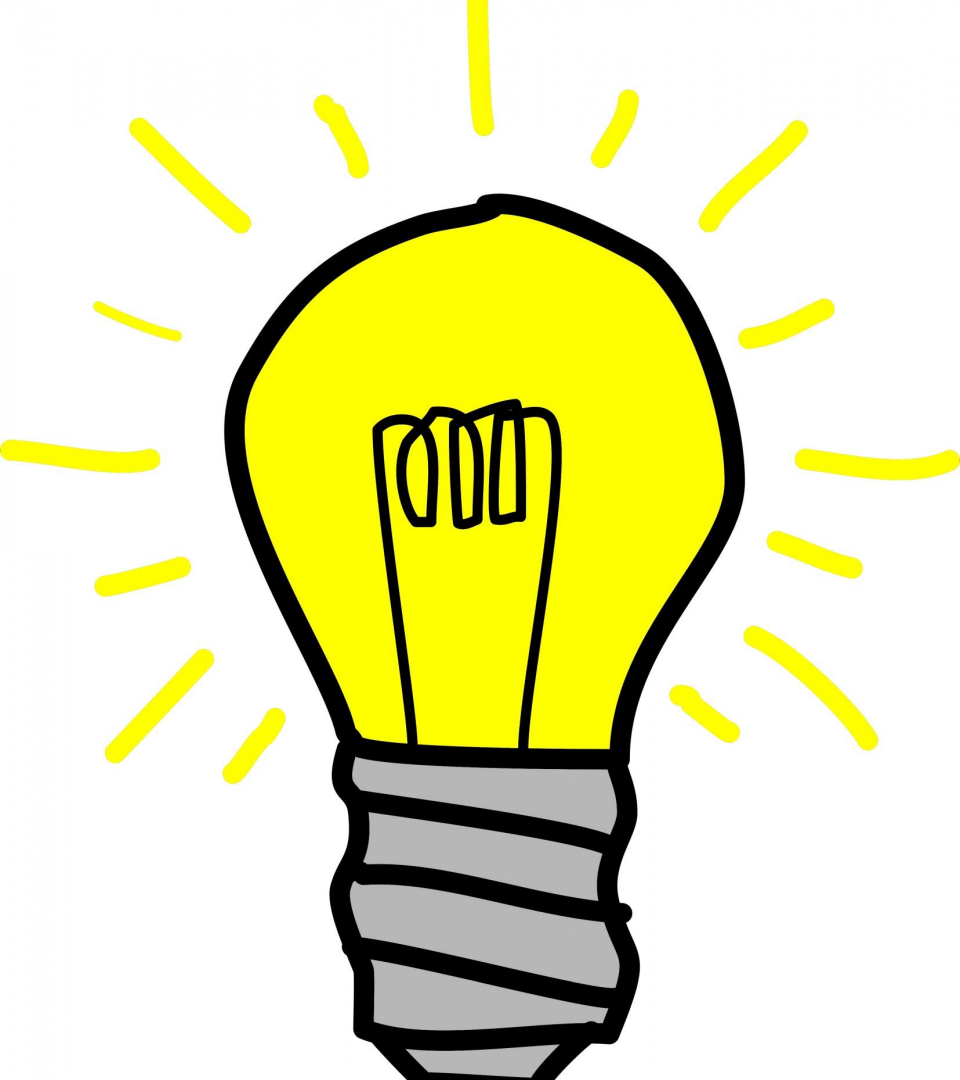
# Symptoms

When a person perceives a threat, the body reacts naturally, this is due to the body's fight or flight defensive mechanism which causes adrenaline hormones to be released into the bloodstream affecting organs throughout the body in characteristic ways. (Lehmann, et al. , 2007, p. 146)

# How the physical changes of arousal translate into physiological symptoms of anxiety.

Lehmann, et al. , 2007, p.147, Table 8.1.

<u><i>Adaptive bodily function</i></u>	<u><i>Sensation Felt</i></u>
Heart beat vigorously to increase oxygen supply to muscles	Pounding Chest
Glands in the skin secrete perspiration to lower body temperature	Excessive sweating, wet palms
Saliva flow decrease	Dry mouth, lump in the throat
Digestive system is inhibited as blood is diverted from stomach to muscles	“Butterflies in stomach”, nausea



## Solutions

Performance anxiety comes with many negative effects that can affect a musician mentally or physically. Although there is no 'cure' for performance anxiety and that it is inevitable, there are many strategies that allow a performer to ease their body and mind minimizing the negative effects of performance anxiety on their performance.

# Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing before and during a performance may be the most popular coping strategy of any kind as it ensures that the body takes in the amount of oxygen it expects in state of arousal limiting the effects it has on your body and your performance.





# Muscle Relaxation

Another approach in minimizing symptoms of anxiety is progressive muscle relaxation training. In these exercises a person proceeds through areas of the body contracting and and relaxing their muscles one at a time starting with smaller muscles and moving their way towards bigger muscles. This practice has been proven to be effective in that it reduces anxiety as well as relieves tension in muscles which prevents your body from cramping up or being stiff during a performance.

# Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique is another method related to relaxation and bodily awareness. The technique has a distinctly philosophical component, emphasizing the unity of body and mind, but it also offers solutions to “misuse” of the body through enhanced sensory awareness and physical training. Exercises focus mainly on bodily posture, use of muscles, etc. It is used to reduce unnecessary tension that accompanies anxiety. Examples of Alexander Technique exercises can be simply standing up and sitting down but breaking it down into steps that prevent you from injuring yourself

## Ex. Standing up

1. Slide your feet closer to your body
2. Hinge forward using your hip joints, or the area where the top of your thigh bone attaches into your hip
3. Gently put pressure into your entire foot and push off of the floor
4. Stand slowly, without any added tension in the spine or neck



# Performance Practice

A large part of our nerves come from playing in a new environment and in a setting we are not yet accustomed to. A way we can ease this transition is by practicing in the hall beforehand, giving you an idea of how you will sound in the hall and getting comfortable with your surroundings, another would be to practice in front of people before performing, this gets you accustomed to playing for people and having multiple mock performances makes the real performance less daunting.



# Sources

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Jon Muller I'm a mechanical engineer and founder of ErgonomicTrends.com. Good Form. Good Function. Good Health. (2020, April 10). 5 Alexander Technique Exercises You Must Try For your Posture and Back Pain. Retrieved December 14, 2020, from <http://ergonomictrends.com/alexander-technique-exercises-posture-back-pain/>