

UWSOM ACADEMIC SUPPORT & COUNSELING

TEST ANXIETY TALK



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ANXIETY & STRESS IN MEDICAL SCHOOL

- Medical school is stressful, and there's no easy way around it. With endless amounts of content to learn and relearn; board exams; and rapidly changing clinical duties, the day-to-day can be exhausting.
- Now, add on family obligations, the uncertainty of COVID-19, maintaining some semblance of a social life, caring for pets, getting an occasional workout in, managing extracurriculars, doing research – all of a sudden you've got yourself an overflowing plate.

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.

PERFECTIONISM

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- Perfectionism is often seen as a positive trait that increases your chances of success, but it can lead to self-defeating thoughts or behaviors that make it harder to achieve goals. It may also cause stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.
 - People who strive for perfection out of feelings of inadequacy or failure may find it helpful to speak with a therapist; this can often help people manage excessive self-criticism. Perfectionism is often defined as the need to be or appear to be perfect, or even to believe that it's possible to achieve perfection. It is typically viewed as a positive trait rather than a flaw.

“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](#)

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.



TEST ANXIETY

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- Feeling nervous for exams is a normal feeling among college students. However, extreme feelings of anxiety and stress before and during an exam can have unhealthy results.
 - Anxiety can be problematic when it prevents you from taking or doing your best on an exam, causes you to feel anxious all the time, or becomes extreme.
 - 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 1st and 2nd 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.

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

IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

- Impostor syndrome (also known as impostor phenomenon) is a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud".
- Despite external evidence of their competence, those experiencing this phenomenon remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve all they have achieved.



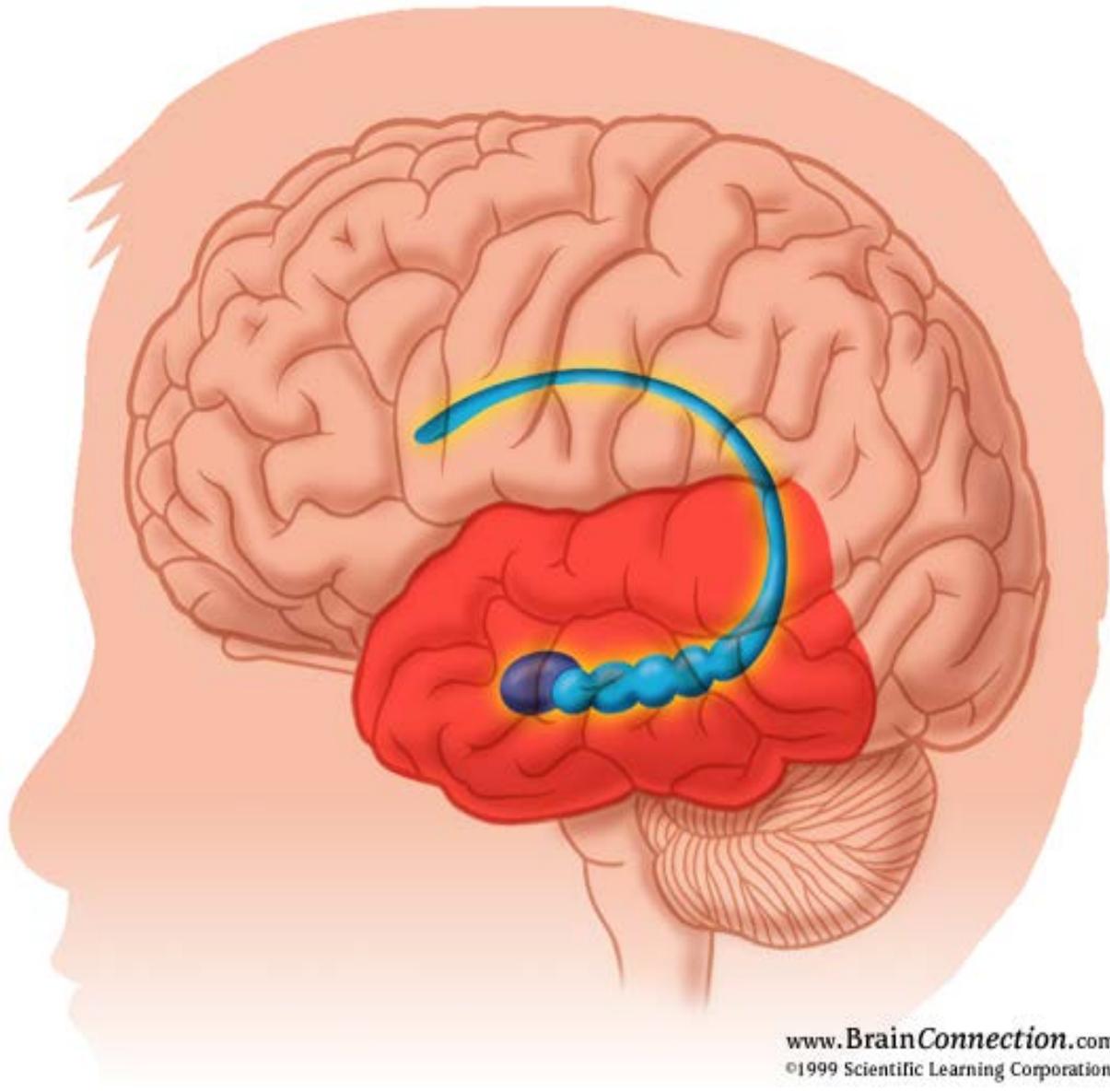
SYMPTOMS & REAL IMPLICATIONS

Physiological

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

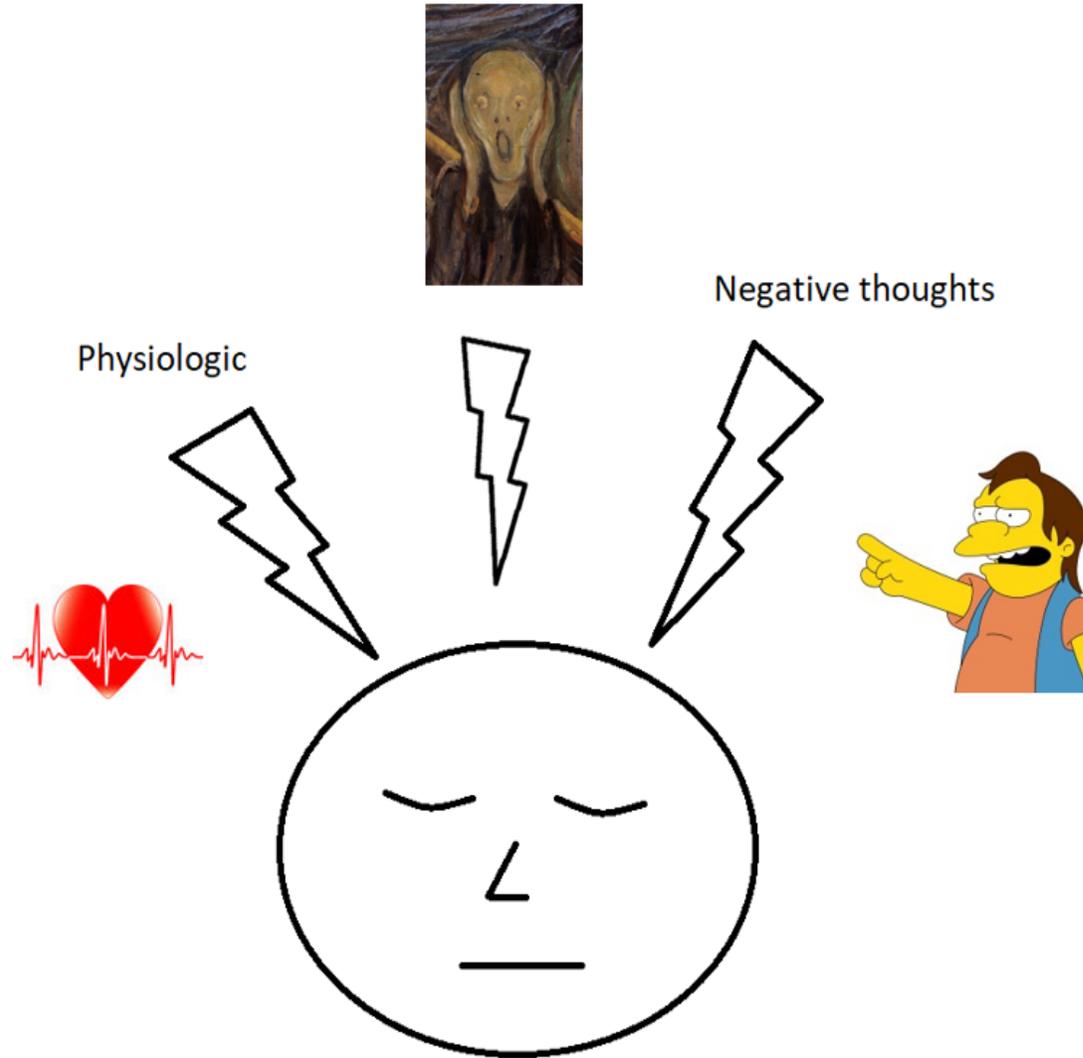
Psychological

- Impaired Processing Speed
- Avoidance
- Crying/Tearfulness
- Rumination/Racing Thoughts
- Disorganization
- Sadness
- Hyperventilation
- Guilt
- Fear

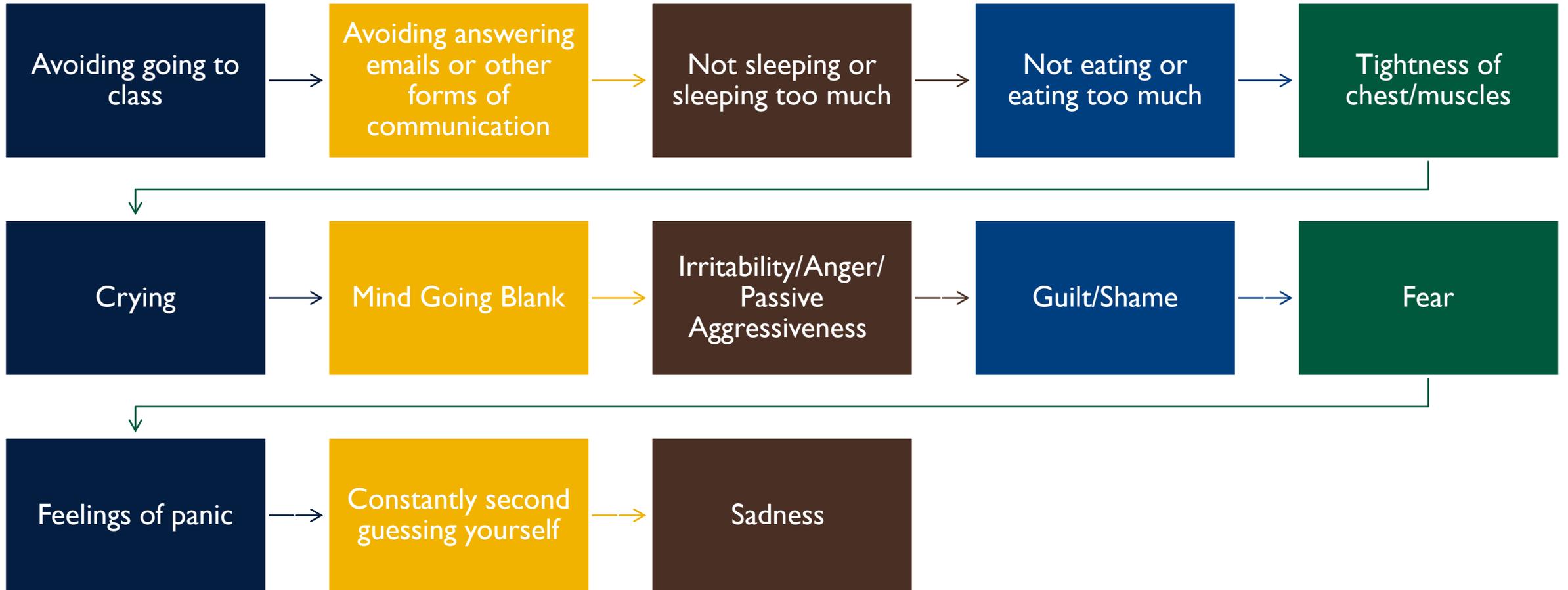


CLIFF'S BODY PICTURE

THREE COMPONENTS:



WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE FOR ME?

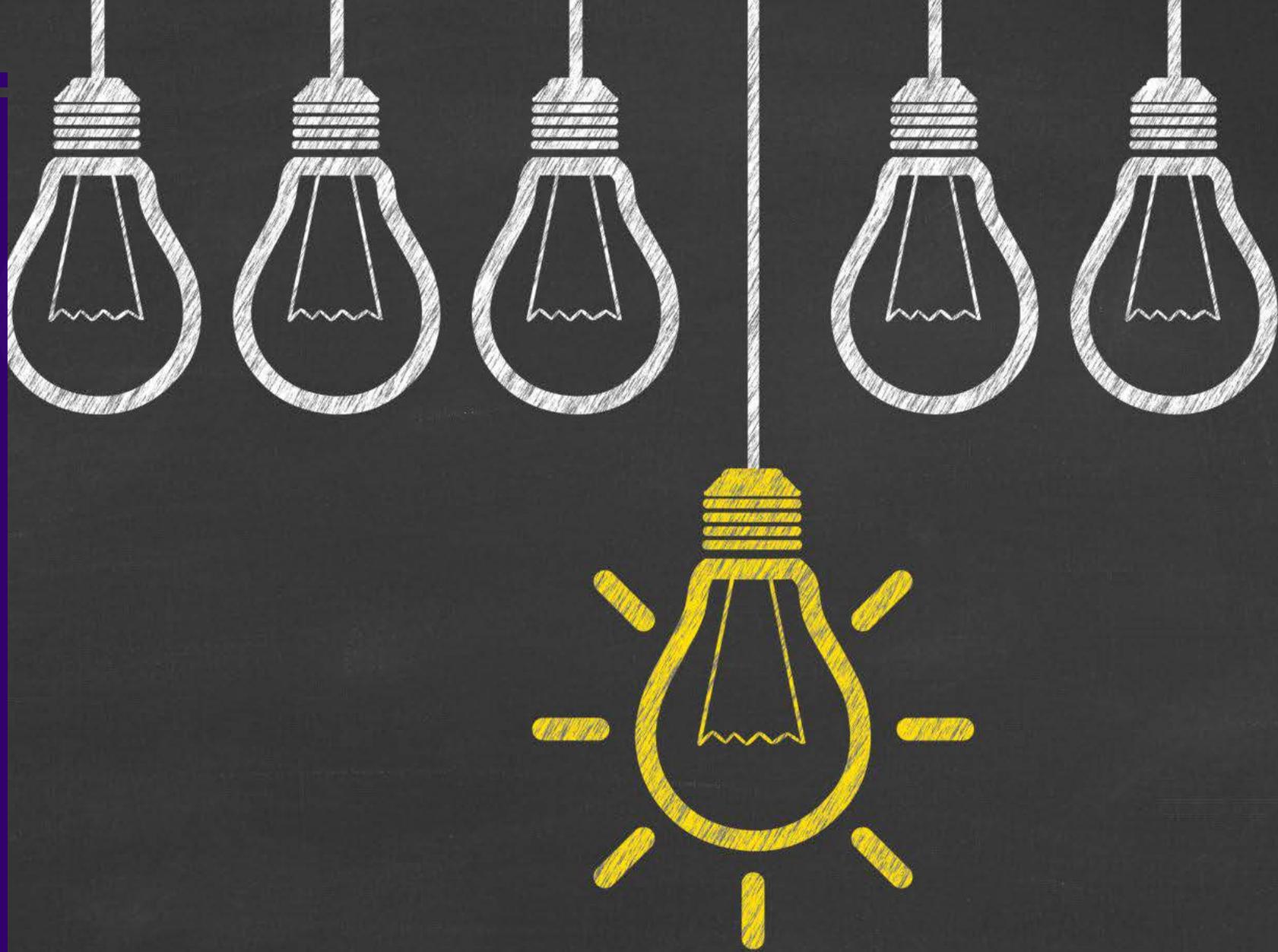


CLIFF'S PICTURE

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.

TECHNIQUES,
STRATEGIES &
SKILLS



PROACTIVE TECHNIQUES

Physical activities: yoga, tai chi, working out

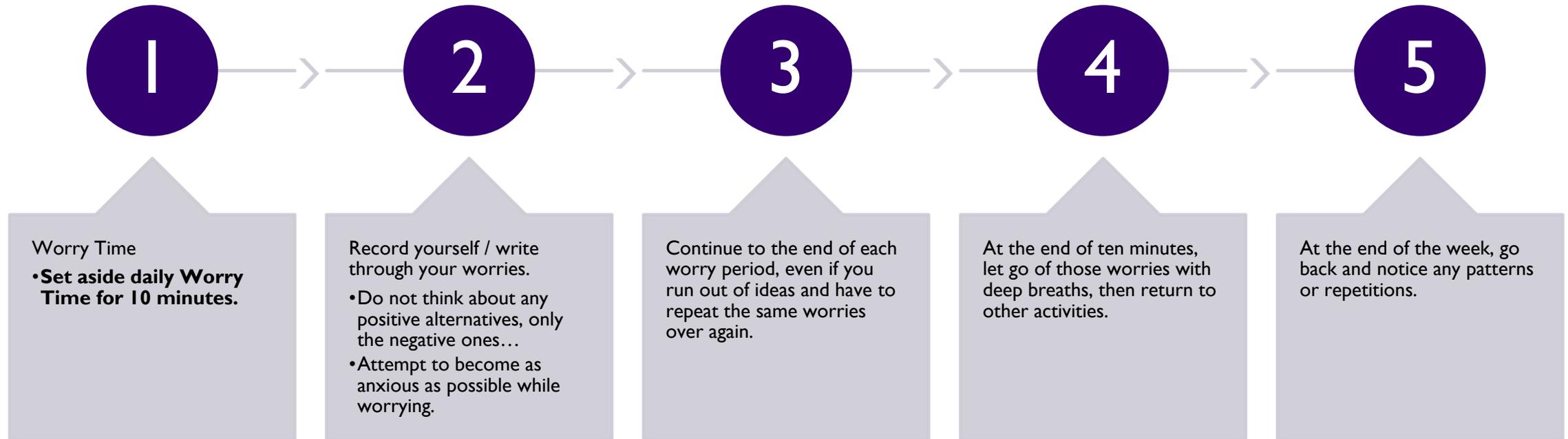
Thought stopping

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

TEST-TAKING TECHNIQUES

BE THE 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



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

A stack of five smooth, dark grey stones is balanced on a sandy beach. The stones are arranged in a vertical column, with the top stone being the smallest and the bottom stone being the largest. The background shows a calm ocean under a clear sky. The stones are reflected in the wet sand in the foreground.

BE **IN THE** PRESENT

- Take time to breathe and reboot
- **STOP, DROP & ROLL!**
- Brain Gym
- Grounding
- Self-distancing

RESOURCES

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

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)



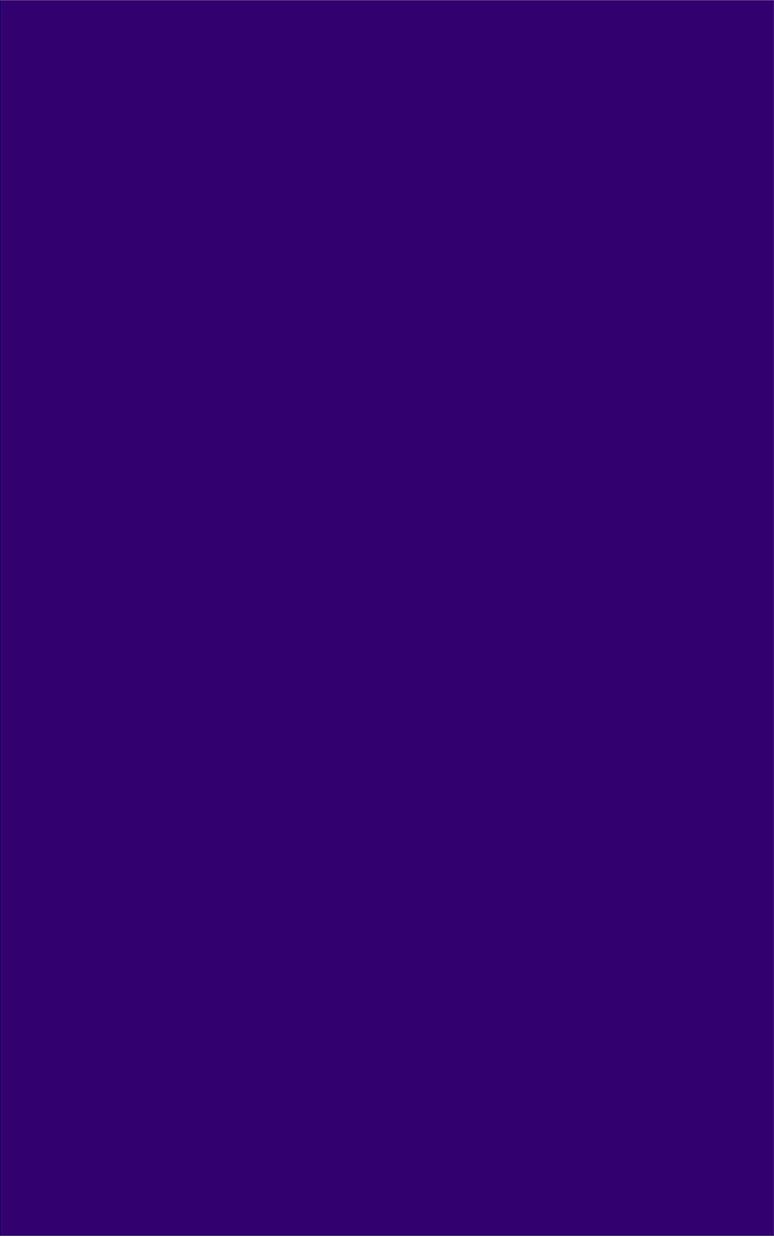
Medical/counseling intervention if needed



Physical activity is a **MUST!**



You are a life long learner



QUESTIONS?

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ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES
