


Zoom Fatigue: *The Concerns Surrounding Virtual Burnout*

It is no surprise that people are running on low fuel these days. We have had to totally reinvent ourselves to accommodate this new virtual world, which may stay with us for a while. Daily in-person interactions have become screen connections. While there are good things about communicating through Zoom and other platforms, there are also downsides, including mental and physical fatigue. Keeping up with virtual interactions can be exhausting! Here are some practical coping techniques.



“You can’t pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.”

- Unknown

1 Prolonged Eye Contact

We are spending hours engaging in lengthy and close-up eye contact. When in-person, people randomly search the room, look up at the speaker, and take notes, ultimately reducing the amount of eye contact. Now

we spend hours looking directly at faces without bodies, staring at ourselves while we talk. In a video call, the only way to show we are paying attention is to look at the camera. But pre-COVID, how often did you stand within three feet of a colleague and stare at his or her face? Probably never since it feels unnatural.

Depending on your monitor size and how you are using an external monitor, faces on videoconferencing calls can appear too large for comfort. That, too, is unnatural and our brains interpret it as intense, according to Professor Jeremy Bailenson, founding director of the Stanford Virtual Human Interaction Lab.



Solution: Take Zoom out of the full-screen option and reduce the size of the Zoom window relative to the monitor to minimize face size. You can also hide yourself from your view while allowing others to still see you. Check your settings.

To give your eyes a break, look away from your computer completely for a few seconds. Try to space virtual appointments out by 25 to 50 minutes to give yourself enough time to get up and move around and use the time between meetings to take a break from your screen.

#2 Multi-tasking

Resist the urge to multi-task during a virtual session. It is easy to think that you can use the opportunity to do more in less time, but research shows that trying to do multiple things at once cuts into performance. Because you have to turn certain parts of your brain off and on for different types of work, switching between tasks can cost you as much as 40 percent of your productive time. Researchers at Stanford found that people who multi-task can't remember things as well as their more singularly focused peers. (Fosslien and Duffy, 2020)

Solution: Try to minimize other distractions on your computer by closing other windows and programs. Put your phone away and stay present. It is tempting but try to remind yourself that the message you just got can wait 15 minutes, and that you will be able to craft a better response when you are not also on a video chat. If you are already fatigued from using Zoom, avoid exhausting yourself further by attempting to multitask.

#3 Reduced mobility

In-person and audio phone conversations allow humans to walk and move around. However, with videoconferencing, most cameras have a set field of view, meaning a person has to generally stay put. Movement is limited in ways that do not feel natural. "There's a growing research now that says when people are moving, they're performing better cognitively." (Bailenson, 2021).

Solution:

Focus more on the room you are videoconferencing in, where the camera is positioned and whether things like an external keyboard can help create distance or flexibility. For example, an external camera positioned farther away from the screen will allow you to stretch out and take notes like we do in real meetings. If you need to take a break during a virtual meeting, you can always turn off the video feature for a moment to give oneself a brief nonverbal rest.

Sources:

Stanford researchers identify four causes for 'Zoom Fatigue' and their simple fixes

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