

WHY VIRTUAL MEETINGS ARE MORE EXHAUSTING

- Our brains work harder to process the non-verbal cues we rely on in communication when they come over video vs. in-person.
- The silence of muted meeting attendees can be just as jarring as background noises or other distractions to the speaker.
- Low-quality video or sound and delays in feedback lead to automatic negative perceptions in listeners (stress), because we're more familiar with the immediacy of in-person conversation.
- We are not used to staring at colleagues close up and with the "constant gaze" that video meetings present. Eye contact in-person is more fluid and feels more familiar.
- We are also now staring at our own faces, which we are not used to seeing. This can trigger self-consciousness and add the mental effort of "performance."
- Many people multi-task during virtual meetings, which takes a toll on our energy and attention without regular breaks away from work for our brains to recover.
- Back-to-back virtual meetings don't allow for proper breaks. Even back-to-back in-person meetings might require a walk to a new room or change to seating position.
- To stay centered on our webcams, we can't move around in our chairs as much as we do during in-person meetings. Sitting in one position for too long is draining.
- We blink less staring at screens, which makes our eyes tired, irritated, and dry.



HEALTHY VIRTUAL MEETING GUIDE

Overall the technology we have is amazing! Imagine going through the pandemic without the virtual connection tools we have. However, the amount of time we're spending in virtual conversation increased exponentially overnight, and we're not well adapted to it yet. Here are some tips to assimilate technology into our lives to support our health and well-being.

VIDEO PRESENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

- ❶ Place your webcam at or around eye level to create a more direct sense of engagement with others. Make eye contact with your camera instead of your screen at least periodically, and especially when you're speaking. This will give the effect of eye contact and visual engagement to other attendees.
- ❶ Use the gestures and mannerisms that you would typically use in person. Smile and nod occasionally when listening. This will provide helpful, friendly cues to your fellow attendees that feel better than looking at a gallery of still, serious faces.
- ❶ Pick a dedicated work area/space that removes you from distractions, and stage the space behind you for a clean background that won't detract from your face.
- ❶ Hold video meetings in a well-lit room with the light in front of you to avoid shadows on your face.
- ❶ Mute your microphone when you're not speaking to reduce background noise in the meeting.
- ❶ Avoid defaulting to video meetings with people you do not know well, or discuss preferred meeting format in advance, such as when you're scheduling.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

- ❶ Practice the “20-20-20” rule. Look at something other than a screen that’s 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes to avoid eye strain.
- ❷ Move or stand at least once per hour. If appropriate, turn off your video and take a walk during meetings. Or, take short breaks to stand, stretch or move around with your video off temporarily.
- ❸ Avoid eating during video meetings, as it’s not pleasant for your viewers. However, don’t skip out on fueling yourself when you need to! Not eating often enough adds to exhaustion. If you do need to eat during a meeting, turn off your video and microphone temporarily while you.
- ❹ Plan intentional screen-free time into your schedule, especially around days that are meeting heavy. This includes screens used for leisure after work hours!
- ❺ Avoid multi-tasking. Remember, your brain is already multi-tasking in new and different ways to process interaction over video. Limit distractions and practice focusing your attention on the meeting alone.
- ❻ Turn off the “self-view” video so others can see you, but you won’t see yourself. This helps reduce the mental effort of “performing”. Or just keep your video off altogether if it’s not required.
- ❼ Shift from gallery view to speaker view so you only have to focus on one person at a time.
- ❽ Take a moment to get centered before joining each meeting. Take a slow, deep breath to settle your attention and mentally transition to the new group. This can be done in 60 seconds or less, and will be great for you while not overly delaying your arrival to the meeting.
- ❾ When feeling particularly drained by video meetings, pause at the end of the day to remember any benefits they bring: more comfortable attire at home? A pet snuggled next to you? A chance to connect with friends we can’t see in-person? A moment of sincere gratitude and a deep breath can ease stress.

HEALTHY SCHEDULING PRACTICES

- ❶ An online event should be no more than an hour. Longer events should be planned and managed with your attendees’ schedules, attention, and physical well-being needs in mind.
- ❷ If you need to deliver more content than 1 to 2 hours will allow, break the session up into multiple, brief sections with breaks in-between.
- ❸ Schedule meetings for 50 minutes rather than 60 (or 25 min. rather than 30) to give everyone a break. This is essential for those with back-to-back meetings.
- ❹ Only invite people who need to be there to contribute. If someone needs to be informed but not actively involved, can you loop them in through another means instead?
- ❺ Establish “no meetings” blocks on your schedule, or designate a day each week to stay meeting free.
- ❻ Make virtual social events opt-in. For those with hefty meeting schedules, make it OK to decline certain meetings when time for other projects is needed.
- ❼ Send the meeting agenda in advance. Provide brief housekeeping and agenda review (5 min) at the start of the meeting, then get quickly into the content.
- ❽ Prepare any materials you wish to share in advance – open files, cue videos, pull up websites – to reduce time spent toggling between shared media.
- ❾ Reduce the number of meetings or time spent in meetings by providing content that needs review in advance. Use other technology to support work outside of video meetings.
 - Cloud collaboration on shared project documents.
 - Replace project status updates with pre-recorded videos or presentations shared in advance.
 - Assume attendees have read materials emailed in advance and avoid spending time reading or reviewing them again during the group meeting. Get quickly to the work at hand.