My name is Dr. Stephanie Chervinko. I'm with the Counseling and Wellness Center, and I'm here today to try to help you not let stress make you a mess. So how many people are feeling a little bit of stressed this time of year? Yeah, I see most every hand going up. I would imagine that you would or you wouldn't be here probably, so welcome.
Well the first thing that I want to talk to you about is what is stress, 'cause I think in order to try to manage something in our life, we have to have a better understanding of what that is to begin with. And believe it or not, we all think we sort of know what stress is but there are some things that we don't always know what stress is. So I'd like to find out a little bit from you about what you think stress is. So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna toss this out and I'd like somebody to catch it and tell me what you think stress is, okay? So are you ready? I'm not the best tosser, so I'm calling you out here. What do you think stress is?

Stephanie: Okay. So too much stuff to do, too much homework, over thinking things gets you stressed out. Great! Toss it to—find somebody else to toss it to and let's see what they think stress is. Alright what do you think stress is?

Student: A lot of things to do.

Stephanie: A lot of things to do again, aha, feeling uncomfortable. You said kind of an uncomfortable feeling. Yeah. Find somebody else. Let's see what they think stress is. What do you think stress is?

Student: Being overwhelmed. [Inaudible Remark]

Stephanie: Being overwhelmed, anxiety. Sometimes we think about stress as anxiety or if it's kind of a chronic thing, absolutely. Toss it towards one of those two. Let's see what they think.

Student: [ Inaudible Remark ]

Stephanie: Yeah, like what's stress? Oh you've got to be kidding.

Student: Having a lot to worry about because there's so much pressure and you have all these expectations and you just want to do--get all of them but you're just overwhelmed.
Stephanie: So a lot to do, feeling overwhelmed, a lot of expectations, wanting to try to do everything but maybe not feeling like you have enough time to do everything. Great! Does anybody have anything they want to add that didn't get added as we tossed it around? Alright. Whoo! [Laughter] No that's okay. That's part of the fun. So here's some things I know about stress. Stress is universal. So for one thing, stress is something that everybody experiences in our lives. So, it's one of those kind of common things that we all have. Now we may vary in terms how much stress we experience or how often we experience stress but it is a very universal experience. It's also normal then, wouldn't it be? So it's pretty normal for people to experience stress in their lives. And so I think that's important for people to know. If it's something that all of us experience at some point, then it's got to be a pretty normal response. It's inevitable. It's inevitable that you're going to experience some stress.

Sometimes I have people come into my office and they say, "Stephanie, I want you to make me stress-free." And I say I cannot do that because everybody experiences stress at some point in their life and in some ways. So the kind of--have the attitude that you're gonna be stress-free is actually probably going to add more stress to your life because you're gonna be working towards something that really is pretty much impossible. So what we want to think about more is how to manage stress and maybe not have things that are smaller things get a big stress response. Stress is necessary. How many people think stress is necessary or agree with that? Yeah, we're gonna get we're gonna talk a little bit about what what in the world stress no way we want to get rid of stress, right? But there are aspects of stress that are actually necessary and good. Stress is individual. We all respond to stress in different ways. So imagine if you had three people who got stuck in the elevator, okay. Now is that experience gonna be stressful to all three people? It depends, right? You might have one person who is totally fine, and actually what they were going up to do was something that they really didn't want to do in the first place and now they have a really good excuse for why they don't have to be there doing that. So they're so not stressed, they're happy, right? Then maybe you have somebody else who is claustrophobic. So let's say they're really, really stressed, right? And then maybe you have somebody else who had a Venti Triple Shot mocha caramel latte and all of a sudden it's making its way through their body and now they're stuck in an elevator.
They might be feeling a little bit of stress, right? So how we react to certain situations is a very individualized thing. So stress reactions are individual. And then finally, we can experience stress in relation to things that we might label as positive events in our life, and we might also experience stress in relation to things that we think of as negative in our life. Usually it's pretty easy to identify the negative events that generate stress, but what might be something positive that might also carry some stress with it? Anybody think of anything?

Student: A wedding.

A wedding, that's a great example. I mean we watch in a--how many people have seen Bridezillas, I mean, you know, something that is supposed to be a wonderful experience, right, turns into this really big kind of stressful thing, right? What's another example of something positive that might be experienced as stressful?

Student: Going to college.

Going to college, yeah. That's a great one, I mean let's face it. You know the privilege of getting a college education being here and the kinds of things you're learning, the kinds of things that are happening for you. In general, I would hope would be pretty positive things for you, and yet here we are in college experiencing some stress. So we can experience stress in response to things that we don't view as positive, but we can also experience stress when we're going through good things in our life too.
So a little bit more about stress. As I said before, not all stress is bad, some stress is actually good, okay? So we need stress to motivate us. We need stress to help keep us alert, and we need stress to help us perform at our peak level. So some level of stress is actually positive. Because when you think of what stress is, it's basically your mind and your body kind of revving up or gearing up to do something that requires you to exert energy or to perform in some way. And so that's what generates some stress inside of us. And we need some of that to feel motivated for the activity or to feel alert about the activity or to perform at a level that's optimal for us.
So if you think about it, all of us have inbred in us sort of this fight or flight mechanism. That kind of hearkens back to the days of the caveman when we used to have to kind of fight for our life. And so our bodies are kind of programmed when we experience something that a stressor or maybe perceived as a threat to kind of kick in in a way that's gonna help us deal with it, in a way that's gonna help us either flee, get the heck out of there or stand up and fight, right? So things that happen kind of automatically, as our heart starts to beat faster, we start breathing more rapidly, our blood vessel start to constrict, our digestive system slows down. All of these things sort of happen in order to prepare our body to exert a certain amount of energy to either perform or deal with the situation at hand. So in some ways, stress is actually adaptive, and in certain situations, we need some stress or we wouldn't be able to cope with what's coming up.
So if you look at it, when we look at too little stress, we're sort of in a state of being inert or like asleep. And let's face it, most of the things in your life you really wouldn't wanna do kind of half asleep, right? How many people wanna walk into a final exam and perform at their optimal level when they're sort of down here? Not very good, right? What we want to be is sort of at a level that's more optimum for us where we're kind of geared up in a way that we feel alert, right? We feel a little bit of pumped. We might feel enough sort of anxiety that we are gonna focus and care about what we're doing, but not so much though that we start to go over the hill. And that's where people start to think about stress as a bad thing. It's when we kind of go over that hill and we're no longer performing at a level that's really optimum for us.
So in other words, you want to be pumped up if you're gonna be doing something like this.
Or maybe even if you're gonna do something like that, right
Or maybe if you're out in the wild and you're either the lion or the zebra, you want to be kind of pumped up, right? It's adaptive.
But if you're kind of pumped up like this,
and the task is something like this,
you get something that kind of looks like this.
And if you take it too far, you might get something that looks like this. Anybody had those experiences where you feel so revved up that, yeah. Pretty uncomfortable, isn't it? Yeah, yeah.
So another thing to know about stress just in terms of increasing our understanding of it is that stress, remember I said it's an individualized experience, right? So that actually means that what's stressful and what's not stressful is actually in the eye of the beholder, okay? What is stressful and what is not stressful is actually what we determine is stressful or not, okay? Now there may be some things that we determine that are stressful that a lot of other people would agree. Yup, that's stressful. But there might be some other things that we determine as stressful that other people might not see as stressful, and that has to do with how do we assess the situation, okay. So usually when we encounter a situation in terms of determining whether it's stressful or not, we ask ourselves two questions.
First, we ask ourselves is this a threat? In these days, we're not always looking at physical threat. We might look at threats to our ego, okay? People know what I mean when I talk about egos or your pride or your sense of self, how you feel about yourselves, self esteem, or we might sort of experience threats to our well-being, how sort of mentally and physically healthy we feel. So when we encounter a situation, we sort of make a determination or assessment of is this threatening to me in some way, might this harm me in some way. Whether it's, you know, an exam that poses a threat because you're looking for a particular grade or whether maybe it's a breakup, you know, that might kind of threaten your ego a little bit, bruise your ego, or you know, might be a little threatening to your well-being 'cause you might feel bad about that. But you make this determination about is it a threat or not. The second thing though that we have to kinda ask ourselves, and usually this happens at a level that we're not even aware of, we ask ourselves, can I cope with this threat, okay? So is this a threat? If the answer is no, usually we don't experience any stress--we're like, "Okay, great!" But if we say yes, then we say, "Can I cope with this? Do I have the ability to manage or to do what I need to do to get through this situation?" And usually if the answer is yes, we might experience kind of some stress like maybe that optimum stress. But if we answer no, then we're more likely to feel stressed. So can anybody think of an example from your own life maybe where that happened, where it's like oh yeah that's something that I did kind of view as a "threat" and you know yeah I actually realized I could cope with it, so it wasn't as big of a deal, or yeah I was really having a hard time coping with that. So what--can you maybe think of an example? Like what would be something might feel kind of threatening. And again, threat's kind of a loaded word but--yeah, Natalie.

Student: When I was snowboarding just learning how to [inaudible]. And I didn't think I could keep down but it was like I got down and I was able to let go [inaudible].

Stephanie: Okay, so going snowboarding. And that first time that you went up, it was kind of a physical threat perhaps, yeah, like absolutely. And so your question--so your question to yourself was, yeah it's a threat and then can I cope with that threat? How did you get yourself up the first time then 'cause you didn't know that you were going to be able to do it? It's an accident that got you up there, so little out of your control. Okay, okay, okay. But then afterwards you learned that you could do it. Yeah. Good. Good example. So something to think about with regard to stress then is how am I viewing this situation; and that has a lot to do within how we experience it as stressful or not stressful.
So another important thing to think about in terms of dealing with stress is to think about what are the indicators that we're starting to get stressed. Sometimes we wait too long before we start trying to intervene or trying to cope with it. So I'm curious to know how you guys know when you're stressed. So I got my little ball here again, and I wanna know how do you know when you're stressed. Ready? How do you know?

Student: I guess I know when I'm stressed because I'm all at rush to do something. [Inaudible Remark]

Stephanie: So part of what you do is like you notice things kinda getting to be too much, you're feeling like there's a lot piled on you. And I noticed one of the things that you said that you do is you get angry at yourself. Yeah. So that's something that you know this is you start kinda getting upset with yourself, but you keep it from getting too much of stress level feeling too much anxiety, maybe kind of accepting that okay I may not get this done in the timely fashion that I want to or something like that. But getting angry at your self does sound like a little bit of an indicator. Yeah. Find somebody else to toss it to and let's see how they know when they're stressed. The guys in the back. There you go. Good toss. How do you know when you're stressed?

Student: This thing like I have an assignment and I'm worrying too much about it.

Stephanie: Okay, so worrying is something that you notice that you do. And when you're not stressed, you don't seem to worry as much. Okay. You more feel like kind of more relaxed, okay. Other people. So you toss it out to someone else. How do you know--what--how does your body change or how does your mood change? How do you know when you're stressed?

Student: [Inaudible] I think I need a cigarette.
Stephanie: Ah okay, a smoke break, yeah. That's a great indicator though that like do you find that maybe that you smoke more when you're stressed, right? That's a really good indicator then. Okay. Say it one more time I missed. You always think about-- [ Inaudible Remark ] Okay so you kind of keep ruminating about it, dwelling on it. Oh, 'cause you kinda can't get anything out of it, got it, yeah. How many people have that one happen, yeah. Find somebody else to toss to and see what they--see what they do when they experience stress. How do you know? What kind of things happens to you when you get stressed?

Student: I do the same. When I don't have like any time to do something. Or I don't know like any solution to a problem.

Stephanie: So you don't have enough time, can't find the solution. Do you notice that you do anything or feel different like he was talking about he smokes more when he gets stressed? Do you do anything different or do you notice anything different. Yeah like what, what might you notice different?

Student: Ah, maybe I feel like tired. I just want to sit down.

Stephanie: Okay, so you start to feel more fatigued. You kinda don't want--you lose your motivation. Yeah, yeah. Let's find one more person, find one more person to toss it to. [ Laughter ] We'll pretend that was a big catch. How do you know when you're stressed?

Student: [ Inaudible Remark ]

Stephanie: So worrying, yeah.

Student: [ Inaudible Remark ]
Stephanie: Okay, so you blame yourself a lot. You start blaming yourself for things whereas maybe when you're not stressed, you don't necessarily blame yourself all the time. That's a good one. Alright. I'll take it back. Tell you what I notice when I'm stressed is I don't know if you guys ever notice like muscle kinda tension in your body. I notice in my jaw like I'll clench my jaws. Anybody notice muscle tension in their body when they get stressed.

Student: I have it in my neck right now.

Stephanie: In your neck right now. Okay, yeah. Where do other people carry their stress? Yeah, I carry it in my neck and shoulders.

Student: In my shoulders.

Stephanie: In your shoulders, yeah, yeah. Anybody else carry stress in their body? Shoulders yeah, I think a lot of us 'cause we're at the computer a lot too, so we kinda, you know, chronically in this position.
So, yeah, some other warning signs that you might experience that we talked about. We talked about fatigue and sleep. We talked a little about anxiety, irritability, anger. You think you might be a little more irritable with people. Stomachache or headache. Anybody ever kinda feel like they might get a little more stomachache or headache when they start to be stressed? Withdrawing from people. Sometimes when we start to get more stressed, we don't spend as much time around our friends. So you kinda pull away from us. So you're, yup, doing that one. Inefficiency, where you're kind of feel like you're working but like nothing's really getting done, and you kinda have that sense of your wheels are spinning but you're not going anywhere. That's another one that comes up. Trouble concentrating, I think some people kinda alluded to that too. Hard to focus. Some self doubt, you know, or blaming yourself, muscle tension, feeling all wound up, out of control. Substance abuse, although cigarettes would probably fall under that. You're drinking more, abusing drugs a little bit more or something like that is another indicator. Frequent illness can be an indication of stress 'cause one of the things that studies have shown is that there's actually a strong connection or good connection between the stress that we feel in our immune system. And when we're stressed at a high level for a long period of time, it actually makes us more susceptible to getting ill. So if you find yourself getting a lot of colds or kind of not, you know, having trouble getting over an illness or something like that, it might be an indication that you've got some stress going on.

Student: Mine too. But I guess it's a little bit worse. I have epilepsy. And so I guess I'd say when I wake up in the morning like too fast, like oh my god I have to get at class like 5 minutes, you know I wake up too fast, I take my medication and felt like some time in class I have a seizure. Even though I'm taking all the medication. [Inaudible Remark]

Stephanie: Yeah, so she's talking about having an illness that actually there is a strong component to stress. And so even when she does the things that she needs to do to take care of your illness like take your medication and that set, if your stress level is high, the medication doesn't work the way that it does, and you might still have a seizure. There's other illnesses that are like that like, you know, problems with high blood pressure or ulcers or things like that. So yeah, definitely a link. That's a good one to bring up. Talk a little about racing thoughts, changes in appetite, rapid heart rate, those are the things.
The main thing that we want to remember is that we don't want to ignore the warning signs of stress. Sometimes when we start to notice some of those little warning signs of stress, we tend to think, "Oh I can just deal with it." But those are the indications that we really need to start doing something differently because if we continue to ignore them, what do we get? Panic or really, really feeling overwhelmed, maybe not quite panic, but we might get more of that anxiety attack kind of thing.
So let's find out how vulnerable you are or how well you do take care of yourself and we're gonna kick up the stress by taking a little bit of a test. Oh dear, oh dear. Actually what I wanna have you do is just take a quick little quiz that will give you some idea of how well do you take care of yourself. So yeah, I'll let you pass those out. So, I'm sorry I should have pushed that closer to you. So Casey's gonna pass out a little self care quiz. And so what you wanna do is along the column here, it has the topic or area, and you wanna read and circle whichever one applies to you, okay. And then you write down the number over here. Like this. So which of these fits you and write down, and then you add up your points at the bottom, and we'll see kinda roughly what kind of a self care expert you might be. [Pause]
Okay, let's see kinda how folks did and how you might interpret this. So if you look at the bottom, it'll kinda tell you how you might sort of loosely interpret your score. So if you got between 30 and 36 points, congratulations, you could probably come up and teach this with me about how to do a good self care in stress management. So did anybody get a high score like that? Anybody excellent with their self care? Wonderful, good for you. Good, so you're just trying to be even better, is that it? Even better, good. How many people got between 22 and 29, which is actually pretty good, pretty good? We got some that were in that range. Good, pretty good. You're taking care of yourself, but basically, you just may mean that, you know, you might need a little reminder to do some of those things that you know are good for you and that maybe you do sometimes but when the pressure gets on, you might kinda let slide to decide. So maybe if you kind of got in that range, maybe one of the things that you might want to look at is one of the things on here that you might want to work on, and just put a little star by it, and just try to maybe change one thing that you aren't doing quite as well as you wish that you were. So how about between 15 and 21 points? Who got between 15 and 21? A couple of people, okay. So you passed, [laughter] but you might wanna be careful though 'cause the indication is that some of the things that you are doing or maybe not doing to take care of yourself may catch up with you. And so again, it's hard to sort of make sweeping changes and especially at this point in the year when we're all pretty stressed and busy with things. But again, I would encourage you to maybe look at like one thing on here and see if there's one area that you might wanna try to focusing on a little bit. Do we have anybody that we need to send to the stress emergency room, less than 15 points? No, okay good. So this kinda gives you a little bit of an idea of things that you might do on a daily basis, 'cause really stress management is something that we need to practice on a regular basis. We look for sort of techniques and things that we can do when we're feeling stressed, but really the key to managing stress is doing some of these things all along. And the more you kinda take care of yourself in all of these different areas, the more resistant you're gonna be to things that come into your life and may create stress, okay. So the more likely you'll be able to answer, "No, I don't feel so threatened by whatever that is" or, "Yeah, I think I can cope with whatever that is."
So let's talk a little bit about how to cope, finally, right? So one of the things like I just said is we wanna try to stop the stress before it happens. So we're talking about prevention. So if you look at the self care quiz, a lot of the questions had to do with taking care of your body. Again, if you look at the warning signs of stress, a lot of them are experienced in our bodies. So we want to take care of our bodies. So doing things like getting good nutrition, making sure that you do some kind of moderate exercise you know three or four days a week for 30 minutes kinda moderate exercise, perfect, you know. I'm not talking about going and beating yourself up at the gym by any means if you want to manage stress. And then also making sure that you get adequate sleep. I can't stress that one enough. And I know that as college students it can be hard sometimes to get adequate sleep, but you would be amazed at the difference getting a good night sleep and getting the right amount of sleep for you can be. So making sleep and getting enough sleep are priority. You can go a really long way in terms of helping you to feel more resilient to stress and more resistant against stress. Putting things into perspective is another big one. Anybody hear the phrase "making a mountain out of a molehill"? People know what that is? When we take something that really in the grand scheme of things isn't such a big deal but we blow it up to be something really, really big. So what are the things--and that happens a lot for some smaller things that may cause us stress like somebody cut you off in traffic or you go to the grocery store and you end up in this long line or something like that. One of the things that you might wanna do to help prevent or cope with that stress is to put it in perspective. To ask yourself the question, "Five years from now, is it gonna be a big deal that that person cut in front of me or that I had to wait an extra minute at the grocery store or if I knew that I only had 48 hours to live is this how I would want to be spending my time feeling stressed and frustrated with this?" So putting things into perspective, asking yourself the question of how important is this really can help you kinda get a handle on stress and decrease that level. Setting smart goals for your self. Sometimes we generate stress when we set goals for ourselves that are too high or we try to expect too much from ourselves. So if we set smart goals, we set goals that are specific, that we can really identify, that are measurable, okay, that are achievable, that we could actually achieve, realistic and timely. So for example, would it be a smart goal to say I want to be successful? Is that a smart goal if we look at these objectives? Not specific, yeah. What else is it not? Is there any other ones?
Student: Graduating from school.

Stephanie: Graduating from school, absolutely. So it's specific, it's measurable. We hope that that's achievable, right? And I think it should be. Realistic and timely, right. So we wanna set goals that are realistic for us and smart. Relax, absolutely a good thing with regards to stress. You wanna make sure that you carve out time in your schedule to have fun and to laugh. What makes you laugh? What makes you guys laugh?

Student: Funny people.

Stephanie: Funny people, alright. What else makes you laugh? What? Smoking makes you laugh? [Laughter] Oh dear, well you just made us laugh, so that was good. But, you know, having those things that make you laugh, having those things that you enjoy that become fun. I know one of the things that always make me laugh is to watch an episode of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. So if I'm having a stressful day, I can go online and watch one of those episodes and know that I'm gonna be experiencing some stress relief. But we wanna be careful though because if we do too much of that kind of relaxing and having fun, we may be avoiding whatever it is that we really need to be dealing with. So we need to balance that in our life. And to use your support system. That's another important thing in terms of coping, is to be able to reach out to people and use them, be able to talk with friends. Research shows that people who have at least one person in their life that they can count on, kind of a confidante or like a really close friend or some family member, makes a big difference in terms of overall wellbeing and ability to manage stress. That having someone in your life that you can talk to like that really makes a difference. And it's not just enough to have that person, but then you actually have to use them. You actually have to go to them and talk to them when you're feeling stressed and let them know how you're feeling. So using your support system is pretty important.
A little bit more on how to cope. We need to get rid of stinking thinking. A lot of times when we feel stressed, our thoughts create a reality. So when we're feeling distressed, our thoughts are likely heading in one of two directions. They're either heading into the past or they're heading into the future.
And so if they're heading into the past, we might be thinking about past failures or maybe mistakes that we've made in the past, negative feedback that we've gotten about ourselves, from other people, areas of weakness, times that we maybe didn't feel we were good enough, anything that might have gone wrong. Basically, we're telling ourselves that things sucked, okay? And if we're thinking about the future, we're thinking about future failures, mistakes that we might make, that we're never gonna live up to expectations, maybe we're an imposter or trapped, no one's ever gonna like us, everything that might go wrong. Basically, saying that things are always gonna suck, okay? And we kinda call that stinking thinking because it doesn't really help us achieve what it is we really want to achieve, and it doesn't help us decrease those stress levels.
So we wanna try to untwist that thinking. We wanna go from having our thoughts tied up in knots to being able to swing a little bit more free when it comes to how we think about ourselves.
And the ways to do that is that instead of focusing on the past or the future, we wanna focus on the present. In other words, we wanna focus on what's happening right now in this moment because that's really the only thing that you control. You cannot go back and undo or fix the things that have happened in the past. Just like you can't project yourself into the future and change things that way, right? So if we spend all this time dwelling about things that didn't go the way we want them or things that have happened in the past or if we spend our time worrying about things that might happen in the future, we're not living right in this moment which is really when we can deal with what's happening to us. So we wanna focus on what's happening right here right now. So pay attention to where your thinking is going when you're feeling stressed. Is it getting pulled back into past mistakes or projected by worrying about things that haven't happened and you wanna gently kinda bring it back to what's happening right here and right now.
A word on coaching. So when we try to untwist our thinking, in some ways it's almost like how we become a coach for ourselves or how we start to talk to ourselves. So I wanna give you this scenario. Imagine that it's the playoffs, football season, right? I don't know if people watch football here, and it's the playoffs, and the Colts are playing the Patriots in the playoff. And it's the final 19 seconds of the game, the Colts have the ball on the 14th yard line and Peyton Manning just threw an interception on the third down and now they're going up for the fourth down to try to win the game, right? They gotta get six points to win the game.
So imagine that the coach says to Peyton, "I can't believe you threw an interception on that last possession. What an idiot! I hope--are you not aware that the entire season is on the line. I hope you realize that if you do that again you won't even be able to get a job playing Pee Wee football." Well, how do you think he's gonna do on the next play?

Student: Horrible.
Stephanie: Yeah, probably not so good, right? That's not really the most effective way of coaching. So what do you think he should say if he's--as a good coach? What would be a better thing for him to say? Do better next time. Do better next time or pardon? You did a good job. You've been doing a good job. Yeah, try harder next time. So yeah he might say, "You know, tensions are high, and this is the playoffs, and we're going to the Super Bowl, we're trying. But I know you can do this. You've made plays like this a million times before, so maybe remembering when he's done it before. I think--think about this like it's any other game, so try to put it into perspective. The whole team is behind you. You can do it."
So when it comes to coaching, you wanna ask yourself how would you want your best friend to be coached, and do you deserve any less. So if you focus on failure, you're more likely to make that happen. But if you focus on success, you're more likely to make that happen. So if you notice in the first example he focused on failure and worrying about failure, and that's probably what's gonna happen. In the second one, though, he focused on succeeding and that's probably more of what's gonna happen. So what you focus on is going to affect the outcome.
So which coach do you want in your head, somebody that looks like that or somebody that looks a little bit more like that? And that's the kind of coach that you want to be to yourself, right?
So here's another tool. Whatever you do, do not think of a monkey riding a bicycle. Don't do it, don't think about it. So what did I just make you guys do?
Think about a monkey riding a bicycle yeah exactly, exactly.
Our brain is this amazing colorful tool, and it's like it doesn't hear the words "do not". Like when things kinda get into our brain and we say don't, don't, don't, don't, it doesn't seem to work very well. Has anybody tried to not think about something? How does it--does that--what do you end up doing? Thinking about it even more, right? So if we relate this back to stress then, don't think about--instead of focusing on the stress that you don't wanna have, don't be stressed, don't be stressed, don't be stressed, don't be stressed. What you wanna do instead is focus on what you do want, the relaxation, okay. So thinking about putting yourself, imagining yourself in a more relaxed state. So it's kind of similar to that--you know if you want success, you think about success, right? Rather than thinking about avoiding failure, you think about the success you want. Similarly, if you're trying to decrease the stress in your life, you don't wanna think about, "don't be stressed, don't be stressed, don't be stressed", you wanna think about, "I'm calm, I'm relaxed, I'm peaceful, I'm confident". Even if you're not completely feeling all of those things, you're gonna start to get your mind in that space, okay.
So, few more solutions, please. I love this saying, "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." There's a lot of times in our lives when it comes to stress that we're trying to change things that really are beyond our control like other people. Can you change another person? Can you make somebody do something? Can you make someone think something? Absolutely, not. You can change yourself, right? You can make changes to you, but you can't change another person, right? And so often times when we're feeling stressed, sometimes we focus on things that we really can't change as opposed to focusing on things that we can. Can you change the fact that you might have two finals on, you know, Wednesday? Probably not, you know. So if you focus on that, you're just gonna get frustrated, right? But what can you affect? Well, you can affect that you might need to start studying for it. You can affect, you know, that you're gonna take care of yourself, that you're gonna get enough sleep. So thinking about what you can change and what you can't change.
Stop shoulding on yourself, and I know I make it sound like I said something naughty and I didn't. So when we should on ourselves, we tell ourselves that we kinda get caught up in the way that we think things ought to be rather than as they really are. So when we make "should" statements to ourselves, "I should be able to do this, I should be a better student, I should, you know, be a good friend, I shouldn't make mistakes." Those kinds of things, we pull ourselves out of the reality of what is or out of the presence of what is. So we want to try to avoid that.
So some common shoulds that people make, "I should never make mistakes, I should be totally self-reliant, I should always be at my peak performance, I should never be tired or sick, I should always be in control of my feelings." These are all those expectations that we put on ourselves. Now you may want all of these things and it's fine to want, you can want till your little hearts content, but when you start kind of making it as a demand to yourself, though, it starts to increase your stress, okay. So we wanna try to kind of catch that.
You also want to cure yourself of the chronic what-if-ing disease. And what-if-ing is another one that kinda projects you out into the future where you start worrying about all these horrible things that could happen. So what if I pass out during my interview and everyone laughs... and what if my girlfriend doesn't like the B-day gift I got her and she moves out, and what if I have some rare, incurable tumor... and what if you don't like the way I look and are trying to poison me with that thermometer... and what if my friends all think I'm lame... and what if... I have just the cure.

So again, you wanna be careful that when you're feeling stressed that you're not sort of starting to catastrophize or to make things out and worry about what's gonna happen in the future and bringing yourself back in to the present.
Finally, a word or two about relaxation. Definitely with regard to stress, we kinda talked about how to make changes to our thinking in terms of managing stress, but we also wanna find ways to relax our bodies 'cause when we relax our bodies, we also calm our minds. And so I'd like to end by teaching you a short breathing technique that can help you to kind of relax your body. Doing some deep breathing is a very short activity that can have a big impact on how you feel physically and the level of stress that you experience. So what I'd like for you to do is imagine that you have a balloon, and everybody kinda sit up straight in a way that feels comfortable, uncrossed feet and stuff like that. And imagine that you have a balloon in your tummy down here okay So when you breathe in, I want you to imagine that you're breathing all the way down to here and you're blowing up that balloon, okay. So you might actually feel your tummy push up because that balloon is gonna get so big it's gonna push your tummy up a little bit. And when you exhale, I want you to imagine that you're letting the air out of that balloon, so you may actually feel your tummy kind of deflate a little bit and you put your hands here. And we're gonna do this kinda slowly. And the other thing I'm gonna have you do is when we get to the exhale where your balloon's deflated, we're gonna leave it deflated for just a couple of seconds, okay, before we inflate it back up again, okay. And some people might wanna close their eyes. Some people like to close their eyes when they do deep breathing. Some people don't, it's up to you. But do it through your nose and we're gonna breathe in 'til the count of four. So breathe in, 2, 3, 4, and breathe out, 2, 3, 4, and hold it out, 2, 3, and breathe in, 2, 3, 4, and breathe out 2, 3, 4, hold it out 2, 3, and breathe in 2, 3, 4, breathe out 2, 3, 4, hold it out 2 , 3, and now just practice. Breathe in, fill up that balloon, and breathe out. And hold it out for a minute.

[ Pause ]
How was that for people to do? Kinda relaxing.
It's a little hard to kind of do the--I just learned today and I thought it was really interesting that a lot of times when we breathe in, we're used to kinda holding our breathe in, so we kind of tense up, you know. But if you practice kind of holding the breathe out a little bit, so when you breathe out pausing before you breathe in, you practice kinda letting your go, 'cause when we breathe out and you kinda notice, if you look at the people around, that they kinda relax as they breathe out, right? And when we breathe in, we seem to kinda tense up a little bit. So you practice as you kinda have that pause on the exhale of letting your body relax a little bit. And so that's something that even just, you know, just a few minutes, if you were to do maybe four or five breaths like that, you'll find yourself feeling a little more refreshed, a little bit more relaxed.

So do we have any questions? Alright, well that's all folks. If you would please complete the evaluations both if you don't mind. And if anybody needs a slip for a class, please come up after you've done your evaluations. If anyone is here for a class, for extra credit or anything like that and needs a verification, I can give you one of those. But otherwise, thank you guys very much for coming.