

## WELLNESS TIPS

### IMPOSTER SYNDROME

The term imposter syndrome was initially coined in the 1970s to describe feelings of inadequacy, not being good enough, that one is a fraud and does not belong, or that success experienced is not deserved or earned. Clance and Imes described it as “particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” despite their high level of professional success. Others, such as women of color, LGBTQ, marginalized groups, and people underrepresented in a particular field of endeavor and without role models or those who face systemic oppression or stereotypes are vulnerable to imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome tends to occur when someone embarks on a new endeavor, and can be experienced when beginning graduate or medical school, clerkships, or residency. Although imposter syndrome is fairly common, it is difficult for others to recognize because it is an internal state that isn’t consistent with objective performance and people tend not to share how they are feeling because of fear of being found out or not asking for help because they “shouldn’t need it”.

Imposter syndrome is associated with anxiety and depression. Available opportunities may not be pursued because of fears of not measuring up.

Imposter syndrome can lead to burnout as the person strives to meet perfectionistic expectations, overcompensating for perceived imposter syndrome limitations. When successful in reaching a goal, the belief can develop that anxiety and constant striving for perfection are necessary to achieve, which can further contribute to burnout.

#### **What you can do if you are experiencing imposter syndrome:**

- ~ Keep concrete reminders of your achievements and successes available.  
Refer to them to challenge thoughts of inadequacy.
- ~ Identify and keep a list of your strengths.  
Refer to it to keep balance as you also identify areas for improvement.
- ~ Expect to make mistakes if you are about to embark on a new experience.  
Challenge assumptions about needing to be perfect in the endeavor.
- ~ Challenge perfectionism by doing some things “well enough.”  
Make a deadline for completing a project in 8 hours instead of 10.  
Have someone read a draft you have written before its final version.

~ Find a mentor.

If it is someone in your career area, they can provide support as well as share their experiences and mistakes. You will learn that you are not alone. A mentor not associated with your career can also be helpful in providing support and another perspective.

~ Tune in to your self-talk. What are you saying to yourself?

Ask yourself:

“Is this thought helping me?”

“Is there another way to look at this?”

“Is this thought interfering with my plans and goals?”

Examples of unhelpful thoughts:

“People will find out I’m not cut out for this.”

“I must be an expert in the field before I present this research.”

Last week’s Tips on challenging your Inner Critic might be helpful.

~ Be cautious in comparing yourself to others.

Avoid exclusively relying on others’ opinions.

Develop internal ways of validation (such as adjusting self-talk).

~ Recognize your expertise.

Tutoring, volunteering, or participating in special projects can be helpful in reminding you of your competence.

While you might be experiencing beliefs of imposter syndrome, you also have the belief that you can be successful. Challenge those beliefs that you are not good enough – there is plenty of evidence that it is not so.

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Weir, K. “Feel Like a Fraud?” American Psychological Association. 2013.

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See the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips. <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Contact the MSCC for questions or concerns or to schedule an appointment with any of our counselors.

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**Stay Safe and Stay Well.**