

Zoom Fatigue

Why am I so tired whilst working or learning from home? By Kelly Rump, School Psychologist

The playwright William Shakespeare reportedly wrote his famous tragedies King Lear, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra during the 1606 bubonic plague. During this time, Shakespeare found himself unemployed as theatres were forced to close. He was somehow able to remain remarkably productive whilst isolated and created plays that tangibly evoked the socio-cultural atmosphere at the time. Thankfully in our modern times, we have access to a range of technology that maintains social connection. This enables us to continue working from home without resorting to describing the downfall of kingdoms and the folly of men.

However, we may find ourselves increasingly fatigued, exhausted, irritated, or unmotivated despite this unlimited access to technology. If you feel this way, you are not alone; in June, 2021, 20% of Australians experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress, and almost one quarter felt restless or fidgety (ABS, 2021). Current lockdowns combined with online learning and working environments have a very real effect on wellbeing that contributes to an ongoing sense of fatigue. This phenomenon is called **Zoom fatigue**.



What is Zoom Fatigue?

Generally, fatigue is used to describe a sense of tiredness or weariness. The term **Zoom Fatigue** refers to feelings of exhaustion whilst working or learning from home, predominantly associated with excessive screen time. Contributing factors can also include uncertainty about when lockdowns will end, mourning the loss of rites of passage such as graduations, social dislocation, and financial stress.

Here are some contributing factors:

- **Exposure to prolonged periods of stress.** When we are constantly required to remain vigilant for threats, our brains send signals to different parts of the body to enable quick and decisive action to keep us safe. This is known as hypervigilance. Remaining hypervigilant over time uses a lot of energy, leading to feelings of anxiety, tiredness, and uncertainty.
- **Attention on multiple tasks simultaneously.** Working on screens means that the demands on our attentional capacities are relentless. This can include notifications from social media or text messages, email alerts, and news stories. Couple this with children and pets requiring supervision and we have an onslaught of cognitively draining information. Currently, we check our phones once every 10 minutes on average, or 96 times a day – an increase of 20% compared with 2019 (Peper et al., 2021).
- **Eye strain from looking at screens.** Spending hours staring at screens is a requirement of online learning and working from home. However, this leads to eye strain, which can be noticed through headaches, blurred vision, watery eyes, and tiredness.

Signs of Zoom Fatigue

- Frustration
- Low energy
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Hopelessness
- Feeling trapped or powerless
- Self-isolating
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Tiredness, even after sleeping

Strategies

- **Improving sleep:**
 - Avoid screens at least 30 minutes before bed
 - Get sunlight to improve mood and regulate your circadian rhythm
 - Use blue light filters (most smart phones have this function)
 - Keep a consistent bedtime
- **Reduce stress:**
 - Exercise daily – particularly encourage students to get up and move between classes
 - Practise self-care
 - Reach out for help if you are struggling – links are provided in resources below
 - Practise self-compassion – we are surviving in a pandemic
 - Create a list of things to be grateful for as a family
- **Improve attention and concentration:**
 - Turn off your phone or disable notifications
 - Take a break from the news
 - Move every 30 minutes
 - Look away from screens where possible

Resources:

- Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Services: 1800 512 348
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78
- ReachOut: <https://au.reachout.com/>
- National Indigenous Critical Response Service: 1800 805 801
- 1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732
- Mind Spot: mindspot.org.au
- This Way Up: thiswayup.org.au

Translated Coronavirus resources:

- 한국어 Korean <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/korean>
- 汉语, 繁體中文, 廣東話, 漢語 Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/chinese-cantonese-mandarin>

- 日本語 Japanese <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/japanese>
- Tiếng Việt Nam Vietnamese <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/vietnamese>
- اُردُو Urdu <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/urdu>
- हिन्दी Hindi <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/translated-resources/hindi>

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