

Member's Quarterly

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Ask The Expert

Virtual Call Fatigue

Q: *Why Do We Find Virtual Calls So Draining?*

Since working from home became the norm, many people have felt exhausted after a day with Zoom or Teams meetings. The term "Zoom fatigue" has gained traction on social media, and Google searches for it have steadily increased. We still rely heavily on virtual communication as we return to the office or even continue to work remotely.

Why are virtual calls so exhausting? They require intense concentration to absorb the material. Unlike in-person meetings, where side conversations and clarifications are more natural, virtual meetings often lack these nuances. Missing something during a call means relying on the private chat feature or waiting for a chance to unmute and ask for repetition.

Research-Backed Tips to Combat Virtual Call Fatigue

Avoid Multitasking

It's tempting to use virtual meetings as an opportunity to multitask, but research shows this reduces performance. Stanford researchers found that multitaskers have poorer memory recall than those focusing on a single task. Close any distracting tabs or programs, put your phone away and stay present during meetings.

Build-In Breaks

During longer calls, take mini-breaks by minimizing the window, moving it behind other applications, or looking away from your screen for a few seconds. This is not an excuse to start another task but a chance to rest your eyes. For back-to-back calls, consider scheduling meetings for 25 or 50 minutes instead of the usual 30 or 60. This allows time to get up and move around between sessions.

Reduce Onscreen Stimuli

Research indicates that people often focus on their faces during virtual calls, leading to distractions. Hide your self-view to avoid this. Additionally, visual distractions can be reduced by encouraging plain backgrounds, like a peaceful beach scene, to minimize mental fatigue from others' faces and backgrounds.

Switch to Phone Calls or Emails

Review your upcoming meetings to see if any could be handled via email instead. If you're feeling fatigued by late afternoon, propose switching a one-on-one virtual meeting to a phone call or rescheduling it. For example, say, "I'd love a break from virtual calls. Can we do this over the phone?" The other person will likely appreciate the change as well.

Avoid Defaulting to Virtual for External Calls

Do not automatically default to virtual meetings, especially with people outside your organization. While virtual calls have become common, they can feel invasive. Opt for phone calls for external communications when appropriate.

Implementing these tips might be challenging at first, but they can help alleviate the exhaustion associated with virtual meetings. As we adapt to this new normal, making virtual calls more manageable will ease some strain.

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