

# Self-Care and Wellness during Grad School: How to Stay Healthy Under Pressure

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A decorative graphic of a feather, rendered in a light green color with a fine grid pattern, positioned on the left side of the slide. The feather is oriented vertically, with its base at the bottom and its tip pointing upwards.

# Learning Objectives

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- 1) Inform and equip students to recognize the signs of burnout in themselves and others
- 2) Provide practical strategies to improve and develop a self-care plan
- 3) Facilitate an open conversation about self-care

A decorative graphic of a feather, rendered in a light, textured style, positioned on the left side of the slide. It has a central rachis with numerous barbs extending outwards, creating a fan-like shape.

# Outline

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- Introduction
- Signs and Sources of Burnout
- Self-Care Strategies
- Integration of Self-Care Strategies into Daily Routine
- Self-Care Action Plan

# Introduction

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What is all the hoopla about self-care?

# Evidence for a men graduate education

Teresa M Evans<sup>1</sup>, Lindsay Bira<sup>2</sup>, Jazmin Beltran Gas

With mental illness a growing concern within graduat  
academia and policy makers to consider intervention

There is a growing cry for help from graduate students across the globe who struggle with significant mental health concerns<sup>1</sup>. Despite increased discussion of the topic, there remains a dire need to resolve our understanding of the mental health issues in the trainee population.

Recent research on mental health in the trainee population has focused on within-institution cohorts, such as the 2014 UC Berkeley report<sup>2</sup>, which found that 43–46% of graduate students in the biosciences were depressed, and the 2015 University of Arizona report<sup>3</sup>, which found that a majority of doctoral students reported “more than average” current stress or “tremendous” stress and endorsed school and education-related issues as the most significant contributors to their stress. Although these studies demonstrate the mental health concerns in this population, more research is needed to better define the prevalence of mental health issues and the role of key variables such as gender, mentorship relationships and perceived work-life balance on susceptibility to mental health struggles in the trainee population.

In order to address gaps in the understanding of mental health prevalence in the graduate

trainee population, we conducted a population-wide survey that scales for anxiety (PHQ-9) via a self-report survey. We surveyed a total of 234 PhD students at 234 institutions and 2) and represent including, biology, engineering (2% (56%) and “other” here demonstrate community has of individuals v. Although this is a representative sample of respondents who report anxiety or depression respond to the stressors in both academia and the workplace.

**Mental health in the student population**  
Our results show more than six times the prevalence of depression and anxiety in the graduate population.



Original article

## Challenging the Stig Students

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**Article history:** Received November 2013  
**Keywords:** Mental illness; Stigma

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study investigated interventions on mental illness stigma among college students.

**Methods:** Data were collected from 234 participants who were randomly assigned to presentation, education-based pre- and post- intervention, and treatment groups. A 3 × 2 analysis of variance was conducted.

**Results:** Both contact- and education-based interventions demonstrated a significant impact on personal stigma, perceptions of empowerment, discrimination, attitudes towards treatment seeking, and intentions to seek treatment from formal sources. No difference in effect was demonstrated between the contact- and education-based conditions.

**Conclusions:** These findings suggest that these two approaches should be considered for challenging mental illness stigma among college students.

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## An Exploratory Study of Psychology Graduate Student Workload, Health, and Program Satisfaction

Christina M. Rummel  
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Graduate students in clinical and counseling psychology programs must balance multiple professional and personal roles, navigate complex educational systems, and respond well to constructive feedback. How do students experience and cope with the stress related to this workload? Responses from a national survey of clinical and counseling psychology graduate students reveal that rates of physical and mental health symptomatology are higher than those of the general population and of medical students. Of students surveyed, greater than 49% reported clinically significant anxiety symptoms, greater than 39% reported clinically significant depressive symptoms, and more than one third of participants (34.82%) reported clinically significant symptoms of both anxiety and depression. More than half of students also reported chronic physical health symptoms, with these symptoms increasing with greater workload. Despite these symptoms, many students reported lacking adequate support from supervisors and faculty, as well as limited use of mental health counseling. Recommendations to aid professional psychologists with increasing trainee self-care and coping are discussed.

**Keywords:** psychology students, training, health, workload, stress

Most practicing psychologists are aware of their susceptibility to work-related stress. Psychologists help clients with personal difficulties, and it is not always easy to separate oneself from those difficulties at the end of the workday (Clay, 2011). Data collected from an American Psychological Association (APA) survey of practicing psychologists showed that clinicians rated work-life balance as their top stressor, feeling that it interferes with their

For psychologists specifically, there are numerous negative consequences of unmanageable personal distress, including loss of enthusiasm and meaning in one's work, impairment in ethical decision making, lack of compassion for clients, burnout, and neglecting one's physical health (Bridgeman & Galper, 2010; Pope & Vasquez, 2007). In addition, work-family conflict has been found to be associated with depression, anxiety, emotional strain,

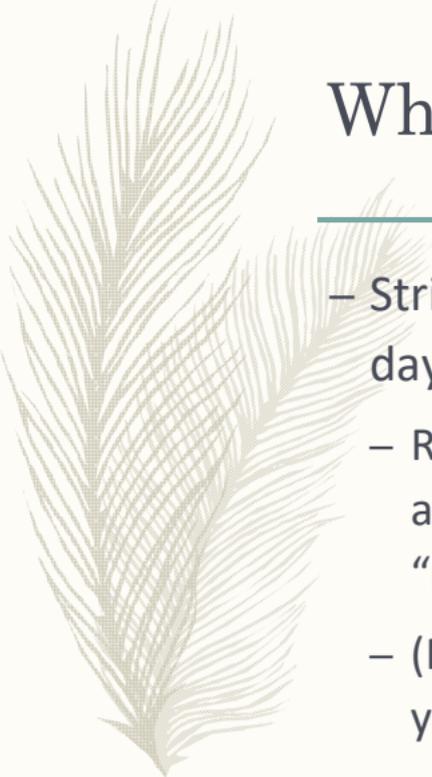
towards treatment seeking, and intentions to seek treatment for mental health among young adults. Results have implications for addressing barriers to mental health care for



# What is Self-Care?

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- Taking care of yourself to maintain your physical and mental health
- Means different things to different people
- Could be as elaborate as having monthly (or weekly) spa days or as simple as ensuring you are maintaining your hygiene



# What is Self-Care?

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- Strive to incorporate self-care into your day-to-day routine...
- Rather than burning yourself out for 12 months and having a vacation at the end of the year to “rejuvenate”
- (Not that there is anything wrong with rewarding yourself with a vacation!)

# Mindfulness Exercise

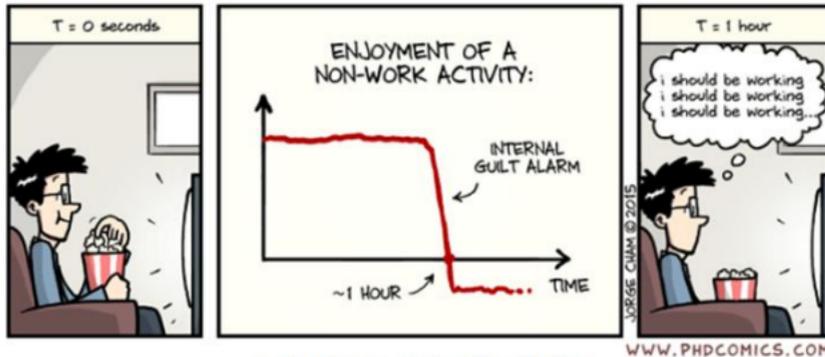
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# Why is Self-Care Important?

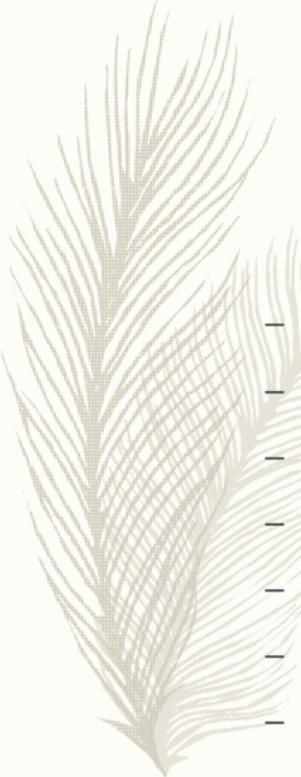
Piled Higher and Deeper by Jorge Cham

www.phdcomics.com



title: "The Guilt Timer" - originally published 10/7/2015

- Self-care helps you to...
  - Avoid burnout and compassion fatigue
  - *Can lead to feelings of exhaustion, ineffectiveness, frustration, and hopelessness*
- Maintain effectiveness
- Increase physical and emotional energy



# Sources of Burnout

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## Sources of burnout

- Work overload
- Lack of control
- Insufficient reward
- Breakdown of community
- Unfairness
- Significant value conflict
- Lack of fit between the person and the job

## Feelings of burnout

- Exhaustion, including emotional exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Ineffectiveness
- Frustration
- Disengagement
- Stress
- Helplessness/hopelessness

# Particular issues for graduate students

- Procrastination
- Isolation
- Time management
- Work-life balance
- Financial concerns
- Long-term and short-term goals

Question or symptom	Percentage
What aspect of graduate school do you find most stressful?	
Thesis, dissertation, or other research	32.8
Balancing work and family	15.1
Class work	12.6
Clinical work or training	11.8
Assistantship	9.2
Relationships with superiors	4.2
Relationships with peers	1.7
Most prevalent physical symptoms experienced biweekly or more	
Feeling easily fatigued	78.8
Headache	61.0
Back pain	60.2
Irritable bowels	57.5
Muscle soreness	48.7
Stomach upset	43.4
Weight gain or loss	38.4
Most prevalent psychological symptoms experienced biweekly or more	
Fatigue	85.7
Feeling overly stressed	81.2
Feeling anxious or worried	80.2
Irritability	78.3
Difficulty concentrating	75.9
Lack of motivation	76.5
Sleep difficulties	63.4
Increased appetite	50.0
Preoccupation with details of tasks	47.2
Feeling keyed up or edgy	46.4
Feeling inadequate	45.0
Feeling down or blue	38.4
Anhedonia	36.0
Nightmares	34.5
Excessive guilt or self-blame	34.2
Feeling detached from others or situations	27.0
Feeling shaky	26.6
Lack of social support	25.5
Use of mental health services	
Currently engaged in therapy	19.60
Have been in previous therapy, but not now	82.0
Have never been in therapy	18.0
Currently taking psychotropic medication	15.1
Have taken psychotropic medication in past, but not now	10.9
Have never taken psychotropic medication	72.1

# Discussion

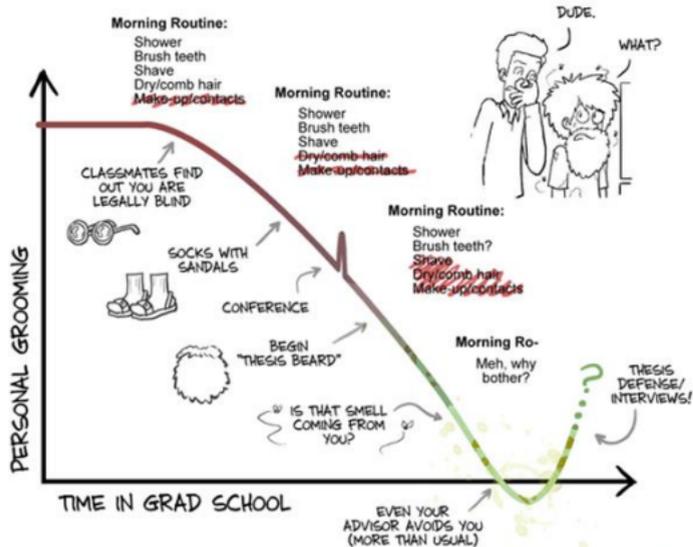
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How does self-care fit into the life  
of a graduate student?

# Self-Care in Graduate School

## GROOMING VS. TIME IN GRAD SCHOOL

What happens when you realize nobody's paying attention.



JORGE CHAM © 2009

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

- Sources of burnout and/or compassion fatigue? What happens when we experience this?
- Barriers to practicing self-care? How can we overcome these barriers?
- What do YOU do to practice self-care? Any tips?

# Self-Care Strategies

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I know self-care is important, but  
how do I *do* it?



# Self-Care Strategies for Your Internal Environment

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## 1. Mindfulness

- Increasing awareness of burnout and compassion fatigue

## 2. Taking care of your physical health

- Sleep hygiene
- Healthy eating
- Exercise
- Do activities other than work!

# Self-Care Strategies for Your Internal Environment

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## 3. Stress/anxiety reducing strategies

- Paced breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Body scan
- Apps: Headspace, Calm, Pacifica (<https://www.bustle.com/p/7-self-care-apps-to-help-you-stay-balanced-in-2019-15643553>)

## 4. Self-compassion

- Kristin Neff (<http://self-compassion.org/>)



# Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

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## 1. Set limits (and stick to them)

- Learn to say no
- Learn to set your limits in terms of timeframes and workloads
- Become good at disappointing others – Yes, but...
- Buy happiness where it counts (e.g. house cleaning, pre-made meals)

## 2. Schedule activities

- Schedule time to work
- Schedule time for other activities
- Create a calendar to visualize your workload





# Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

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## 3. Break it down

- Divide your tasks into smaller tasks and schedule time to work on them
- Use calendars to plan tasks for bigger projects (like your thesis)

## 4. Keep track

- Create lists to manage your tasks
- Set timeframes for each task
- Reward yourself when completed

# Self-Care Strategies for Your External Environment

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5. Create a work environment that works for you
  - Schedule important tasks at times when you are the most productive
  - Silence/music
  - 50/10 rule - Pomodoro timer: <https://pomodoro-tracker.com/>
  - Working buddy



# Self-Care Action Plan

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Let's do it!

# Create Your Self-Care Action Plan Now!

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1. Identify two self-care activities you can start TODAY
2. Schedule them into your regular routine
  - Mark it on our calendar!
3. Plan ahead
  - How will you get around your barriers?
4. Re-assess how things are going



YOU GOTTA  
NOURISH  
TO FLOURISH



# Self-Assessment

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## **Rate yourself on how well you are implementing your self-care plan:**

- Physical health (sleep, nutrition, exercise)
- Stress
- Incorporating relaxation/meditation/other forms of spirituality
- Scheduling, maintaining balance and limit setting
- Positive work environment

## **ASK YOURSELF:**

- *In which areas am I taking care of myself as well as I can? Not?*
- *Which areas can I improve on? How?*

# Transfer to Everyday Life

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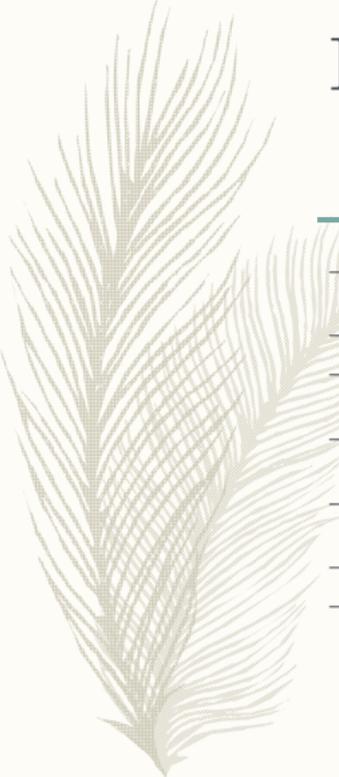
## Don't

- Don't be overly enthusiastic
- Feel guilty
- Prioritize shoulds over wants
- Treat your self-care plan as less important than your other responsibilities
- Add extra things to your schedule without subtracting something else

## Do

- Start small and gradually increase activities
- Practice mindfulness (if you do feel guilty)
- Make a plan and stick to it
- Write it down, and keep it somewhere you can see
- Keep open spaces in your schedule





# Resources and References

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