

Videoconferences more exhausting when participants don't feel group belonging

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Videoconferences may be less exhausting if participants feel some sense

of group belonging, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

As remote work and the use of videoconferences have dramatically increased during the coronavirus pandemic, more people are fatigued from [meeting](#) through computer screens instead of in person. In this study, 55 employees in various fields in the United States were surveyed about their feelings about videoconferences. The researchers thought longer meetings and being on video would cause the most fatigue, but their findings surprised them, said lead researcher Andrew Bennett, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Old Dominion University.

"We expected that aspects of being on video would be related to fatigue, such as watching everyone's faces closely on a screen or even watching yourself, but we didn't find this to be true in our study. Longer meetings also didn't impact fatigue," Bennett said. "However, the importance of feeling a sense of belonging or connection with the group really minimized fatigue after a [videoconference](#)."

Bennett's team decided to study videoconference fatigue, or "Zoom fatigue," because they all felt exhausted after their first videoconferences together when they began working remotely during the early days of the pandemic. The research was published online in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

The study participants received nine hourly surveys every day for five consecutive working days last year. Out of the surveys sent, participants completed more than 1,700 surveys and participated in an average of five to six videoconferences during the week. The majority of participants were male (58%) and white (73%) with an average age of 33.

One participant said videoconferences "can be taxing on the mind and

spirit," while another was "tired of being in them" and "extra tired after being in them." Only 7% of the participants didn't report any signs of videoconference fatigue.

Watching oneself on a webcam or turning the webcam off had no statistically significant impacts on post-meeting fatigue, the study found. Participants reported conflicting feelings about using the [webcam](#), with some saying it was exhausting always to be staring at the screen while others felt it was impersonal when participants switched off their webcams.

"Everyone just wants to get in and get out, log in and log off," one participant reported. "There's very little chatter before and after the meeting like there would be in real life."

That chatter may help build a sense of group belonging, which had a marked effect in reducing videoconference fatigue, the researchers said. There also appeared to be a [sweet spot](#) in the early afternoon when videoconferences caused less fatigue than at other times of the day.

Based on their findings, the researchers made some recommendations to help reduce videoconference [fatigue](#):

Hold videoconferences in the early afternoon.

Enhance perceptions of group belongingness, including time for [small talk](#) before or after the meeting or breakout rooms where people could talk about their interests (sports, movies, etc.).

Establish basic meeting rules, such as whether to keep webcams on and refraining from doing other work.

Take breaks by looking away from the screen, standing up and walking

around.

"We know videoconferences are helpful," Bennett said. "We get more emotional and nonverbal information from them, but that doesn't mean everything needs to be done in a videoconference. Sometimes a phone call or email is more effective and efficient."

More information: "Videoconference Fatigue? Exploring Changes in Fatigue after Videoconference Meetings During COVID-19," by Andrew A. Bennett, PhD, Emily D. Campion, PhD, Sheila K. Keener, PhD, Old Dominion University; and Kathleen R. Keeler, PhD, Ohio State University; Journal of Applied Psychology, published online April 19, 2021. [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000906](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000906)

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