

# UWSOM ACADEMIC SUPPORT & COUNSELING

## TEST ANXIETY TALK



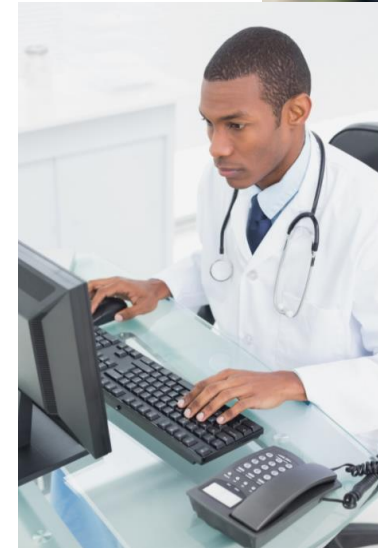
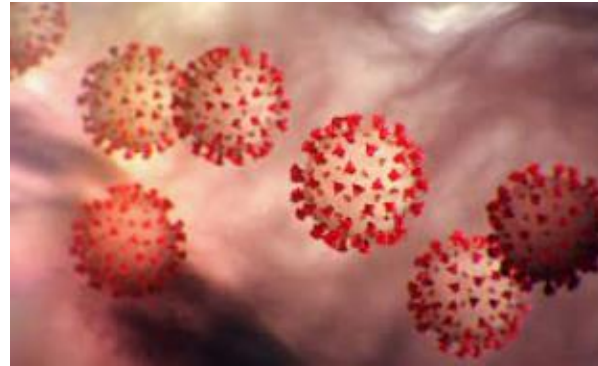
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# ANXIETY & STRESS IN MEDICAL SCHOOL

- So much to do, so little time!



# PERFECTIONISM AND IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Two common related thought processes and behaviors

## Perfectionism -

- The desire to be or appear perfect.
- Always working under the toughest scrutiny
- Little room for error
- Self criticism that prevents forward progress

Article for UW grad students:

<https://grad.uw.edu/learning-to-let-go-of-perfectionism-in-grad-school/>

## Imposter Syndrome-

- The fear of being exposed as a fraud
- The individual doubts their skills, talents, and accomplishments despite evidence of their competence

Article for UW grad

students: <https://www.grad.washington.edu/for-students-and-post-docs/core-programs/mentoring/mentor-memos/the-imposter-syndrome/>

# SHAME AND GUILT

## Shame

- I am equal to my mistakes, missteps, inadequacies, etc. (I am...)
- Inward focused
- Disempowering

## Guilt

- I am NOT equal to my mistakes, missteps, inadequacies, etc.
- Outward focused
- Empowering

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*“Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be your best. Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgement, and shame. It’s a shield. It’s a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from flight.”*

— Brené Brown, [The Gifts of Imperfection](#)

# ANXIETY

- The American Psychological Association (APA) defines anxiety as “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”
- Knowing the difference between normal feelings of anxiety and when it is something more serious can be done with the help of a professional such as a physician or therapist.
- Under the broader category of anxiety, student may experience challenges related to perfectionism, performance anxiety, test anxiety and imposter syndrome.

# PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

- Performance anxiety is fear about one's ability to perform a specific task. People experiencing performance anxiety may worry about failing a task before it has even begun. They might believe failure will result in humiliation or rejection.
- Performing before others can make people feel vulnerable. They may fear that a mistake will damage their reputation and make them seem less than perfect.





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# TEST ANXIETY

- 
- Test anxiety is a combination of physical symptoms and emotional reactions that interfere with your ability to perform well on tests.
  - Many students experience varying levels of test anxiety for a number of different reasons.

In a survey of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year medical students (N=200) from a medical college in Asia, factors contributing to test anxiety include:

inadequate rest  
(89%),

irrational thoughts  
(67.50%),

excessive course  
load (60%),

inadequate study  
(44%).



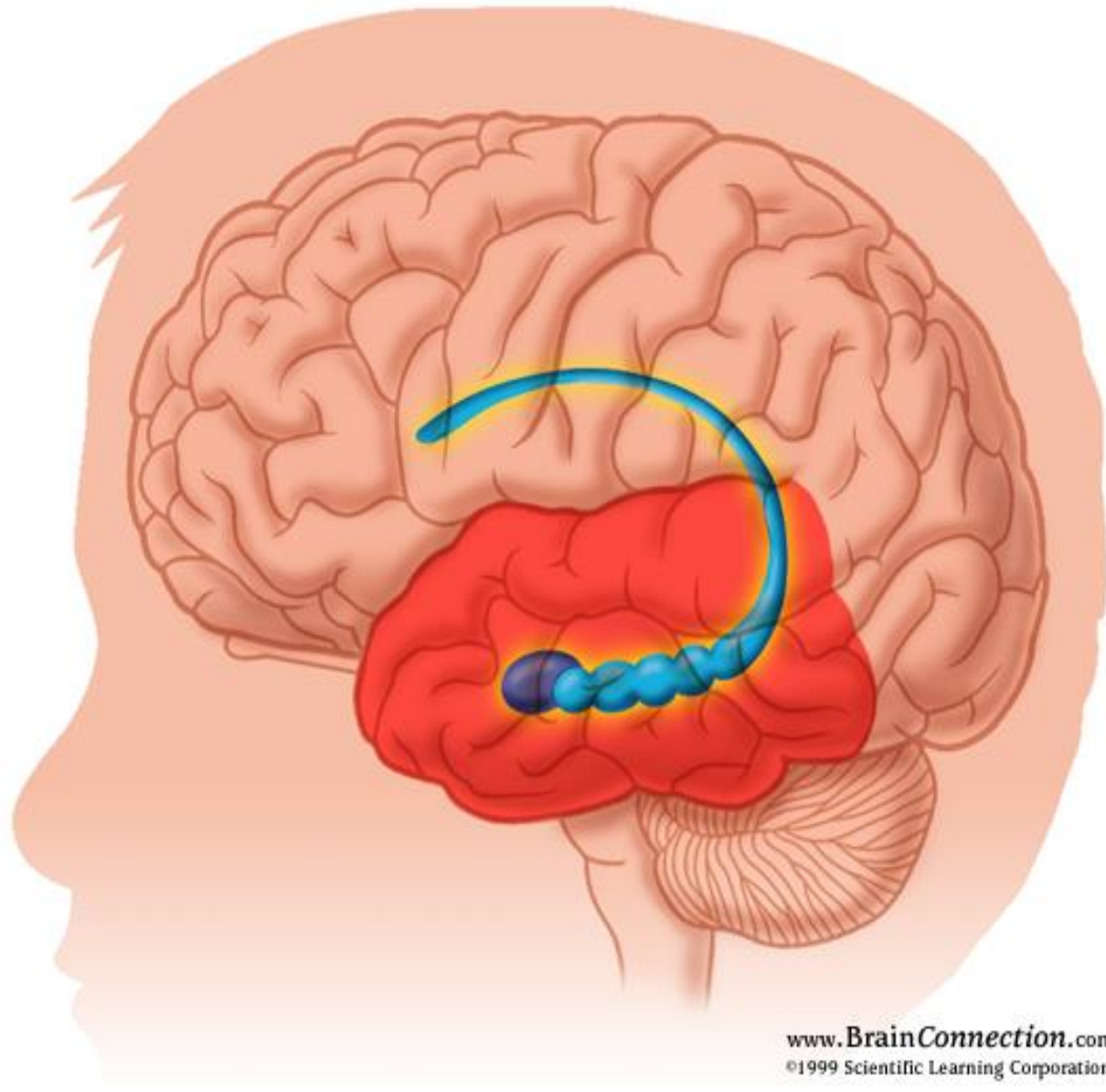
Remarkably, researchers have surmised that other, seemingly related issues including lack of exercise and poor nutrition are the **result** of test anxiety as opposed being contributing factors.

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*“Test anxiety is modestly inversely correlated with USMLE step-1 scores.”*

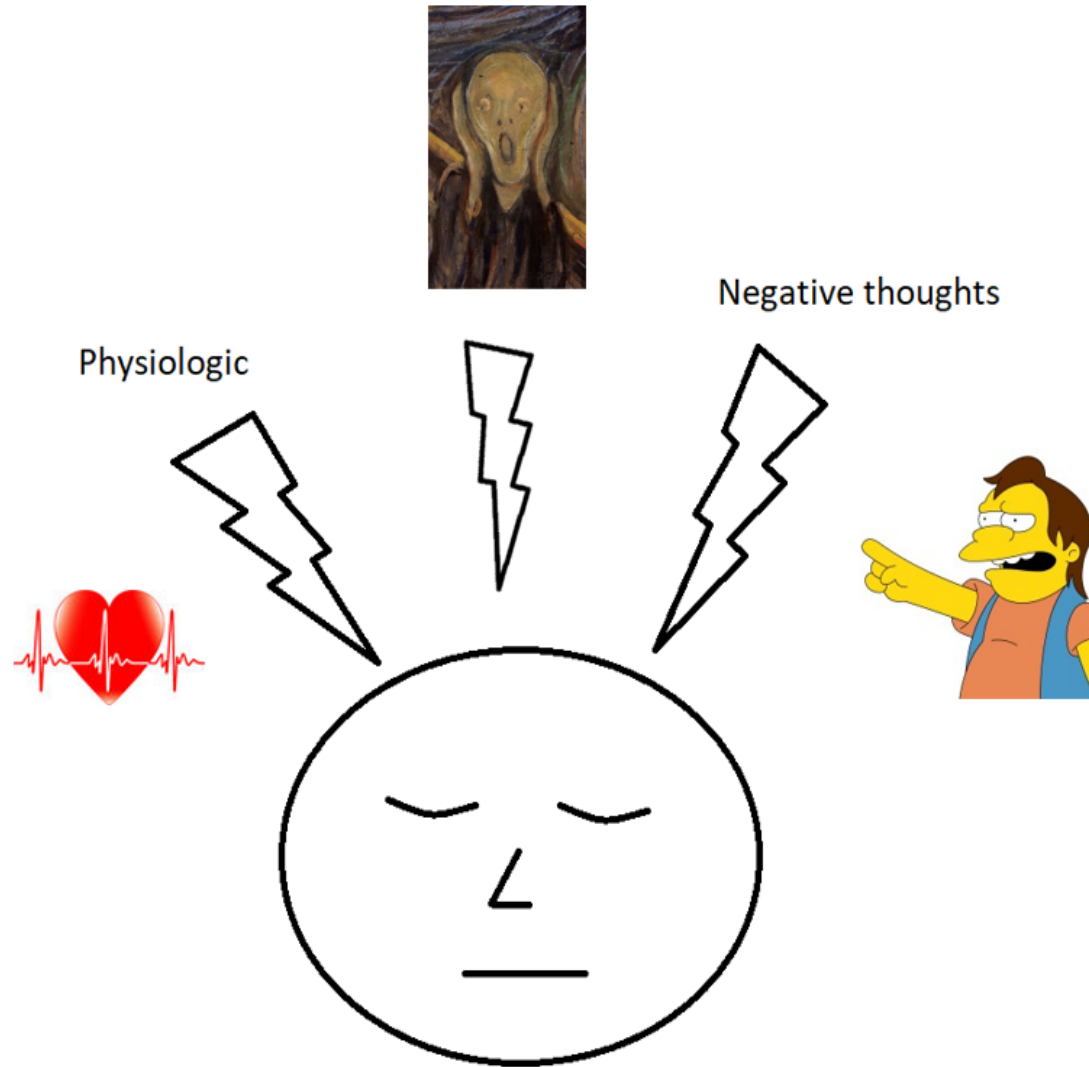
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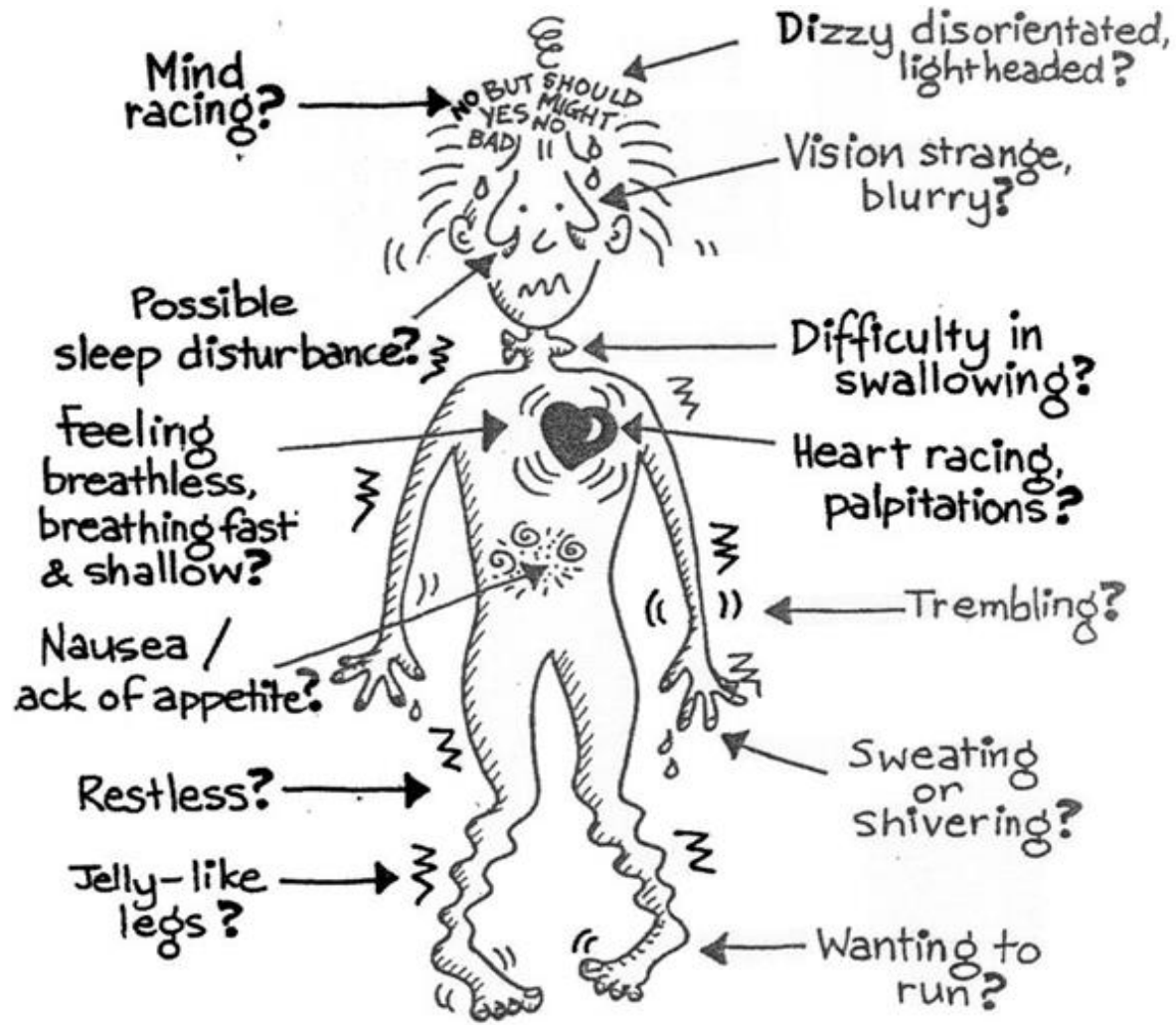
SYMPATHETIC  
NERVOUS SYSTEM  
ACTIVATION IN  
RESPONSE TO A  
PERCEIVED THREAT



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# THREE COMPONENTS:





# COMMON PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

HOW DO WE  
EMOTIONALLY  
EXPERIENCE  
ANXIETY?



# SYMPTOMS & REAL IMPLICATIONS

## Physiological

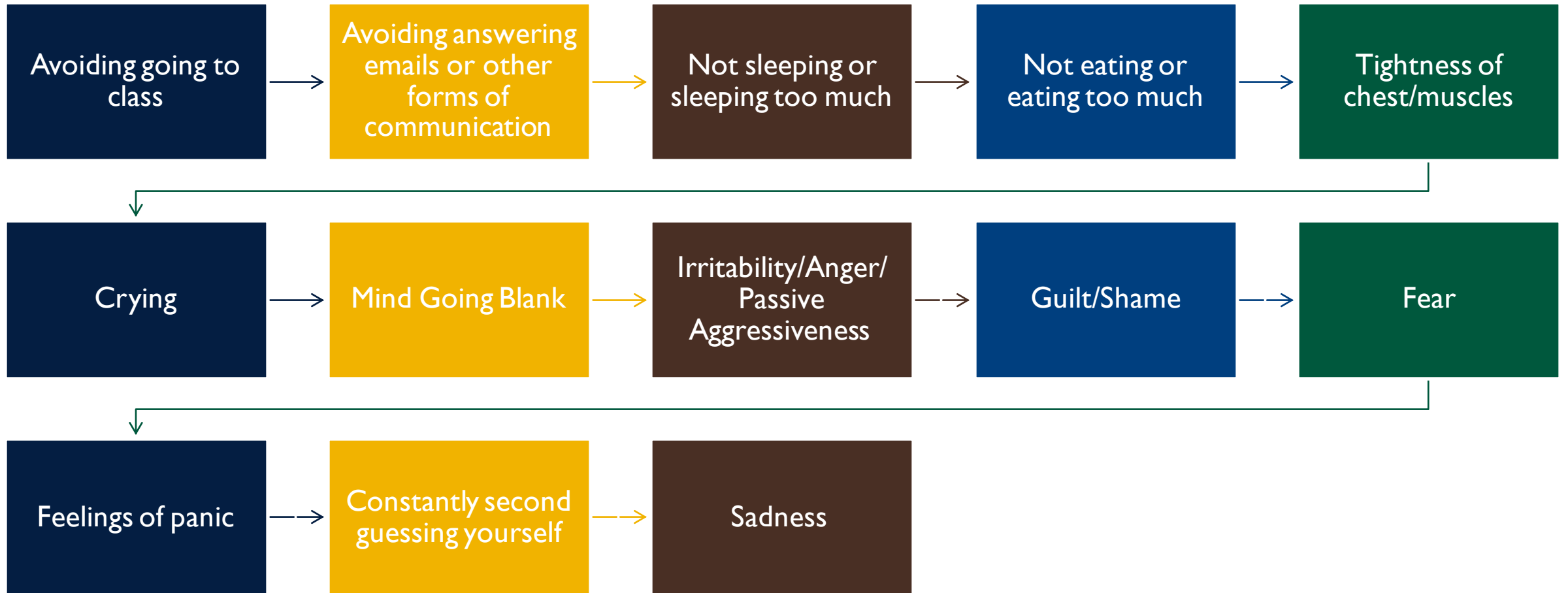
- Insomnia
- Tense Muscles
- Hypertension/High Blood Pressure
- Fatigue
- Sweating
- Gastrointestinal Problems
- Increased Heart Rate
- Trembling

## Psychological

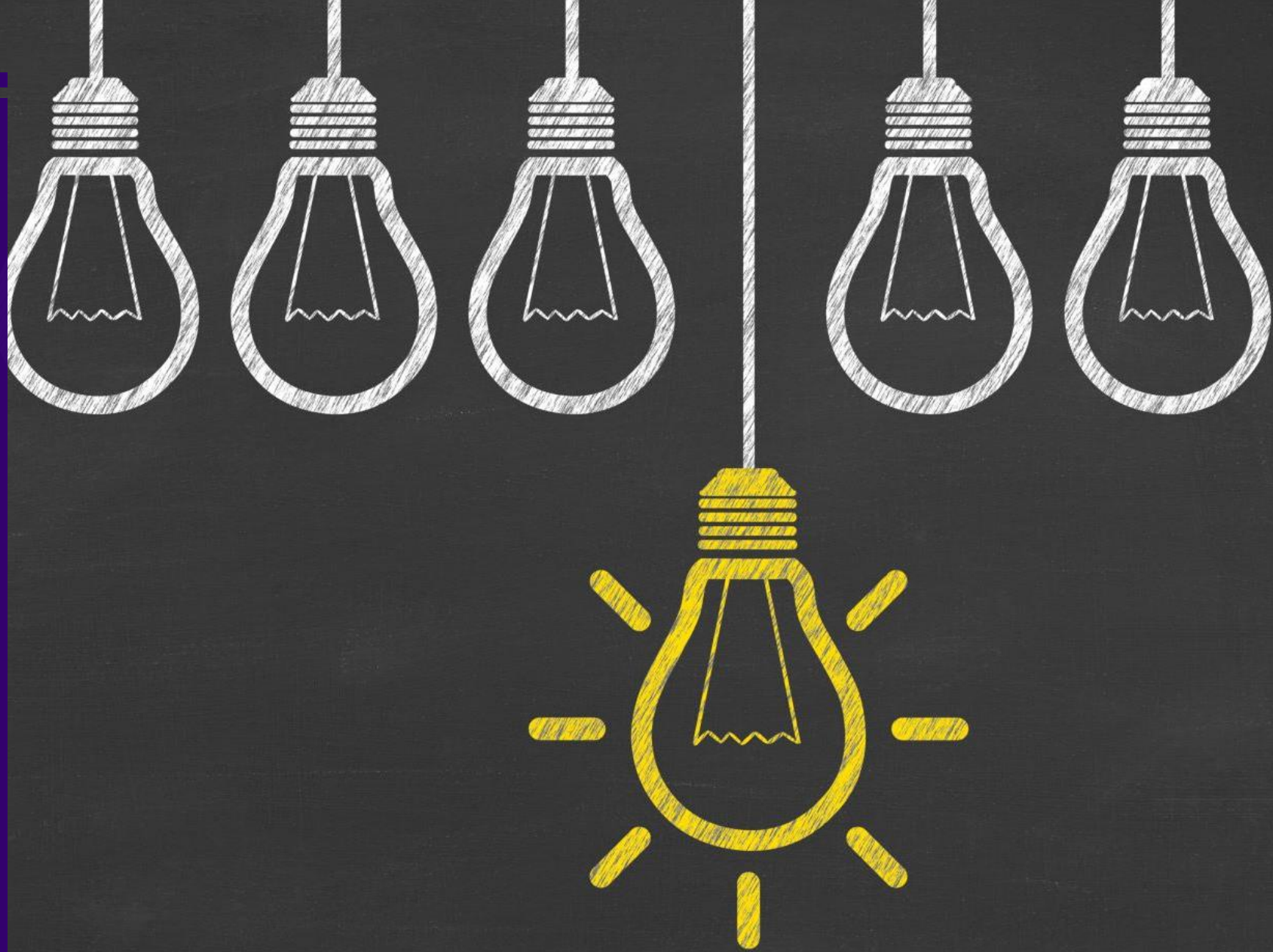
- Impaired Processing Speed
- Avoidance
- Increased Doubt
- Rumination/Racing Thoughts
- Mind Fog / Blanking
- Disorganization
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Fear



# WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE FOR ME?



TECHNIQUES,  
STRATEGIES &  
SKILLS



# PROACTIVE TECHNIQUES

Physical activities: yoga, tai chi, working out

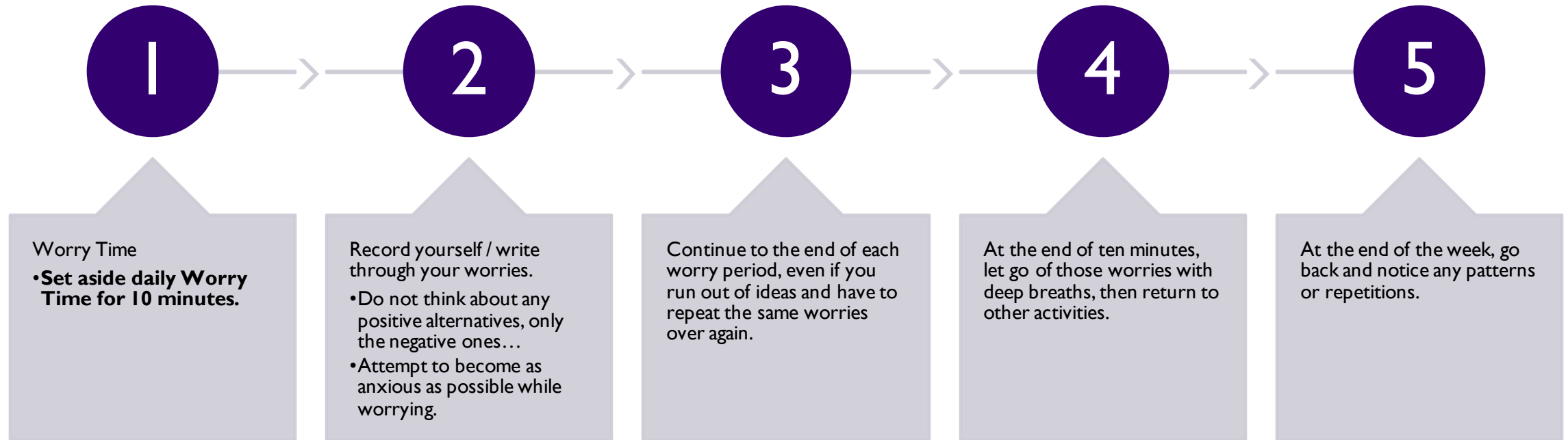
Thought stopping

Cognitive restructuring

- Reframe it (challenge vs. threat)



# PROACTIVE TECHNIQUES – WORRY TIME



**Familiar questions  
first**

**Mark  
challenging/longer  
questions & come  
back**

**When you're done  
you're done!**

**TTT: TEST TRIAGE TECHNIQUE**

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# TEST-TAKING TECHNIQUES

## BETHE ROBOT!

- Assembly line – think like a robot; don't overheat the machine
- Test strategies
  - What are they looking for?
  - Gather evidence
  - What are they looking for?
  - Answer in your head
  - Find the best answer



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# CREATING AN ADAPTIVE TESTING MINDSET

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- Once a plan encounters a challenge it will often not survive, which requires adaptation and sometimes improvisation.
  - When you encounter resistance/difficulties, simplify your approach
    - Regroup
    - Reframe
    - Recharge
  - Minimize and actively address *doubt*.
    - Doubt is paralyzing
    - Paradox is you CANNOT positive self-talk your way out of it
    - Must act to overcome



## BE IN THE PRESENT

- Take time to breathe and reboot
- Grounding
- Focused tapping



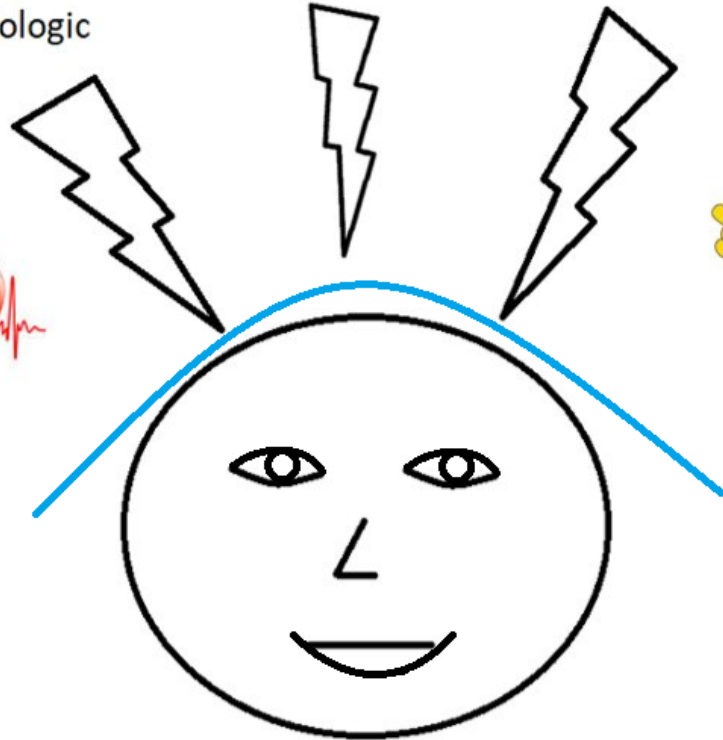
# TREATMENT OPTIONS

- **Mindfulness Meditation:** Mindfulness is a process that leads to a mental state characterized by nonjudgmental awareness of the present experiences, such as sensations, thoughts, bodily states, and the environment. It enables us to distance ourselves from our thoughts and feelings without labeling them as good or bad.
- **Psychotherapy;** Working with a psychologist, counselor, or social worker can help you learn new ways to cope with anxiety in daily life
- **Medication:** Medication can help you manage the symptoms of anxiety and increase your quality of life. Research shows a combination of medication and psychotherapy can be extremely effective.
- **Exercise:** Exercise decreases stress hormones like cortisol. It also increases endorphins—your body's "feel-good" chemicals—giving your mood a natural boost. It also provides a great distraction from unhelpful thoughts.



Negative thoughts

Physiologic



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# RESOURCES

- 
- Counseling & Wellness Services
  - Academic Support Services
  - Disability Resource Services
  - College/Faculty Mentors
  - Personal Support Systems
    - Family
    - Friends
    - Classmates

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# WHAT SHOULD I TAKE FROM THIS?



Science isn't always perfect and neither are you.



There are no “miracle cures”



Commit to one or two techniques and practice them (daily)



Medical/counseling intervention if needed



Physical activity is a **MUST!**



You are a life long learner



QUESTIONS?

# COUNSELING & WELLNESS SERVICES

## **Counseling Services**

<https://education.uwmedicine.org/student-affairs/counseling-wellness/>

## **Academic Support**

<https://education.uwmedicine.org/student-affairs/academic-support/>