

Hello, class.

So remember, stress is a body's reaction to changes within a person's environment. The things around them and the people around them. And it's very helpful in the short term, because it can lead to reactions like a fight or flight response that can get us out of situations that are either harmful or dangerous. But it can also lead to mental or physical problems in the long term, as well. Things like fatigue, irritability, or decreased mental functioning, on a brain or mental level. It can also lead to physical problems, like heart disease from increased blood pressure, ulcers, and also decreased immunological functioning, which makes a person more likely to get sick when they're stressed out.

So it's important for people to learn certain stress management techniques to better cope with the stress within their lives. Stress management is what we refer to as any kind of cognitive or behavioral strategy that a person can learn to reduce the stress around them, and its harmful effects that it can have on both the brain and the body. So we're going to be looking at examples of stress management techniques in this lesson.

First, probably the most popular and historically, the longest used stress management technique, is meditation. Meditation can take many different forms, as I'm sure you're aware. But basically, what it is, is it's a trained relaxation technique in which a person focuses on something else, like their breathing, or their bodily sensations, or their surroundings, to gain an increased awareness of themselves or their surroundings. This is often considered an altered sense of consciousness, kind of an expanded sense of yourself, where you are very aware of your own body, as well as the things around you.

What this can do is, it can help to reduce psychological stress by removing anxious thoughts from your mind, by pushing them out and focusing on something else entirely. But it can also help to calm the body's excitatory stress reactions, as well. Which can further reduce a person's psychological and physical stress.

A related technique is called guided imagery, which is a coping strategy where a person, instead of trying to relax the mind, or trying to think of nothing, purposefully thinks of things that are both positive and calming to that person. These are mental images that help to relax the body, as well as to reduce a person's stress. So again, this is that brain-body connection, where if we use these mental images, then we can affect our body, as well.

Oftentimes, what a person will do using guided imagery, is they'll think of a calming place. Like being alone on a tropical beach, or being out in the middle of the woods. And while a person is doing this, they try to use all of their senses. So not just the sight of the beach, but also the sounds, like the waves crashing on the beach. Or the smells, like the salt in the air, or the feeling of the wind against their skin. So this helps to increase that mental

picture within that person's mind.

Another technique that people use is called progressive relaxation, which is a technique where a person intentionally first tenses up, and then relaxes specific muscles in their body in succession. They'll start with one particular part of their body, say their shoulder, or their back, or their legs. They'll first tense it up, and then release it. And the person focuses on that feeling of relaxation when they release that tension, which helps to reduce that person's stress. So again, we're controlling the body to help control the mind, as well. So we're kind of going in reverse this time.

This is a technique that was developed by an American physician in the 1920s, but it's been proven to be very effective against stress-related illnesses, and it's still very popular today. In fact, you can try it out right now, by first focusing on one part of your body-- tensing it up for a few seconds-- and then focusing on that release that you have. And that should hopefully help to calm you down for the next part of our lesson.

One of the big factors that leads to ongoing and long term stress are the negative thoughts by the person themselves. So some event might initiate the stress, but a person's dwelling on it, or the bad feelings that are caused by the stress, will cause that stress to continue, or to worsen over time.

Psychologist Donald Meichenbaum proposed a technique called Stress Inoculation, which is when a person instead focuses on those positive thoughts and feelings to reduce anxiety. So what he said was that negative self-statements we're a reflection of these negative thoughts and emotions that a person has. These are critical thoughts that a person has that increase the stress, particularly in anticipation of an event that they know is coming up. Some kind of stressful event. So person might say to themselves, I can't do this. Or, I'm terrible at this. And these sorts of self-statements can help to defeat them, or to increase their stress over time.

So what he said was that you should counter these with what he called coping statements, which are positive, reassuring statements that help to stop negative self-statements themselves. It's a way of talking yourself up, kind of like a football player that gets pumped up right before a big game. These are things like, a person might say, I'll do this one step at a time. So they're talking themselves through it. I've done this before, to remind themselves that this isn't a big deal. They might remind themselves to stay focused, or that it will be over soon. So it's not just, you will succeed. But reassuring sorts of things that help a person to just get through the stressful situation.

So you can see how all of these techniques are different ways of approaching stress, and trying to mitigate its effects in different ways.