Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: All right, well let's go ahead and get started. My name is Dr. Stephanie Chervinko. I'm a psychologist. I work-up in the Counseling and Wellness Center upstairs on the fourth floor. Always like to do a little commercial about the Counseling Center. We offer individual and group counseling to any student who is currently enrolled, so services are eligible or you're eligible for any of the services. We assist students with any kind of psychological emotional or kind of personal problem. So, I like to say there's no problem that's really kind of too big and no problem that's really too small. So, we want you to come in if you feel like you're struggling in any way and might benefit from sitting down and talking with a professional. Then, we’d like you to do that. Our services are confidential, so we don’t tell family, friends, professors, other staff that you’ve come in to see us and we don't tell them what you talk about with us. So, it is a confidential, which is sometimes nice people appreciate that and if you're interested in talking with the counselor, you just need to call or go up to the fourth floor. We’re in the Student Services Center in room four-thirty or you can give us a call at 898-6345 and ask to schedule an appointment. So, just a little bit about that. Today we’re going to talk about stress because certainly I will say that anxiety can kind of go along with stress. Has actually a couple, couple years ago surpassed depression as the number one thing that students sort of come in concerned about when they come, when they do come in for counseling services. So, is used to be the number one concern was depressed feelings or depression and now it kind of anxiety/stress related. Depression is still number two but we know that a lot of students are experiencing anxiety and experiencing stress. So, we're going to talk a little bit today about kind of, what is stress.
Give you some ideas of what kind of what it is because sometimes you have to understand what it is before you can start to cope with it. Then, will talk about some different ways that people cope with it. Like I said, one of the things I think that's helpful around coping with stress is keeping our expectations manageable. So, today the expectation or the hope is, that if again, you walk out of here with one or two ideas about something that you might be able to do to kind of help decrease your stress. We are successful, so I'm going to be giving you lots of suggestions, lots of ideas. If you have questions as we go along, please feel free to shoot a hand up, ask the question. Also, I might be asking you some questions, it is so much more interesting if you engage and interact with me. I'm so much more entertaining that way, so we will go there.
So, what is stress?
Stress is, who can finish that for me and again I'm not looking for right or wrong answer. I just want to know what comes to mind when I say stress is.

Audience Member: Constant work

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Constant work that's something that creates stress. Yup, absolutely, thank you. What else, stress is?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: What did you say?

Audience Member: Stress is stressful.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Stress is stressful. Yes, stress is stressful isn’t. What else, stress is?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: What did you say?

Audience Member: Time-consuming.
Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Time-consuming. Doesn't it sometimes feel like you sometime, did you ever get to that point where you're feeling like you're spending more time being stressed? Then you are actually doing what needs to be done. Yeah, it can be time-consuming sometimes that spinning your wheels. Absolutely, stress is? What else? Yeah.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah, so there we, now we're kind of getting it, to the textbook, right? She got the textbook answer there, like it's kind of something related to biology. Absolutely, can become from prompt but we are going to talk about how it's not always a problem. Just stress is not always associated with problems but yea definitely there's some biological stuff going on. Good and it can be associated with problems but not always. What else, stress is? One more.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: What did I heard, I heard one.

Audience Member: Overwhelming.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Overwhelming. Yes, it certainly can be overwhelming. We can get too much stress, can be overwhelming right? Too much stress and we'll talk a little bit to about kind of the varying levels of stress. But, yea too much stress can definitely be overwhelming. Here's some things I kind of think about...
When I think about stress.
One is, that it’s universal. In other words, lots of people experience it. Right? I don’t know anybody in society that hasn’t experienced stress in some way. If you, if you’re somebody who has trouble talking to people, boy great conversation starter, are you stressed? Yeah, I’m stressed. Boy, me too everybody is stressed. Tell me the last time you were stressed? Whew, I am so stressed. We all feel stress, right? So, it’s pretty universal, so one thing I want to say is look around the room. If you are feeling stressed, guess what. You’re not alone, right? And that’s not even to say anything about the people who probably felt too stressed to come to the Stress Management Workshop, so it’s universal. And, so that means it’s pretty normal. It is pretty normal to be experiencing stress. Especially, I think in college, college has become more and more stressful for students. I think, we place more demands on students, students more students are having to work to get themselves through college. We know that, you know folks are having trouble kind of getting classes and things like that, so college is stressful. We know that our students are kind of coming in with more stress and so it’s a pretty normal thing for people to be experiencing this.
So, that means it's a little inevitable. That we're all going to kind of get through or we're all going to kind of go through an experience some level of stress. Woah, wait a second, did that just say necessary? Shut the front door. Is stress necessary?

Audience member: Yeah.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yes? What makes stress necessary?

Audience Member: Keeps you on game.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yea, very good. How many people agree that some level of stress keeps you on game? Yeah, some. I did say some, right? Because, as we talked about it, it can also be overwhelming. So, we're going to talk a little bit about what kind of levels of stress and recognizing, again not all stress is bad and not all levels of stress are bad but we want to try to, kind of do some things to address that overwhelming. So, some level of stress is necessary.
If you were zero stress, I would really be concerned because you might be dead. Right? So, we all experience some level of stress.
Stress is individual. Okay. In other words, even though it's universal and pretty normal, not everybody experiences stress in the same way. Okay, we might have different reactions to stress, so it might show up differently. What I do and what I experience when I'm stressed, may not be what you do and what you experience when you're stressed or what she does and she experiences when she stressed. Okay, the things that might generate stress for me, may not be the things that generate stress for you and may not be the things that generate stress for you. So, there's an individual component to stress too, so that's one thing when sometimes we look around and we kind of compare ourselves with everybody else look like they got together but not me. Ehh, for one thing it may look like they got it together on the outside but not in a silly on the inside and the other thing to as we don't always know that they might not be experiencing stress about some other things. So, how we experience and how we show our stress may look real difference. There's an individual component to it.
And, then kind of going back to the problem statement, which can totally agree negative events problem but can also be related to positive events. What's something that might be a positive thing in someone's life that might generate stress?

Audience Member: You got promoted, so you have [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Absolutely! Right, yay for the promotion. Right and hopefully the promotion came with a little bump in the paycheck but oh my gosh now I have more responsibility and that generate stress. Great! Something else positive that might generate stress?

Audience Member: Childbirth.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Child, oh my gosh! Yeah, anybody ever go, if you want to see some stress, just go on and google like childbirth video on YouTube. Yea, no thank you very much. Right but it's a pos, I mean I would say for a lot of people that's a very positive thing but yeah absolutely. Probably raising kids is positive but yet stressful.

Audience Member: Graduating [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Oh my gosh! Do we have any graduating folks in here? Any graduating folks? No, did they figure out that how, that's they get to graduate now because they figured out how to deal with stress but yes.
Absolutely, change, transition we can have good positive changes. How about coming to college? Right, anybody remember kind of some folks might be new to college. Some folks might be able to think back to when they were new to college. Generally, a pretty positive event for people but comes with stresses, so not all stress is related to something negative or problematic it can also be related to things that are good things. So, we can experience excitement, joy and feel some stress around that and again that's a pretty normal thing. Sometimes when we're experiencing stress around positive changes, we have a tendency to sort of say, oh I shouldn't be experiencing that. That's not okay and yet it's perfectly natural and normal. When we're experiencing big changes, transition things of that nature whether there positive or negative that we would be experiencing some stress, so good stuff. Ugh, you guys are awesome. Alright, so here's the...
Textbook definition or at least one of them. Right, there's of the bunch of them out there but I kind of like this one. Stress is an automatic physical or biological response to any stimulus that requires you to adjust to change. So, there's a big association between stress and change. Okay, so transitions can be big things for changes. So, whether you have had your bike stolen, suddenly been dumped by your boyfriend or girlfriend. Oops, I thought I shouldn't do that on the microphone. That probably just blew out, I just blew at her ears. Or you had your computer crash in the middle of writing a 15 page term paper. Each real or perceived threat triggers a cascade of stress hormones and produces this well-orchestrated set of physiological changes. Right, so what are some of those changes that end up happening?
Fight or flight response. Right, folks heard of the fight or flight response kind of in the face of danger. Our bodies kind of automatically react to that and so we know the physical sensations of stress. Stress hormones race through our bloodstream and kind of go to different parts of the body and then prepare you to either fight or flee or in some cases freeze. Right, anybody kind of get that paralyzed feeling sometimes when they experience stress. You just kind of like, I don't know what to do. Kind of freezing, so that could happen as well. So, basically what happens is your sympathetic nervous system kind of revs up the body. Your heart beat faster, your breathing quickens, blood vessel start to constrict, digestive system flows, senses gets sharper, sweat glands open, endorphin are released, so these things all can happen in response to stressful event or things that might come to trigger that fight or flight response. And, so this can be really helpful, if you try to do...
Something like this...
Right or maybe you are doing some like that. Kind of being that amped up mode or maybe some like that.
Right, if you want to be a little amped up for that or even something like that.
Right, whether you are the one looking for dinner or the one deciding you don’t want to be dinner. Right, so it can be super helpful when those things can happen. So, it can be really useful to take crucial action and then when the situations over...
That’s a queue for the mind and body...
To start to calm down. So, not all stresses are bad. Some stress is actually good. Some stress is actually beneficial...
We need stress to motivate us,
What is STRESS?

- Not all stress is BAD, some stress is actually GOOD
- We need stress to
  - Motivate us
  - Keep us alert

Keep us alert...
And perform at our peak level. So, revving up a bit can even be helpful if we need to study hard to get through dead week or finals. Right, so we want to be who said, stress is because it helps you stay on game. I like that, yeah helps you stay on game. Right. Come on in, I think we got an empty, does anybody have an empty chair. Raise your hand if you have an empty chair next to you, so she can find a seat. There you go. So, revving up can help us stay on game. The idea is, that we don’t want to get too revved up, right?
So, to kind of illustrate this,
We have this lovely little Yerkes-Dotson Curve here and these wonderful researchers discovered that as stress and anxiety rise so does performance and efficiency - up to a point. So as at the point further stress and anxiety can lead to a decline in performance and efficiency. So, some level of kind of that revved up ness helps us get things like creativity, being able solve problems, making progress, change, feeling satisfied. If we don't have enough, we're kind of under stimulated or just kind of don't have enough going on. You get bored, we've get fatigued, we get frustrated, we don't feel very satisfied. If we have too much in our performance is usually low. If we have too much, too much of it we can get the ineffectual spinning our wheels or taking, do not really doing, doing much to be in be very helpful to ourselves. We can get exhausted, we might see illness kind of come up, low self-esteem and again performance goes down. So, with stress, what you want to do is kind of think about, what's my optimum level? Okay, where am I going to be revved up enough to kind of stay on game and be able to get in the zone? Anybody ever kind of had that experience when you're doing homework or you're working on something in you're like, it's just flowing. You're like, I'm so in the zone. Right? And then other times, it could be the same kind of level of whatever it is that you're working on but your stress is just so much and you're like I can even, I don't even know what I read. I'm like reading it five, I have no idea or I don't even know how to add 2 plus 2 right now because I have just hit my limit. Right, so you want to kind of that zones, is what you are trying to feel. Alright and it varies from person to person and from task to task, so not everybody has the same zone. So, being aware of that, so like my zone and your zone may not be the same.
Okay and if I'm doing a really easy task, I probably don't need to be revved up as much as if I'm doing harder task.
So, things get tricky though, when our mind doesn’t do a very good job of sort of assessing the threat or ability to cope with the threat. So, stress can be in the eye of the beholder.
So, we asked ourselves two questions when thinking were about whether something stressful or not. First is it a threat and threats don't always have to be physical threats. Right, we can have kind of threat in terms of does this feel like something that might be helpful or harmful to me in some way? So, for example we might perceive a test to be threatening in some way not because the test is going to come and eat you up like a bear would or something like that but because you might sort of attached the meaning to the test. The test might have some implications for how you're doing in the class and how you doing in the class might have some implications for you know how you're doing in your major, your GPA, those kinds of things. So, the level of importance or meaning are kind of threat that you put on, whatever it is that happening, is going to contribute to whether or not you view it as something really stressful. Okay, so if you're like, you know this is just one test of many test. One test doesn't define me, that I hope I do the best I can on it but if I don't I know I'm still a good person. I know that I still have lots of other test I will get to take in my life. Then maybe that test doesn't feel quite as threatening but if every test feels like sort of a determination of whether I'm smarter, dumb or whether I'm going to be successful or not successful in life and sometimes we catch that meaning to it. Whew, suddenly this test becomes a little bit more threatening to my sense of self, so we look at that. The second question is can I cope with this threat?
So, if I feel like it is a threat do I think I can cope with it? Okay, the degree to which I experience something as threatening or not and the degree to which I feel like I can cope with it is going to help determine how much stress I experienced about it. So, if for example, I say whoa this test really is you know pretty important but I know that I have the ability to study, I know that I have the ability to learn the material, I know that in the past when it comes to exams I’ve done pretty well and you know I know that for the most part I’m to be able kind of breeze deeply and kind of get myself through this test. Yeah and I know that I left myself enough time to deal with it. I’m probably going to feel a little less stressed about it. I might experience some stress but not as much but if I’m like I have no idea, you know I can’t figure out how to approach this, I don’t like to have enough time, I have so many other things to do. Suddenly, I don’t feel like I can cope with it and it feels a lot more stressful, so how we define our ability to cope and whether we see something as stressful or not can have a lot to do. The trick is though, that our minds don’t always do a good job of helping us determine or assessing whether something threatening or whether we’re able to cope. So, sometimes we’re not always accurate in our assessment and that can contribute to stress. So, for example, when your arousal level is geared up...
To deal with something like that
but really you're dealing with something that's more like that. So, in other words, with kind of made it out to be a lion when really it's a mouse
or we made it out to be a looming tornado
when really it's just crap, where am I going to park my bike and it's really crowded.
Then we might get something that kind of looks like that. Stress, right because we haven't really matched our assessment of what the situation really is. With what our arousal level really is. Make sense and if we take it too far sometimes we can panic. Right?
Or get really anxiety. So the good news is, so here's the problem, right. Help us out Stephanie, so here's the problem. The good news is that with practice we can learn to monitor and control our arousal level, so we have to practice it. So, that we don't experience as much stress and so we're going to talk about some ways that people might kind of moderate or control and kind of monitor how aroused you get.
So, first of all, let's start to look at kind of what are warning signs of stress because sometimes we tend to neglect these.
So, I know I'm stressed when... What do you notice? What kind of thoughts, feelings, behavior, physical sensation, do you notice that start to tell you that you might be feeling stressed? Okay, over here and then you okay? What do you notice? Yeah.

Audience Member: Overthinking.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Overthinking. Yeah, so you kind of start getting caught up in your head and your thinking about it more and you get caught up in your thoughts. Yeah, okay, so you tend to do that more when you're stressed and when you are not as stressed you don't do it as much. So, you notice that, okay when I do that I'm starting to feel more stress. Got you, how about you?

Audience Member: [Inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Ah, okay, so keeping, you're not as good at keeping track of things. When you're stressed as, so when you're not stressed you kind of stay on top of stuff a little better?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah. Yeah, you kind of lose you, you kind of lose track of things a little bit more because you're not as present. Alright, oh lots of hands. One, two, three, four and five, got it? And, then you don't have to keep your hand lose. Go.
Audience Member: [inaudible]


Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Oh, appetite loss. Anybody else, appetite change? Yeah, anybody increase appetite? You know, you eat more when you're not hungry. Hmm, yeah. Mhmm. How about you?

Audience Member: When you can't sleep.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Can't sleep. Okay Sleep. Sleep problems, when you're stressed. Yeah, start noticing, okay. Do I see a hand back here?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Not, what makes you stressed. What do you experience? So, how do you recognize? How do you start to recognize? Oh, I think I'm beginning to experience some stress. What's kind of going on?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Okay, so if you notice yourself feeling more frustrated, that there's an association between those two. Great! And, who was the other hand? I had a hand over here. Yes!

Audience Member: When [inaudible] frustration.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Frustration, so you notice you, you kind of irritability. Does that kind of go with frustration? You're more little irritable.

Audience Member: Like [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah! Suddenly, like normally, you're totally fine waiting in line at the grocery store but then when you're stressed you're like, I hate each and every one of you. That and I know that you have 11 items and you're only supposed to have 10. Right? You're just kind of less tolerant and more irritable when you start noticing. That normally things that are like, It's okay, go ahead, you can go in front of me and then suddenly you're stressed and you're like, oh my gosh.
Yeah. Okay, you had irritability, so lots of irritability, people notice. And, anything else that we didn't kind of mention somebody wants to... Yeah!

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Right, oh that sounds like you're kind of overstressed. Doesn't it? Yeah, overstressed but you know feeling more cheerful sometimes. Absolutely. Yeah, kind of probably, if you reach the breakdown you're like overstressed, so what we kind of begin to notice or pay attention to is, what are those early warning signs? Right, not the signs that you kind of completely gone over the hump but those early warning sign because that's when you want to start to intervene a little bit more, so when you start noticing.
So, we talked about quite a few of these sleep problems, feeling some anxiety, irritability, stomach... maybe a little bit funkiness in your tummy, butterflies. Withdrawing from friends... being a little less social, inefficiency, kind of spinning wheels, forgetting things, not being able to focus as well. Self-doubt, I know when I'm feeling stressed sometimes, like normally I'm like, yeah I rock and then suddenly I have a lot of stress and I'm like oh, maybe I don't rock as much as I thought I did. Right? Then the judgment stuff starts to show up. So, that might show up when we're feeling more stressed. Muscle tension, we talked about all winded up, kind of just a little more edgy, feeling out of control, substance abuse, you know? Drinking a little more, glass of wine, smoking a little something, you know? I mean, you know does are things, you know, again you know we kind of laugh about it a little bit but at the same time to though it's one of those things that could kind of that contribute to more stress right? Because, it makes us more less effective. Frequent illnesses there's a connection kind of between our immune system and the amount of stress that we carry, so kind of getting ill more frequently. Might indicate that we need to make some shifts around our stress. Kind of racing thoughts, we can make it hard to concentrate. Talk about changes appetite or weight.
So, the bottom line is don't ignore the warning signs of stress because one of the things that tend to happen is that we start to feel these things, we kind of let them go. Right, I'll be okay or we don't notice. You know? You ever have that experience where it's like you don't really notice how much you were sort of caring until somebody points it out or there's a little absence of it, so that experience sometimes of like, sometimes with the muscle tension, you know? I don't notice how much muscle tension I have until maybe I do a little yoga and then I'm like, oh my gosh I feel much. I didn't realize, what I was going to holding in my body, you know or you know maybe I don't realize how kind of irritable I'm being until someone is like, are you okay? And, I'm like, Yea! I'm fine! Well you just seem a little edgy, you know? So, we want to try to begin to tune into an notice more what's going on with us and not ignore that and not sort of go with that I'm too stressed to kind of do anything about that. So, as we move into kind of talking about some of the things that we can do, begin thinking about ways that you might start employing these suggestions in your life.
So, how to cope?
Finally, exercise or physical activity, okay. How do you guys, sometimes I like to call it physical play because I think sometimes exercise for some people can get associated...
With drudgery, right? So, let's just call it physical play because boy, you can play physically in all sorts of ways. Right? So, how do you like to play physically? C'mon somebody say it. Go ahead I know you're going there.

Audience Member: Basketball

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Basketball. Okay, that's what we were all thinking, it was basketball. Yes, thank you. Yes, basketball. Yes, yes. How else do you play physically? What else do you like to do? What's fun? That gets you moving.

Audience Member: Running.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Running, running is fun for some people. Absolutely and more power to those people who believe it. Yeah, no that's great. Running. Yes!

Audience Member: Dancing.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Dancing, yes. How many people like to dance? Yay! Dancing is fun and it's easy, you can just throw on some music at home and dance. Right? What else is fun to do physically? Physical play. Other kinds of things that are fun to do movement wise. Yeah!

Audience Member: Hiking.
Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Hiking. Yeah, folks likes to, then again you get the benefit of why nature? But, what we know is that exercise physical movement just about any form of movement can help prevent pent-up muscle tension, certain exercises can elicit the relaxation, and response can help over time kind of decrease your heart rate. You can clear your mind when you're doing physical activity, so just a lots and lots of options to do that and what I say, is really make exercise joyful and fun, okay. If it is boring as heck for you to go and walk on the treadmill for 30, I mean if you love to do that great! More power to you, absolutely go do it but if it's really boring to walk on the treadmill for 30 minutes, do not do that. Dance, play basketball, play whatever basketball is a euphemism. You know, whatever it is that you enjoy doing make it something joyful. Okay, around stress but find some ways to kind of physically move your body and in general it doesn't have to be a lot. They say kind of on average it's good to get about 30 minutes. Five days a week under, 150 minutes a week. You can even break it up into 3, 10 minute segment throughout the day, so and still get the benefits around easing stress and some of help benefits. So, exercise.
Nutrition. Eating nutritiously, so what we put in our bodies plays a big role in our overall health and well-being. Rather than kind of creating more stress about what you should or shouldn't eat because I don't necessarily think we need to have like, forbidden foods or not forbidden foods because that usually doesn't work out too well. But, just to think about you know, in general are you getting, getting good nutrition? Are you getting you know, five servings of fruits and vegetables a day and if you aren't, don't feel like you have to suddenly go out and get five a day. Think about can I add one in, okay. Or are you getting enough protein in your diet? Are you getting enough carbs in there for energy? If you're unsure even what I mean by carbs, protein and vitamins, could you meet with the nutritionist. They actually have nutritionists available at the Wrec and over at the Student Health. Who can actually talk with, they're great about talking with students about how to make kind of healthy choices or how to get a little bit more nutrition in your diet. In ways that are very student friendly, right? Don't have a lot of time to cook and don't have a lot of money to do it, right, but they can talk with you about those things and so how we feed our bodies can really help in terms of keeping our stress at a good level.
Sleep, I know big one right? But, if there's one thing that I could sort of in terms of what helps overall our mental physical and emotional well-being, it's getting good sleep and sticking to a regular sleep schedule. I know that, that's a hard thing to do when your students and sort of in student mode but the more, the more that you can do to kind of get yourself to bed at a reasonable hour and try to get kind of that eight or nine hours, which is in general what most people need. I know people kind of very, some people need more, some people you know can do a little less but making sure that we do get enough because that's really the way that your body rests and rejuvenate. Yeah!

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Can take away, can, yes. It can and so one of the things that I will say is that, by trying to kind of have a more regular sleep cycle during those times that are less stressful, you're going to be, your body is going to be more resilient in general. Then, if you're kind of running on empty when you're not using, do you kind of see what I was saying, so when you don't have many stressors going on, you're like, I'm fine, I can stay up and do all and then suddenly you start kind of running on empty. And, then the stressors start to come in and then you're having trouble sleeping but what I'm saying is if you're, those times when you're not as stressed right? And, you're kind of still being better about kind of sticking to a regular sleep schedule, you have more in your tank to manage those stressful times and may be able to kind of continue to kind of stick with better sleep.
Does that make sense? So, yea. So, some of this is kind of preventative, it's not stuff that you necessarily do when you're stressed. Some of this is to kind of help prevent stress, so you do it even when you're not experiencing that high stress because it helps you stay more resilient. So, that's a great question, good point. Thank you. Nurture yourself, oh.
We all need support. We all need support, so taking care of your own needs. We oftentimes want to give and give and give to other people, put other people in front of us that sometimes we neglect our own bodies. Right? Our own emotional health, so thinking about things that really nurture you. That feel really good, right? So, maybe that's time with friends, maybe that's talking to family, maybe that's, you know making yourself something that is really yummy, maybe it's getting a massage or taken a really nice hot shower or hot bath, maybe it's taking time if you have a pet to play with your pet. But, doing things that just feel really good and nurturing to yourself, so taking time for you is something that's really helpful in terms of, again making us more resilient to stress.
Learning to relax. There are three basic kinds of downtime that we all need in our lives. We need relationship time, we're all kind of some social creature, so we all kind of need time to be in relation with people to connect with people. So, thinking about it, am I making time available for that, am I doing that, am I connecting with the people in my life that are important to me. We need recreation time that, that's kind of playtime, fun time. Don't always have to be physical, it can be, you know video games. It can be whatever's kind of fun for you, right? Whatever that play is, that you like to do. Whether it's going out with friends or you know, watching a little bit of TV or something like that. But, recreation, leisure, crafting whatever that might be and then we also need rest time and rest time is a little bit different than sleep. Sleep is good and we still need sleep but sometimes we need that rest time where we just have, and it doesn't always have to be a lot but it's just that time where you take some time out of your day and just kind of let the world kind of fade to the background. You're not necessarily occupying yourself with something and you're just kind of letting your mind and your body relax and rest a little bit. Again, it will be five minutes of that but we do need to kind of focus on learning how to relax a little bit more and all three things kind of contribute to that and help with that. So, thinking about yourself and thinking about you know, am I making time for relationships, am I making time for recreational, am I making time for some fun in my life and am I also making some time for resting. Do I let myself just kind of, we all have five minutes in a day, right? That's not going to kind of make or break anybody's success or failure in life and in fact it might even enhance. To just, five minutes to lay on your bed, not fall asleep but just kind of breathe and let go a little bit.
Finally putting things into perspective. We're going to talk a little bit about kind of working with our thoughts and how we can use our thoughts to help us decrease our stress and how thought sometimes can increase and contribute to stress. But, learning how to kind of put things in perspective, sometimes when we are feeling stressed, we may have a tendency to kind of blow things out of proportion or not look at or assessing accurately. So, learning how to look at things a little bit more accurately and being reasonable about the expectations that we place on ourselves can really help in terms of decreasing stress and making us more resilient to stress in the first place. So, there's a little bit about...
The relaxation response. We talked about kind of that revved up nest, the relaxation response is, this physical state, oh there it is...
Of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional response to stress. So, just like I said kind of the sympathetic nervous system kind of rubs the body up. Engaging the parasympathetic nervous system, I know big words, basically part of your body that revs you up, part of your body that calms you down. Kind of resting and digesting, is a good way to think about it. So, just like you rest it up, if you engage the other system it can kind of calm your body down and we can learn how to do that, to get to a response where we start to feel calmer and we start to feel more relaxed. It takes practice and it's not like flipping a light switch, again, if it was that easy, I'd be on Oprah. If I figured out a way to make that happen, so it's not necessarily like flipping a light switch. It does take practice getting that relaxation response but will talk about some different things that people do or can incorporate into their day to practice getting to that more relaxed state and the better we get at doing it the more practice we get. When we are feeling stressed, we can engage that process better. Makes sense? Okay, good. How are we doing? Hanging in there?

Audience Member: Yea.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Alright, good. Alright, so...
One way that we can kind of start to engage the relaxation response...
Is through focused breathing. And, so we’re going to practice that in here. Anybody ever watched a baby or an animal breathe? You ever notice how they breathe? What you notice about them when they breathe?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah, their stomach kind of rises and falls. Anybody ever watched a stressed out college student breathe? Do you know how they breathe? It's all up here in their chest, right? So, how we breathe has, has an effect on how our body feels and, so when we breathe all tight and up in her chest, which is sometimes what we learn to do as we get older in life that, that can trigger some of the physical sensation of stress. It can trigger, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, it contributes to muscle tension, like if you tense your muscles, and you feel it tight in your chest. Don't you, everybody just do that. Tent your muscles. You feel that in your chest and then relax them and you feel your chest kind of relaxing, so doing the focus breathing can help with that. What we do, is we have, have a muscle here, the diaphragm muscle and when that muscle lowers your lungs are able to expand and you're able to allow more oxygen to come into your lungs. Without a lot of effort, it just kind of happens, so it's not like you have to suck in a big deep breath but just more oxygen naturally comes into your lungs. Which again, feeds your, I'm not the biologist here but kind of you know, feed your blood, feed your heart, feed your brain, so again, helps with that relaxation part.
And the way to kind of get your diaphragm muscle to drop is by breathing kind of imagining that your breathing down into your belly, so if I can have everybody kind of sit straight feet on the floor, uncrossed your hands, I don't know wake up, wake up and where going to start. You're just going to put your hands on your tummy here and without really doing anything different with your breathing, I just want you to and this is one where it's like, you know on our society you're not supposed to have a belly. We're supposed to have these nice, you know six pack, and this is one where you can totally have a belly. In fact, it's great if you have a belly, so let go all that body stuff. So, because what I want you to do is put your hands here and I want you to do but without anything different just to get the cessation, just push your belly out, bring it in. Just with the muscles, out. It's good workout, out, in, out, in, out, in. Feel that? Do you kind of feel the sensation, now here going to match it with some breathing? So, when you breathe, when you breathe in your going to breathe in through your nose and breathe out of your nose. When you breathe in you're going to imagine that you have a balloon here and all the air is going down into your belly and filling up the balloons. So, you breathe it and your belly is going to expand and I want you to feel your belly expanding. You don't have to take a big deep breath, just breathe in and then when you breathe out, I want to imagine all the air is going out of that balloon and so your stomach is kind of collapsing. And, what that will do, as it will allow your diaphragm to lower and rise. Ready to give it a try? And, you can go at your own pace, so just kind of do a couple of breaths in and just kind of move on your own pace. In and see if you can feel your belly going out and then coming back in. That's focus breathing, okay. That's deep breathing. Anybody want to share how it felt for them to do that?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Did it! No? Oh you're just playing with me, aren't you? Yeah, thanks. How was it? Anybody had trouble? It can be a little hard to get used to it. Yeah?

Audience Member: [inaudible] it was pretty relaxing.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Is it kind of relaxing to do? Yeah, and sometimes it can take a little bit of practice to do. I know for me I had to kind of get used to it because I was not, I was use to kind of like, wait I'm trying to get all this air in my lungs, so I had to kind of practice it. So, what I encourage people to do is to practice this and notice it didn't take much time at all. I mean do it for about a minute and you know you're good but I encourage you to practice it a couple times a day and not only do it when you're feeling stressed because it does take a little practice to do when you're stress.
Sometimes your body is already tight and it's a little harder to kind of shift from that tight up in your chest breathing, down to your belly, so practice it and so that as you get better at it, those times that you really are feeling more stress and you're really feeling like, ugh I need to kind of relax a little bit. You'll be better at it. The other thing too is that even if you're not experiencing a lot of stress, again remember sometimes we carry stress that we're not aware of, it's an opportunity to kind of let go of some of it. Like I noticed just as we were doing it, probably because I'm up here talking in front of you, you might pull my leg and be mean to me while I'm up here. That I felt a little, I felt a little bit like, oh, yeah okay I feel a little bit more relaxed, I can get to the next few minutes. So, focus breathing. The way to kind of get the relaxation response.
Guided imagery and meditation can also...
Be really helpful. Conjuring up soothing scenes, using all your senses can do, we can do that on own. We can purchase CD's. There's a lot of things apps and things that are available on smart phones that kind of take you through guided imagery. So, sometimes just closing your eyes kind of doing a little bit of focus breathing and then imagining maybe yourself someplace that you have really good associations with. Someplace that just feels really good to you. It can be a place that you've been before that feels comforting for you or maybe it's just kind of a conglomeration of places that feel kind of good and it can be helpful to kind of bring your senses in. So, as you’re in that place, you start to notice what you smell. Okay, and then you start to notice what you hear in that place and then you start to notice if there's things that you feel while you're there. Okay, for me I often envision the winds or the oceans, so I feel kind of the winds, as it kind of goes. I might feel the sand on my feet, of the warmth of the sun. Then you notice, you're noticing what you see. Alright, again I see the blue, it's off of the California coast, which is beautiful. So, I see some of the rocks in the sand and you just kind of stay in that place for little bit and again it can bring you to that relaxation. Anybody have, do something like this or have a place that feels really relaxing that you can kind of call on when you need to? You want to share. Yeah.

Audience Member: [inaudible] or sometimes I like to listen to relaxing sounds of nature or like things that sounds like rivers or [inaudible]
Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah. Yeah, and you kind of call in a little bit, kind of that, you know in visioning some of the nature around here. That's great. Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, did you have...?

Audience Member: [inaudible] for me it's kind of hard to in vision.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Okay.

Audience Member: (same as before) such things, so I [inaudible] I like to go to the river or the little creek.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: You'll actually go to someplace and kind of sit and yeah. And, for some people sometimes it's hard to kind of call on your own imagination to do it, so sometimes if you want to try something like that to, again there are apps on the smartphone that will do kind of guided imagery or there's one online. So, if you go online and you just kind of Google guided imagery. There will be a lot, there's lots of YouTube kinds of videos and things like that, that you can access. That will kind of lead you through it, if you have trouble kind of envisioning on your own but yeah, you can just go to the place and then see if you have the memory from. Meditation is a little bit different than guided imagery. How many, anybody here have experienced medication? Yeah, what, what's your, what you, what do you do, kind of do when you meditate?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Kind of focus on your breathing. Great. Yes, kind of just focusing on the breathing. Yeah, so a lot of, a lot of our lives are spent thinking about this, that, the other thing kind of running from one thing to another. Meditation is really an opportunity to kind of clear your mind. Right? And, it takes practice because what happens when we start to meditate for the first time if we've not done it?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah, well drift off and start...

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Thoughts, come in. Yes, thoughts coming in. And, so yeah with meditation, people will just kind of focus on the breathing and just a thought may come in but you just kind of let it pass and bring yourself gently back to your breathing.
And, again, recommending that if people do that, that you might just start very short. Okay, not feeling like you have to spend a lot of time on the meditation, that you can do it in, like, just try it for a minute and then after you're kind of able to do it for about a minute. Add another 30 seconds, you can set a timer. Then you can add another minute if you want. Right? The other thing to is, that you can get sort of a powerful effect just doing it for a minute sometimes to. So, having that opportunity to kind of clear your mind can also contribute.
Gaining perspective, which we talked about before. It's kind of...
Getting rid of stink and thinking. So...
Believe it or not our thoughts create our reality. So, when you’re feeling stressed, your thoughts are heading in one of two directions. You’re either thinking about...
Gaining Perspective

➤ Get rid of *Stinkin’ Thinkin’*

➤ Believe it or not, our *thoughts create our reality*. When you are feeling stressed your thoughts are likely heading in one of two directions.

**THE PAST**

The past
or you start thinking about the future. I know I do this to myself, right?
So, if you're thinking about the past,
you might be thinking about past failures.
You might be thinking about mistakes that you've made,
negative feedback that you got from others or yourself,
areas of weakness, times you didn't feel good enough.
Anything that might of gone wrong in the past which we start on calling on all that stuff,
basically telling yourself things suck. Right?
You thinking about the future than you're probably thinking about all the ways you're going to fail in the future. All the mistakes you're going to make.
Alright, you're never going to live up to expectations. Yup, yup, we got some folks who do that. That's, me too, me too.
You're an impostor, right? If they really knew they would know that they should never have admitted me to this university. I shouldn't be here, right? Yeah, if they only knew. You're trapped, oh my gosh, I'm trapped, I have no options. Right, you start feeling that way. No one's ever going to like you, right? Everybody hates me.
Everything that might go wrong, is what you kind of start thinking about.
So, basically tell yourself that you always suck. Right? Everything always sucks. And, so those kind, those ways of thinking kind of having our thoughts go on those two directions. Again, contributes to stress. Contributes to this feeling stress and not managing it very well.
So, instead of focusing on the past or the future, what we want to try to do is
focus on the present because that's really where we have the opportunity for change and that's really the only thing that we have an opportunity to have any kind of control over.
Right here in this very moment. Right? I cannot go back and undo, what has happened in the past and I also can't leap into the future and make something different happen. The best that I can do is, what I can do right now in this moment, so pulling yourself and again that's where meditation can be helpful to kind of gently because oftentimes if you're meditating the thoughts that are going through have nothing to do with the present. Right? They have to do with, oh what I should be doing because I'm not meditating the future. Right? Or, they have to do with like, oh this happened and you're running through conversations or this or that or the other thing. They're not about the presence. So, meditation is really great on helping us focus on the present or be in the present moment and that's where you have control. Is being right here, right now in the present moment.
It’s also a lot like learning how to be a good coach to yourself. So, how we talk to ourselves can really impact how we manage stress and how we feel about ourselves. So, you can...
So you can ask yourself and this is kind of, on being more compassionate with ourselves. How would you want your best friend to be coached before they were about to undertake something really tough? I don't think that most of us would be telling ourselves, that we would want our best friend to say, by the way things have always sucked in the past and things are always going to suck in the future, so good luck with whatever this is. Right? That's probably not what we would want with our friends. Yet we do it to ourselves, don't we deserve something a little bit better? So, if you’re having trouble kind of thinking of kind things to think to yourself, sometimes thinking about what would I say to a friend and can I be that gentle with my friend.
So, if you focus on failure you're more likely to make that happen.
Likewise, if you focus on success, you’re more likely to make that happen. So, rather than focusing on the failure you don’t want, focus on the success that you do want. What we focus on grows.
Just a couple things,
stop, breathe, reflect and choose, so consciously calling a mental timeout. Taking a few deep breaths, reflecting and then making a decision about how you want to proceed. I know we're just about out of time. One more tool, whatever you do right now...
Do not think
of a monkey
riding a bicycle. Whatever you do don't think about that. Okay, what did I just make you all do?

Audience Member: Think about it.
Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Yeah, I totally made you think of the monkey riding a bicycle, didn’t I? Because, again, the mind is a really powerful tool. It doesn’t hear the do not, it only hears monkey riding a bicycle. Right?
So, again,
Instead of focusing on the stress that you don't want, I don't want stress, I don't want to feel stressed, what are you going to, what's your brain hearing?

Audience Member: Stress.

Dr. Stephanie Chervinko: Stress, stress, stress, stress, stress.
Focus on the relaxed state that you do want. I want relaxation, right? So, what we focus on, gets bigger for our-self. I want to feel relaxed, I want to be able to manage this. Okay. Good luck to all of you, if you did not sign in...