A study by the University of California, Berkeley, found nearly half of postgraduate students met criteria to classify them as depressed.¹

WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING/FEELING

**IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

Someone is going to figure out you don’t belong here soon. You look good on paper, but passing that exam was a fluke. I don’t have what it takes to [do these experiments, write a thesis, succeed in academia]. These are all classic signs of impostor syndrome. Tip: reframe your thinking. Aim for progress, not perfection.

**FIRST TIME FAILING**

You’ve always been the best student at school, and you did pretty well at university too. Now your science isn’t working and everyone around you seems to be getting on just fine. These feelings can come about as at undergraduate level, [believe it or not] are designed to work. Tip: remember, you are at the forefront of scientific research - if it was easy it would already have been done!

**COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE**

Unfortunately, academia often fosters competition over collaboration, when it should be the other way around. This is made worse by the fact that often the only way to gauge how well you are doing is to compare yourself against others. Tip: no two PhD projects are the same. so avoid comparing them.

**NO MORE TICK BOXES**

You got pretty good at doing essay and lab reports - they were all short term tasks. You also got good at figuring out what questions might be asked in exams. Now you have an open ended project, with the end no where in sight. You no longer have grades to tell you if you are doing a good job. Transitioning from undergraduate mentality can be particularly tough. Tip: break down your research into small, manageable goals.

**ISOLATION / GUILT**

Writing your thesis can be a particularly lonely, isolating task. This can also be coupled with feelings of guilt when going about your daily life as “you should be writing”. Tips to manage this include still attending research group meetings/departmental seminars whilst writing. This can also be coupled with “writer’s block”. Tip: when writing, start by making figures - it is far easier to write about what a figure means.

**THE WORK | LIFE STRUGGLE**

There is an inherent culture of acceptance in academia of long work hours. In fact, 40% of academics report working more than 50 hours a week.³ This is a fault with the system. Presenteeism is a common trait observed in academia, where people work long hours due to anxiety/stress, but are not being efficient in these long hours. Tip: aim to be efficient inside normal working hours then focus on “you” time.

ARE THOSE AROUND YOU STRUGGLING? HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>symptom</th>
<th>possible warning sign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>increased drinking</td>
<td>7 in 10 of PhD students experience impostor syndrome throughout their careers⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increased eating</td>
<td>55% of PhD students are concerned about work-life balance⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

SOME WAYS TO HELP MANAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**seek medical advice**

It’s not always possible, but if you feel you can approach your supervisor about your mental health concerns with them, other options include medical help or taking time out.

**talk to your supervisor**

It’s highly likely that people around you have also experienced the impostor syndrome or PhD burn-out, if you feel alone. Remember, people in the same situation may have some useful coping strategies.

**take some time out**

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, try to break down your research into manageable bits. It may help to talk to your supervisor, a good tip is to keep a list of what you finished in a day, before looking at other tasks like emails.

**focus on you**

It is not always possible, but if you feel you can approach your supervisor about your mental health concerns with them, other options include medical help or taking time out.

**request counselling**

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**create manageable chunks**

If anything is overwhelming, try to break down your research into manageable bits. It may be helpful to discuss your work with others in your team or to discuss your work with your supervisor.

**read literature**

There are a large amount of online resources available to help manage mental health and wellbeing. For example, the charity Mind have a range of videos and talks to help manage stress.¹⁹

**talk to your peers / postdocs**

It’s highly likely that people around you have also experienced the impostor syndrome or PhD burn-out, if you feel alone. Remember, people in the same situation may have some useful coping strategies.

**joking about suicide**

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**looking dishevelled**

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**self-harming? suicidal thoughts?**

Call Samaritans now on 116-123 or email jo@samaritans.org

#TIMETOTALK
#RSCPOSTER

*although I did survive a PhD

A poster by Dr Zoe Ayres (not a medical professional). Free to distribute.