

WELLNESS TIPS

AVOIDING BURNOUT

As the semester progresses, especially this year with added stress related to the Covid-19 pandemic, students can begin to feel more stressed and overloaded, with risk of experiencing burnout.

Signs of potential burnout include: feelings of physical and emotional exhaustion, fatigue, decreased concentration, decreased motivation, apathy, cynicism, detachment, decreased productivity, irritability, insomnia, and depressed mood.

In attempt to feel in control of their academics, students may compensate by cutting out other activities such as exercise, eating healthy meals, or engaging in leisure activities, and they may go to bed later. But these strategies aren't effective and can contribute to further feelings of exhaustion and being overwhelmed.

But there are things you can do to help you avoid or deal with burnout:

- Focus on the here and now.
While acknowledging possible future events is important, perseverating on negative things that might happen (“what if?”) isn't helpful. It increases anxiety worrying about events that may not happen. If there is a high likelihood that an event will occur, develop a plan (or back-up plan) for the future and focus on what you can do in the present.
- Focus on what you can control.
Thinking about what you can't control increases feelings of helplessness and discouragement.
- Limit engaging in activities that may reinforce a pessimistic, discouraged outlook.
For example, if you become stressed listening to the news or following social media, limit times you tune in. If interacting with some people results in habitually feeling discouraged or self-critical, cut back on these contacts.
- Move your body or engage in formal exercise.
It is re-energizing, relieves physical tension and anxiety
- Get enough sleep.

If you are exhausted already, studying later isn't an efficient use of your time for learning new material and less sleep contributes to tiredness the next day.

- Do something enjoyable that makes you happy and takes your mind off your deadlines and worries.

It will help you feel refreshed.

- Don't be self-critical about how you spend your down time.
Every minute doesn't have to be "productive". You don't have to learn a new skill. You aren't a failure if you don't do something new.

- Stay connected with others.

Receiving and giving support decreases feelings of isolation.

There is no one right strategy for preventing or coping with burnout. Find what works for you and give yourself permission to focus on self-care. If you would like assistance, have questions or concerns, feel free to contact MSCC to schedule an appointment.

AMA Resident and Student Health. "Medical School Burnout: How to Take Care of Yourself." February 1, 2019.

<https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/resident-student-health/medical-school-burnout-how-take-care-yourself>

High Octane Women. "The Telltale Signs of Burnout ... Do you Have them?" Sherrie Bourg Carter. November 26, 2013.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/201311/the-tell-tale-signs-burnout-do-you-have-them>

Harvard Medical School. Lean Forward. "A Double Whammy: The Covid-19 Pandemic and Burnout in Medical Professionals." Marwa Saleh. April 9, 2020

<https://leanforward.hms.harvard.edu/2020/04/09/a-double-whammy-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-burnout-in-medical-professionals/>

Orlovich, Daniel. Solving Resident Burnout: An Assessment and Plan: Solutions for Residents with No Time, No Money, No Power. Horowitz Publishing, 2020.

Stay well and stay healthy!

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If you would like to review previous Wellness Tips, check the MSCC Website:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>