

Re-frigerate!

Cool Out the Burnout.

“I just started medical school and I’m already ready to retire.”

If you’re a first- or second-year medical student at a small and prestigious medical school situated off the coast of Maine, this sentiment might feel all too familiar. It was only day 39 of my medical education there and I had felt any and every emotion I could’ve possibly experienced since starting medical school: *excitement, anxiety, calmness, fear, triumph, horror, happiness*, and the list goes on. The journey to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a healer had just barely begun and the roller coaster ride had already swung up and down so many times that I was ready to hurl. I had logged more daily hours in the library at that point than I did playing *Fortnite* during my summer vacation in the months before medical school (and that’s many, many hours). I even pushed myself to make the mistake of power napping in the silent zone of the library to avoid losing “precious” study time during travel to and from the library. Needless to say, it was quite embarrassing to wake up to a text saying, “Dude, you were snoring so loudly. Everyone was laughing.” After receiving that first *Needs Improvement* on my Readiness Assurance Test (RAT), I felt my stomach turn and knot up. My immediate reaction was to ramp up my study hours with time I didn’t have. Not only was I miserable but adding more study hours didn’t improve my academic performance anyways.

Upon a suggestion from my friend who noticed me bent out of shape from the overwhelming mountain that was medical school, I took a moment to step back and reevaluate my approach to my new life as a medical student. During my reflection, I remembered a point made during one of the clinical practice conference (CPC) sessions. *Self-care*. I had lost the balance between my mind, body, and spirit that I had spent the past few years practicing. Subconsciously, I had fallen into a diet characterized by frequent Taco Bell trips and constant microwaveable meals. The most physical activity I participated in came from walking to and from class and my next study spot. I didn’t even remember what “hanging out” meant. What I needed was to **refrigerate**.

Leaving food in warm, perishable air for a prolonged time allows bacteria to grow and putrefy it. To avoid this, we refrigerate our food in a cool, preserving environment. Similarly, by keeping myself in a constant state of apprehension and anxiety, I allowed misery and bitterness to grow in my mind. I needed to refrigerate myself in an enjoyable environment where I could preserve my emotional sanity and rebuild balance back into my life. I needed to rediscover the enjoyment I felt for medicine while I was striving to be admitted into medical school. I started with participating in exciting activities like pick-up volleyball every Thursday and pick-up basketball every Friday (because ball is life). I made efforts to socialize with my peers with low-key movie nights or exploring new local food joints with my fellow foodies. I even started taking brisk walks outdoors in between my review sessions or worked in a quick lifting session after

class to relieve any tension that materialized in my body. My routine had changed dramatically, and my medical experience improved remarkably.

Since I've made these changes, my medical school experience has become actually enjoyable. A fresh mind gives me a new appreciation for the miracle of the human body. I transitioned from seeing the brachial plexus and immediately feeling like "oh my Lord, how do I memorize this?" to "holy cannoli, it's so amazing that every human body, regardless of their external appearance, can consistently develop this incredible network of nerves that allows us to move and feel our arms!"

Burnout syndrome is a very real and relatable experience for anyone who is under constant stress (like being a medical student or professional). It is debilitating not only for the individual, but for their peers, institution, and patients (in the case of a medical professional). As exhaustion from physical, mental, and emotional fatigue settles in, the process of burnout has already crept forward. Soon, that exhaustion will lead to cynicism towards their passions and dreams. The process transforms from an exciting challenge to an annoying obstacle. Eventually, they lose their drive and reach the stage of inefficacy. Their lack of motivation creates the perception of incompetence and lack of achievement. For anyone who has experienced symptoms of burnout or has concerns about falling into a state of burnout, I hope you can find your version of self-care, whatever it may be, to remedy or prevent burnout. Explore and search for the activities that you enjoy. Come up with a schedule or routine that incorporates doing these activities in your week without sacrificing the time you need to study. Then, finally, set it in motion and refrigerate.