

# Avoiding Burnout: Self-Care Strategies for Faculty

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Now that you've finished assessing your students, it's time to turn the assessment process around by looking in the mirror. If you limped across the finish line last semester, it may be time to identify some new strategies for self-care. In our "Tending the Teacher" session at the recent Teaching Professor Conference in Washington, D.C., we presented a menu of ideas to help faculty design a balanced and productive work life. Here are our top tips:

- 1. Examine how you spend your time and energy:** Which work-related tasks or activities leave you feeling energized or excited? Which feel like unnecessary chores rather than positive contributions? Next year, prioritize the aspects of your job that build you up or represent an important contribution to the field. Minimize tasks that drain or deplete your energy without commensurate benefit. Cultivate the art of saying "no" in order to focus on what's important to you.
- 2. Check your rhythm:** Circadian rhythms allow us to anticipate and respond efficiently to environmental changes. Creating a degree of predictability in your schedule can help align your internal clock. While it's rare for an academic to have a "normal" day, you can control some aspects of your schedule. Waking up and going to bed at about the same time each day will help to synchronize your body clock. Similarly, eating and exercising at predictable times both support this process. Many people feel more energetic and productive when they follow these basic guidelines.
- 3. Rethink course design:** While we all strive to have engaging and interactive courses, doing so can be quite time consuming. Use creative course design strategies and tools to provide engaging experiences for students without taking up a disproportionate amount of your time. For example, use a simple audio recording tool to provide feedback instead of typing your comments. If your school's LMS doesn't provide an audio feedback tool, Vocaroo and VoiceThread make great options. Students appreciate the personal approach, and providing verbal feedback takes far less time than generating written comments. Also, consider using peer-to-peer review

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with select activities to allow students to get supplemental feedback without adding to your workload.

4. **Refine your daily workflow:** Are you getting bogged down with e-mails? Watching deadlines zoom by? Putting your own health on the back burner? The start of a new semester is the perfect time to change your default pattern. We suggest making one or more of the following small changes next semester. Consider using a service that delivers e-mails a few times per day rather than trying to work through the persistent interruptions of new emails arriving in your inbox. Some apps will also turn off notifications on weekends or after hours. Use an electronic “to do” list like Todoist or Wunderlist to organize reminders and deadlines. Many of our nutrition clients find that using Google or Outlook calendar scheduling and reminders is a good way to prioritize a daily walk, meditation, or a quick stretch.
5. **Evaluate your food and fuel:** Food can drag you down or prop you up. Step away from your desk periodically for a snack, and be sure to choose one that is nourishing as well as invigorating. Good choices include a piece of dark chocolate; nuts and seeds (especially walnuts); berries; or foods with spicy, sour, or tangy flavors. Preliminary evidence even suggests that chocolate may be associated with cognitive enhancement (Scholey & Owen, 2013). (You can thank us later.) As nutritionists, one of the most common things we see is unhealthy or mindless snacking. Avoid snacking at your desk while you’re doing other things. Use your snack break to get outdoors or connect with your colleagues while you nourish yourself.

Self-care isn’t an all-or-nothing approach. Starting small is ideal. Pick one or two practices to implement tomorrow, and you’ll be on the road to a more sustainable work-life balance.

## Reference

Scholey, A., & Owen, L. (2013). Effects of chocolate on cognitive function and mood: a systematic review. *Nutrition Reviews*, 71(10), 665–681.  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/nure.12065>