

How to combat WFH video fatigue

By - Shikha Desai | Created: Sep 26, 2020, 13:30 IST

Do you find yourself feeling exhausted after a long day of video consultations or meetings? Are you no more excited about video meet ups with friends? Do you run away from the idea of attending a virtual class that requires you to switch on your video? You're not alone. Over the past few weeks, the term "Zoom fatigue" has popped up more and more on social media, and Google searches.

Video calls: boon or bane?

There is no doubt that in times of the pandemic video calls have come across the best bet to manage work and collaborate on projects real time but like everything else there are two sides of the coin. While the positive side has advantages like: convenience, real time connectivity, lower costs of business operations, there is the flip side that is not so positive which is being ignored. "Spending too many hours on video calls can make one feel lethargic, confused, tired and disoriented. So many people are struggling with video fatigue.

Videos can never come half as close to meeting someone in person. Initially it was exciting but now it's exhausting. People no longer want to do official video chats and children don't want to sit in virtual classrooms," says psychologist Dr Seema Hingorrany. Also, group calls are making people very uncomfortable. "People often have to run and do their hair as their bosses and colleagues are online. One has to dress up more perfectly than one used to dress up for in-person meetings. In fact, most corporates have a dress code. I have seen many women saying they have to literally push themselves to apply lipstick for a video meetings while men complain about being asked to sport a tie for their morning meetings," adds Hingorrany who feels that constantly being on video calls can not only cause mental health issues but also lead to physical problems like spondylitis, neck pain and back pain.

Constant gaze can make one feel uncomfortable Video calls require us to engage in a constant gaze which makes us uncomfortable."A lot of us are experiencing discomfort at various levels given the increasing number of video calls. This is clearly driven by human psychology. For most of us, being on camera brings out anxiety on two levels: first our judgement of our own self and secondly social judgement which is judgement by others? How am I looking? What are the others thinking of my presentation? Is my room background looking awkward? and so on. And for a lot of us, who can already be dealing with anxiety issues, this worsens the case. It feels like we are standing in front of the classroom which can be the reason enough for making us uncomfortable. Thus the whole process can be very exhausting both physically and emotionally," Pooja Khera, Coach of Happiness and Wellbeing. Moreover, when meeting in person, we might glance out the window or look at others in the room. On a video call, looking elsewhere might seem like we are distracted or aren't paying attention.

Are too many video calls necessary?

WFH is making people anxious about project developments since the option of being in an office space isn't there anymore. This anxiousness is leading to multiple, repeated calls that are clearly tossing away everyone's work life balance. "Initially, working from home was new and fun. Gradually, it started taking a toll on me. We started having team video calls two to three times a day and I started feeling the burnout. Being an introvert by nature, I am not very comfortable sitting in front of the camera for long hours," says marketing professional Ashish Joshi. "A lot of times, video calls are just being done to "reassure stability" as the environment is so uncertain that everyone wants to know that their work is seen, they are heard and their jobs are secure. The bosses also want to make sure their employees for busy working. So even when not needed, there are team calls being scheduled. So while we need these tools to sustain our work, the important thing is what I call "schedule responsibly". Keep in mind everyone's time and respect each other's space and the fact that all of us need a healthy mental balance if the productivity level needs to be sustained," says Khera.

Ways of alleviating video call fatigue:

1. Don't schedule back to back video calls. Space your video calls throughout the day as it gives your brain the right time it needs to process all the information and reduce the stress on your eyes. You can also do justice to all the calls.
2. Make sure you stay hydrated well throughout the day with water and other healthy options like home squeezed fresh juices, coconut water, nimbu paani, etc.
3. Stretch well at regular intervals. Basic stretching exercises go a long way as they help release muscle tension and brain fatigue and help restore energy.
4. Give your eyes a much-needed break. Try the 20-20-20 technique – Every 20 minutes look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This will allow your eyes to refocus and reduce strain on them. Trying to consciously blink will moisten your eyes and reduce dryness.

5. Take mini breaks from video during longer calls by minimizing the window, moving it to behind your open applications, or just looking away from your computer completely for a few seconds now and then.
6. Research shows that when you're on video, you tend to spend the most time gazing at your own face. This can be easily avoided by hiding yourself from view. Also, make it okay for people to turn off their cameras for parts of the call.
7. If you aren't stepping out at all, make sure to consume Vitamin D supplements under medical supervision.

EXPERTS SPEAK

"While using video calls as a medium to connect, let's not forget the advantages of in-person meetings. During in-person meetings, you get to see the body language of the person that helps you manage the conversation far better. It's easier to engage with people when you are sitting face to face; you can share a laugh, make a comment very effortlessly. After all, humans have been created for actual social contact"

- *Pooja Khera*