

Why am I so TIRED?

Eight ways change can drain you - and how to restore your spark.

The coronavirus and Covid-19 have caused seismic changes in the ways we are living, learning and working. Are you back at home, experiencing the loss of independence that living on-campus afforded? Are you bunking on a friend's couch, experiencing the loss of a "home" you relied upon? Even if you didn't have to relocate, you may be missing the mini-escapes to coffee shops, stores and restaurants that used to change up your scenery. You may feel trapped or isolated.

Whatever your specific situation, you're confined (willingly or unwillingly) to four walls with more unstructured time than you ever thought possible as a college student.

Why are you so tired with so much less activity?

After all, you're "just sitting" at home watching video lectures and doing homework. You're never farther than a few dozen steps away from your kitchen. You're not rushing from class to practice or driving from campus to work. And yet...you're worn-out, and you don't know why.

What gives? Change. That's what.

It turns out change can knock you flat.

Change can occur for many reasons. It can be desirable or dreaded. Some change is predictable, such as graduating from high school or starting a new job. Other change just happens, such as a tire blowout on the freeway - or losing your sports season to Covid-19. It can be easy, or hard. Regardless, you may be feeling lost, anxious, depressed, even angry. It's enough to leave you...weary.

Chosen or not, change requires flexibility. Adapting to new circumstances is tough, often requiring great mental and physical energy. **In this issue**, we explore changes you may be experiencing now, and suggest responses you can choose to **strengthen your resilience** - and get your energy back!

One word for "the ability to cope effectively with change" is **resilience**. It's a "soft skill" can be grown, and which employers seek.

Though your environment, lifestyle and genes can impact your current level of resilience, the amount isn't set in stone. Most of resilience is actually "in your head." And that's good news! It means that choosing to practice different ways of thinking and being in the world can boost your resilience, which can help you create a life that is vibrantly adaptive to new places and unexpected events.

If any of the changes below are depleting your energy, explore the suggested responses to build your resilience.

The Change:
None of this was your choice – or your fault.

Fundamental elements of good mental health include autonomy, self-expression and a **sense of control**. Well, we've been sent home and no longer have the choice to go to the classroom, the dining hall, or to our jobs. This **lack of choice** can be frustrating, disorienting, and even depressing. **It's a loss**, and you may feel grief. Grief is tiring.

The Change:
You now have to think about things that used to be automatic.

When you were in the classroom, you were able to hear the lecture clearly, see the notes written on the white board, and indicate your attendance by simply occupying your chair. Now, these activities may require a few **extra deliberate actions**.

The Change:
You miss people.

On campus it's easy to connect with friends throughout each day. Now you have to "schedule" that interaction. School is fundamentally social and **human connection is an important part** of it – yes, even for those who are more introverted! You're exhausted because you're not energized by these regular connections, and because maintaining those connections virtually requires more effort.

A Resilient Response:
Find ways to infuse choice into your day.

As much as possible, set your own work times, and keep to them. **You can choose** which assignments you work on when, how much work you choose to do each day, and/or the actual flow of your day. For example, **planning breaks** can give you more control over your time.

A Resilient Response
Keep at it.

It's like any other new skill: **once you learn it, you gain "muscle memory."** Getting connected using technology is rarely seamless; but as new tools and ways of working become the typical, those actions will become more automatic and your brain will be able to put less effort into them.

A Resilient Response:
Reach out and connect in new digital ways.

Remember that others could be feeling the same anxiety and isolation as you are feeling. When you text or call, first ask if the other person can talk, or if later is a better time, so you can enjoy a relaxed conversation. **This will get easier and you'll establish new norms to stay connected.**

The Change: More distractions.

Roommates, parents, children, or spouses can unintentionally cause **distractions**, especially if you don't have a door to close when you study (you may not even have a private place to sleep). The stress of the **constant "buzz"** this 24/7 proximity can create, along with the stress of those around you, can sap your energy.

The Change: You're under new pressure that you didn't have before.

You may have **more roles you must fulfill**. You may do more cooking because restaurants are closed, or more cleaning or yard work. Perhaps you're planning activities for younger siblings or caring for older family members. All of this pressure can pile on to that of your own academic goals. The **demands on your time** have increased, while your energy levels are the same or even reduced! **Being pulled in many new directions can cause fatigue**. On top of all that, you may be **missing the faith connections** you experienced at our weekly Spirit Life sessions.

The Change: The flow of information is overwhelming.

You're now flooded with more **unsolicited information** than ever. Your employers and the places you like to eat, shop, get medical attention, and bank are sending you **news**. With Blackboard, you may need to look for class updates more often. **Social media** channels are stuffed full. And of course, OUAZ is sending you regular **emails** to support you. Coping with this **overload** of digital information can tax you.

A Resilient Response: Plan for distractions.

Make time each day for the distractions you can expect. For example, **plan** to spend your lunch hour with your family or for getting a breath of fresh air for when the anxiety grabs you. If you **carve out small chunks of time** between academic tasks throughout the day, your family will know the approximate time(s) you'll be available. This may lessen their anxiety about having access to you.

A Resilient Response: Count your blessings daily.

Take time each day to "Be still and know that I am God..." (Ps. 46:10), to seek **His perfect peace** in the midst of this storm. Some call it devotional time, others call it meditating, study, journaling or prayer. It's the **time you take** to focus on things for which you are grateful such as your health and your friends. Your education. Hot running water! **Each day write down three things you're grateful for**. They can be teeny, or huge; visible or invisible. Gratitude has tons of positive mental and physical impacts. Appreciate the time with your family. Appreciate the freedom to attend class in your PJs. And then **appreciate the new resilience you're building**.

A Resilient Response: Filter information and prioritize.

While you do need to stay up-to-date and in touch, **be firm about your boundaries**. Give yourself permission to ignore text alerts while studying. Wait to respond to emails. Some communications may not require an immediate response, if they require one at all. Focus on information that will help you accomplish your goals OR help you relax. If you don't need it, ignore it.

The Change:
You're living on video more than ever.

You're looking at faces all day without being able to **take visual breaks**, with your eyes focused on what is right in front of you. This is physically and socially exhausting. You may have to maintain your sense of self-esteem despite a bad hair day, the asymmetry of your eyebrows, or your tendency to touch your face (a habit to break, of course). While these issues may seem silly or trivial, they aren't. They have to do with your **sense of identity**. When you're navigating all of that while having to "be ON" so often, you can exhaust your energy reserves.

The Change:
You're not moving.

We sit for so long: at our computers, our tables and desks, our game consoles, our tablets and our televisions. And we're doing it inside of our four walls **without the ability to "escape"** to larger spaces such as malls, parks or game fields. Studies have found that **too much sitting** is associated with thinning in the regions of the brain responsible for memory formation. The fact that you're not moving daily across our campus or from dorm to dining hall might actually create more exhaustion.

A Resilient Response:
Focus on the others on the call.

Instead of dwelling on yourself: **refocus on others**, on what you're **learning**, and on the **questions** you and others are asking. Also ensure you're looking away from your screen at least a few times an hour to give your eyes a chance to focus on things at a distance. For example, look out a nearby window or the artwork on your wall for several consecutive seconds, rather than only what's on screen. This variety can provide you with **visual "rest"** that can help you stay the course.

A Resilient Response:
Plan physical activity.

Studies suggest that when you move regularly, you can learn better. Even **quick bursts of exercise** can boost memory and learning. Exercise (endurance walking in particular) is associated with better cognitive function. So...during a video lecture, **stand up**. Between classes, get up and move, perhaps by walking the dog, or strolling to the kitchen to grab a beverage. Consider taking **"micro breaks"** in your study space where you **stretch**, do a few jumping jacks or **walk** around the couch a few times. Contrary to popular opinion, "pushing through" without breaks does NOT result in better work. Only faster burnout.

Did you realize the many ways "physical/social distancing" could be impacting you?

By choosing to practice resilience now, you'll be better prepared when we restart economies and reconnect socially. Our world will be different after the pandemic passes. We don't know exactly how yet; but those who have built resilience will be better equipped to thrive.



Adawe **Mentors**

At the Adawe Center, we help students navigate their OUAZ journey by listening, asking, guiding, and empowering.