

Make virtual meetings less draining

One expert shares ways to make virtual chats far less fatiguing.

By VERENA MARIA SCHURR

YOU are not alone if you're exhausted after a full day of attending video conferences on Zoom or Skype, as they sometimes feel more overwhelming than meeting the pre-pandemic way – face to face.

Sabine Appelhagen is an expert in virtual communication and has a few useful tips and tools to help in overcoming video conference fatigue.

Why are video conferences often so exhausting?

Appelhagen: In a nutshell, a well-done video conference doesn't fatigue you. By well done I mean good sound quality, sufficient light and participants having basic netiquette.

There are simply certain no-gos – for example, having a shaky camera because you're walking around or not turning off your microphone when someone else is talking.

It makes for restlessness and puts excessive strain on our sensory organs.

What can we do to stave off fatigue?

First of all, be considerate – and invest money in a good setup for video conferencing at home.

With poor image, sound and network that is constantly disconnecting or slowing down, your brain must go into higher gear to give meaning to the images and

word fragments it's receiving, which of course means expending much more energy.

Therefore, it's best to minimise distractions and outside influences that can compete for your attention.

When possible, close the door and hang up an "on air" sign, for example. Of course, if you're also trying to quickly write an

email on the side, you'll also find it difficult and tiring to try to get back on track with what's going on.

It's also important to have a good meeting manager, because we are constantly interrupting each other.

Usually we can tell if someone wants to speak with gestures like coughing or

raising the eyebrows, which doesn't work in virtual meetings and usually means two people will start talking at the same time.

That's very exhausting over a long period of time when there are no clear rules for such meetings.

What rules should be in place?

I recommend not sitting too close to the camera so that your body language can also come across.

You can also use a small sign that's the virtual equivalent of raising your hand and a discussion leader can note down the order in which you speak.

Alternatively, someone who wants to add something to the discussion can post an agreed-upon icon or write their name to signal they would like to say something.

A meeting leader should provide a clear structure and guide participants through the phases of the meeting.

What are some examples of such meeting structures?

One possibility would be to break up the meetings into individual topics and short time blocks of at most 30 minutes, with pauses lasting 10 to 15 minutes built in between the blocks.

Before the meeting, the tasks can be split up, and various participants can introduce different topics.

Or, the meeting could be broken up into smaller groups, which could then gather and discuss their results at a larger plenary session.

Another tip: Once in a while include a flash round where everyone quickly, and in one sentence, can say their position or opinion. – dpa

During a meeting, it's best to minimise distractions that can compete for your

