

Well-Being Tip

August 2025

Belonging and Self-Care During Times of Transition



Many medical and PA students are cracking

open fresh notebooks and moving into new apartments this time of year. In a college town like Iowa City, August often feels more like the start of the new year than January. Although transitions can be exciting, they can also be stressful. Especially for those starting a new academic program (ahem...medical school or PA school), the increased stress of transitions could be coupled with imposter phenomena. Imposter phenomena, commonly referred to as imposter “syndrome” is the internal experience of believing that oneself is not as capable as others believe they are. Some people identify with feeling like a “fraud” who will be exposed for not actually being qualified to do what they are doing. If you’ve felt this way, know you’re not alone.

Up to 80 percent of people have experienced imposter phenomena at some point in their lives ([Bravata et al., 2019](#)), and the prevalence of imposter phenomena may be higher for students with identities that are underrepresented in medicine due to the experience of racism or sexism within academic and occupational systems ([Cockley, 2024](#)). Medical learners, particularly medical learners with identities that are underrepresented in medicine, may question whether they belong in their educational programs, which can create a sense that one must be “twice as good” and “perfect” to deserve a spot on the class list. With this Well-Being Tip, MSCC is here to remind you that all of you belong at CCOM. Here are some practical strategies for navigating the transition into a new school year:

1. **Find your people!** Nothing beats imposter phenomena like community. When we experience a sense of belonging within a group of friends or a professional community, it helps us to remember that we have every right to be where we are. Do your best to reach out to and connect with classmates and potential mentors. It may take some time to find the other people with whom you “click” the most, and that is okay. Be patient and try to keep putting yourself out there. You can start by taking small steps like asking classmates to eat lunch together or to form a study group.

2. **Bring it back to the basics.** Caring for your body and brain becomes even more important during periods of transition or high stress. H.A.L.T. is one easy way to remember to stop and check in with yourself. That is, am I hungry (H), angry (A), lonely (L), or tired (T)? Try to prioritize taking care of your nutritional, emotional, connection, and sleep needs first. Most people feel better and learn better when these needs are taken care of. If you're struggling with this, try scheduling regular meal times, sleep/wake times, and/or social events into your week. Then prioritize these appointments the same way you'd treat a scheduled meeting with a faculty member or supervisor. Your well-being matters.
3. **Set small, manageable goals (No, even smaller).** Try to keep your focus on the next small, measurable goal. Break whatever big project you're taking on into small steps. For example, if you need to make 100 flashcards for an upcoming exam, can you just focus on creating 10 flashcards first, and go from there? Similarly, if your whole apartment is still in boxes from a recent move, can you just focus on getting the bathroom unpacked this evening? Setting small goals helps to make large projects more manageable. Meeting them helps to build our confidence and offers momentum to keep moving toward larger goals.
4. **Embrace routine.** Do you have a long-standing daily routine of some kind like making coffee in the morning or reading something enjoyable before bed? Daily rituals can offer immense comfort during times of transition. Even seemingly mundane tasks like brushing your teeth or washing your face can offer consistency when a lot of other things are changing. Take time to lean into any routines that bring you comfort.
5. **Seek out support.** If you're experiencing stress related to imposter phenomena, MSCC invites you to participate in one or both of these outreach activities:
 - a. Join clinicians from the Office of Education Support and the Medical Student Counseling Center for support spaces, a support group open to all CCOM students.
 - September 10 from 12:00-1:00 pm in general hospital room C238
 - September 22 from 5:00-6:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
 - October 8 from 12:00-1:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
 - October 27 from 5:00-6:00pm in general hospital room C238
 - November 12 from 12:00-1:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
 - November 17 from 5:00-6:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
 - December 10 from 12:00-1:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
 - December 15 from 5:00-6:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room

- b. Join MSCC therapist Adam Robinson for a group outreach event titled, “From Imposter to Intrinsic,” a discussion about the challenges of impostor syndrome and strategies to help yourself overcome these constraints and learn to trust your true potential.
 - i. Monday, September 22 from 1-2 pm; location to be determined

[Connect with the MSCC](#)

The Medical Student Counseling Center (MSCC) offers free, confidential personal counseling, disability and accessibility services, academic and career development support, and wellness consultations to MD and PA students.

Contact MSCC

Email: osac-mscc@uiowa.edu Phone: 319-335-8056

(Email should not be used to share confidential information or in the event of an emergency.)

If you are in crisis or you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text 9-8-8.

[Nondiscrimination statement Accessibility](#)