



Suggestions for healthy working as a researcher

Choosing the right opportunities and saying no to others

Being aware of your priorities and resources when evaluating tasks for which you take responsibility can make you a better researcher. Questions you can ask yourself to assess opportunities and tasks:

- ? Does this fit my research agenda and identity?
- ? Do I have time to do a good job on it without sacrificing my other commitments?
- ? Does this leave space for my personal life?

It's hard emotional work, so you might need a group of peers to help you assess opportunities and practice declining them. The questions above and lots of learnings from this experiment in intentional yes-saying come from an article by four mid-career environmental social scientists, who describe how this helped preserve energy and creative capacity to do a better job: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-02325-3>

Using yourself as a measure to find a sustainable work pace

Use yourself as a measure to find a sustainable work pace. When planning your work, ask yourself:

- ? What is realistic to achieve in a day so I can also do it tomorrow and the day after tomorrow?

This can be a more useful question than asking yourself what is expected of you.

This suggestion is taken from participant discussions in workshops about handling work stress and self-care. Related tips from the participating researchers were:

- ◆ be realistic with your to do lists: create achievable steps; adjust when you realize that a task is bigger than expected
- ◆ set alarms for breaks
- ◆ don't use perfection as a measure to count a task as done
- ◆ visualize your achieved results/completed tasks

- ◆ create a ritual to mark the end of a workday

Sleep is also a priority when you want to remain productive.

Embracing your professional fiascos

There are ways to find joy in perceived failures, to learn from them, and to calmly (or very dramatically!) let them go.

👉 One of the ways is do to it as a community: Celebrate fiascos with your peers, who have surely also experienced them, since they are a normal part of academic life. Professor Sabine Bergner facilitates a Fiasco Fest for the PostDoc Office yearly.

👉 You could also take a satirical approach, like this author: Glass, R.L. (2000): [A letter from the frustrated author of a journal paper](#), In: Journal of Systems and Software, volume 54, issue 1, p.1.

👉 Or create your own CV-of-failures, which serves to highlight how motivated, productive and resilient you are: <https://www.sciencealert.com/why-creating-a-cv-of-failures-is-good-Princeton-professor-viral>

👉 more reading:

- Ruchika Tulshyan & Jodi-Ann Burey (2021): Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome, Harvard Business Review, online.
- Jaremka, Lisa M. et al. (2020): Common Academic Experiences No One Talks About: Repeated Rejection, Impostor Syndrome, and Burnout, In: Perspectives on Psychological Science Volume15, 3, 519-543.

Explore what allows your body to release tension built up during a work day

There are evidence-based strategies for moving from stressed to calm. Identifying the strategies which work for you and using them regularly can help you rest and recharge better.

Things to try after a work day:

- 👉 exerting your body (from punching a pillow for a minute to going for a run)
- 👉 creative explorations (paint, scribble, sing, dance...)
- 👉 physical affection (from humans or animals close to you)
- 👉 deep breathing, laughing

Amelia and Emily Nagoski talk about the theory behind this in their book:

- "Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle".

More things to try can be found in this book:

- Petra Boynton (2020): Being Well in Academia: Ways to Feel Stronger, Safer and More Connected, Routledge.

Also helpful: Establish a nature-time routine.

Regularly breathing in forest air or the scent of wild flowers on an aimless stroll has been proven to have impact for health and wellbeing.

"Moving my body to move my mind" is one of the practices recommended by workshop participants of the PostDoc Office. Another one was establishing routines.

Why not try if you can benefit from a routine of being in nature? Include short (or long) walks in Leechwald or flower-smelling-strolls through the Botanic Garden into your week.

Consider yourself a creative & celebrate yourself

Consider yourself a creative and maintain the space for this creativity in your work life.

Start by sitting in an armchair with a cup of tea and a notepad, thinking, and thinking, and thinking some more.

This is a suggestion by Kel Weinhold on the blog The Professor Is In (created by academic coach Karen Kelsky):

🧠 Since your work as a researcher involves taking an idea, concept, or vision and making it manifest, you are well advised to take all the steps of the creative process seriously.

🧠 Apart from allowing yourself the space to think, there are three more steps to follow - including celebrating the results of your creative labour.

Read more here: <https://theprofessorisin.com/2022/09/02/just-one-thing-claim-your-creativity/>

Letting yourself be inspired by stories of academic kindness

Academia can be a place of care and goodwill, marked by collegiality and friendly environments, which in turn lead to research of excellent quality. Here is a whole blog about it: <https://academickindness.tumblr.com/>

It's also talked about in science and technology studies, like in this article series edited by Daniela Jauk-Ajamie & Anita Thaler: <https://queersts.com/forum-queer-sts/queer-sts-forum-7-2022-towards-academic-kindness/>

The collected articles can help gain a better understanding of the tasks and implications of cultivating academic kindness.

Being aware of signals of poor mental well-being

This could be the more frequent occurrence of illnesses, an inexplicable frequency of headaches and digestive problems, as well as changes in sleeping habits. You can take countermeasures with what usually feels good (e.g. participating more intensely in social life, playing sports, practicing relaxation techniques).

Reflect:

- What are the signals for you specifically?
- What have you done in the past which lead to improvement?
- Can you take these steps now?
- Who could be helpful in this process?
- Can you talk to trusted people in your personal environment about what you are experiencing?

It is always possible to seek out a primary care physician and talk it through!

Building & maintaining supporting networks

That can be in a professional context (especially with peers & external mentors), which has the potential to see others also have burdens, to learn about their coping strategies and to get help and offer help. You have access to external and independent, but experienced support who looks at your issues with fresh eyes. You experience yourself as self-effective and integrated into a community.

Finding out how a counselling session works

Obtain basic information about supportive contact points and their offers. That way, you gain familiarity with processes of support and can assess whether you could benefit from it and what might be useful in case of emergencies. Think about which stabilizing factors and supporting organizations & people you can fall back on in a stressful situation. In the event of a stressful situation, you have access to continuous support through the coping process.