

A cognitive-behavioral approach to well-being during Step 1. Warning, as always, CBT is very logical, and thus the recommendations are kind of obvious. Nevertheless...

Behavioral:

The basic idea here is that if you only study, you will more quickly reach the point of diminishing returns on your learning/integration process. And thus, thoughtfully, intentionally breaking up your studying with other activities is highly recommended, for both your learning and your wellness.

- **Exercise** remains the intervention with the most consistent support as an anti-depressant, anxiolytic, and energy and focus maintainer.
 - If exercise does not have a *regular* spot in your Step study schedule, *get it in there!*
- **Social connection.** Worth noting, social connection stood out in the WE-MD study of LCOM medical students as a particularly important stress inoculant.
 - Schedule time to reach out to your people. Let them know you might not be your best self, and that you might be a little brief.
 - Classmates can be anxiety amplifiers, but you all are rational beings. You could have a conversation where *you agreed* only to talk about music, food, poetry, sports, whatever. You get the idea. This can be done, connecting without mutual fretting.
 - Or get together, sit quietly, and share food. The sharing of food is a primal, and powerful way of connecting (even if it is chips from the vending machine, which some of us might greatly enjoy).
- Take intentional time for **other activities** that you enjoy or care about that take you away from Studying. This varies person to person, obviously. Scheduled days/afternoons off for outdoor or inward adventures are highly recommended.
- Wind down. Stop studying, wind down, and go to bed at a reasonable hour. You'll reach the point of diminishing returns if you deprive yourself of this.

Cognitive:

- Cultivate awareness of your Step 1 narratives. Are they helpful, inspiring, propelling you forward? If so, great! Keep that going. I've heard students say versions of:
 - I like learning things, and that's what Step 1 studying is. This is an amazing opportunity to focus only on learning.
 - I like learning things while wearing my pajamas. Voila.
 - Successful Step 1 studying is just a series of moments, moments of learning cool things, and that is not so terrible.
 - The universe is 13 billion years old. This is a tiny, tiny thing. I will barely remember this time in 10 years.
 - If I struggle, that's ok. It's supposed to be a struggle. I took on a difficult task ON PURPOSE, and that is growth producing no matter what happens.
- If your narratives are predominantly negative, and this is not helpful to you, reach out to someone (a therapist, a support person, someone sensible) and ask for help. We all go there sometimes.

- Cognitive reframing simply refers to: noticing and tracking unhelpful thoughts, and intentionally and systematically challenging them with more helpful/rational thoughts. It is sometimes very useful to get support – professional and otherwise -- for this process.

Emotional:

Mindfulness of emotion is the move, and what goes with that is awareness and acceptance of your emotional vicissitudes. Allowing your emotions to come and go, without being reactive to them, to allow them come along for the ride, and always returning to the present moment. Not surprisingly, a meditation practice is a great way to cultivate this mindset.

- The Waking Up app has a great introductory meditation course. The sessions are only 10 minutes long at most. It's free for 30 days, so what a great time to try it out.

From: [Rosen, Lee](#)
Subject: Some notes on your wellbeing and progress around Step 1
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Hello M2s (so very soon to be M3s)!

Thanks to some of your student leaders, it has come to my attention that there is a little extra stress building in your class. That is not shocking, as Step 1 season usually brings about this sort of report. Therefore, I want to remind you about some the resources for both your academic and psychological wellbeing.

As always, Dr. Moynihan, the Deans for Students, and I are completely available to you for individual consultation about your Step 1 progress and/or your stress and coping.

- [Here](#) are Dr. Moynihan's drop-in sign ups, and here are [mine](#). If you can't find a time that works for you or you're hoping to see us sooner than the sign-up allows, please just reach out to us and we'll find another time for you.
- Our Deans for Students (Dr. George, Dr. DeAngelis, Dr. Kulaga, and Dr. McNamara) are amazing and ever helpful, and their drop-in sign-ups are [here](#)
- [The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) is another fabulous resource here and a great place to visit, study, or unwind. [Dr. Eileen CichoskiKelly](#) is the Academic Excellence Liaison at the ODEI and another great resource for Step support and guidance.
- Don't hesitate to reach out to your Step-sib for emotional support. That's what they are there for, and they've been through it all and come out the other side, living proof that it can be done.
- Students from the [The Wellness Committee](#) are also there for you. They're available for support, and note that they'll be hosting tea-and-snack sessions periodically during the dedicated study period.

Delaying Step 1, if necessary. I understand that students that students also want to know what happens if they are not ready to pass Step 1 by the end of the dedicated study period. Here is LCOM's [policy](#) regarding the USMLE exams. You will see that students may request to delay their Step 1 exam and take the exam at the beginning of the 4th year. The procedures for this are spelled out in the policy. That said, the dedicated Step 1 study period remains an excellent opportunity to take the exam, and we will do everything we can to support you completing the exam before clerkship begins. Any of us (me, Dr. Moynihan, and the Deans for Students) are glad to answer any questions about the potential for a step 1 delay and counsel you about your timetable and the future implications of this maneuver.

If you've made it this far in this email, nicely done! You've got some email stamina. You might, therefore, have the wherewithal to read a little summary of cognitive-behavioral tips for maintaining your well-being during step 1. This I have attached.

And just in case, our mental health resources one more time:

- UVM's Counseling and Psychiatric Services ([CAPS](#)). Available to all UVM students, for free, **regardless of which insurance you have.**

- [WellConnect](#). *Wherever* you are (i.e., VT, CT, on vacation or an away rotation), as an LCOM student, you have access to free online, phone, and in-person counselling sessions with a licensed mental health professional. The easiest way to access services is to call WellConnect at 866-640-4777 (code: UVMCOM).
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy from the training clinic ([Vermont Psychological Services](#)) in the UVM psychology department (reach out to Dr. Rosen or call them directly). There is a long (6-8 month) waitlist right now, but get on there if you think you'd like some CBT down the road. Time goes by fast.
- Referrals to local mental health providers in CT (reach out to [Dr. Kulaga](#)) or community providers in VT (reach out to [Dr. Rosen](#) or your Wellness Committee reps).
- Referrals for psychiatric care (reach out to [CAPS](#), [Dr. Rosen](#), [Dr. Kulaga](#), or the [Wellness Committee](#)).

Take care everyone,
Lee

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