



Imposter Syndrome

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Imposter Syndrome is a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persists despite evidence of success.¹

What is imposter syndrome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chronic self-doubt and sense of fraudulence that overrides feelings of success or external proof of competence.¹ ● Attribution of success disproportionately to luck, timing, external conditions, or support from others, while retaining full responsibility for perceived failures.¹
Who is likely to have imposter syndrome? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perfectionists, high achievers at increased risk.² ● Highly correlated with linking self-worth to performance or achievement.² ● More common among those lacking “like” role models of success (i.e., women, minorities).^{2,3} ● Common even among highly accomplished individuals when making transitional advancements in their careers or acting in high visibility roles.¹
What contributes to imposter syndrome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negativity bias: We tend to notice things we don't do well. We may be habituated, and therefore insensitive, to noticing our fluency and success. ● Reality distortions: Society visibly celebrates success and achievement, which may set unrealistic performance expectations. Meritocracy favors successful outcomes over process, effort, progress, or learning. ● Incomplete perspective: There is often tremendous grit, failure, and struggle “below the surface” of success that may not be visible. ● “Not like me”: Underrepresented practitioners in medicine may find themselves absent similar, accessible role models of success.³
How does imposter syndrome limit us?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By celebrating only visible, established assumptions around success, we may not honor novice perspectives that may challenge assumptions or advance understanding.⁴ ● We may perpetuate anxiety and self-doubt, limiting what we can accomplish if we had the confidence to take risks. ● By downplaying their successes, those with imposter syndrome may sabotage their own career.²
How to undo imposter syndrome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek evidence of success. If this proves challenging, ask others to point out observed competence. ● Encourage self-compassion. Exercise the same generosity, patience, and understanding for ourselves that we extend to others.¹ ● Reframe anxiety as activation. Relabeling the physical sensations of heightened alertness can build confidence and vigilance, rather than increasing stress and pressure. ● Encourage a culture of respect over a culture of reverence. Debunk the infallibility myth: no one ever always knew something. ● As a leader, be accessible, authentic, vulnerable role model of success. Learners should be encouraged to ask about the challenges and failures their mentors have experienced. ● Focus not just on outcome, but on the process. Emphasize how much is being learned, not just how skills are being performed.⁴ Reframe “failure” as a learning opportunity.¹ Support learning over performance orientation or growth over fixed mindset.⁵

References

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