

Imposter Syndrome In Medicine And How To Overcome It

Kristin Yates DO FACOG

A dark blue diagonal graphic that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the slide.

What is Imposter Syndrome?

“A collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success. **'Imposters'** suffer from chronic self-doubt and a sense of intellectual fraudulence that override any feelings of success or external proof of their competence”

“Everyone here is smarter than me.”
“I got here by mistake”
“I don’t belong here and soon everyone is going to figure that out”

What is Imposter Syndrome?

Originally defined in 1978 by clinical psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes

They defined it as “the persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills.”

70% of people experience imposter syndrome from time to time. For some it can be devastating (leading to stress, overwhelm, anxiety, depression and burnout)

It happened to me...

- In medical school
 - They sent me the wrong letter
 - I have to work harder than everybody else
- In residency
 - They meant to accept someone else
 - I am never going to be able to learn everything I need to.
 - Someone is going to call on me and I won't know the answer and everyone will know I'm a fraud.
- As an attending
 - I don't belong here caring for patients all alone.
 - I would not have been able to handle "insert challenging medical situation" like my colleague did.
 - I am going to do something wrong and everyone will finally know that I'm not smart enough

Who is at risk for Imposter Syndrome?

- * Perfectionists
- * People with a fixed mindset
- * People with a fear of failure
- * People who feel they differ from their peers (in age, gender, ethnicity...)
- * People pleasers

Can you relate to any of these?

What does Imposter Syndrome Sound Like?

" I don't belong here"

" I got here by mistake"

" I'm not smart enough and soon everyone will figure that out"

" Everyone here is smarter/better than me"

" I have to be perfect or everyone will find out I don't belong here"

" This is hard for me so I know I shouldn't be here"

Why do high achieving people struggle so much with imposter syndrome?

- We have many of the risk factors
- We are constantly surrounded by smart people and compare ourselves to them
- We are never taught about what Imposter Syndrome is
- We hesitate to talk about our insecurities with others
- We may be the only person working among others who seem to have an overabundance of confidence

For women specifically:

- We are less likely to accurately assess our skills
- A Swedish study found that women scientists had to produce 2.5x more research to receive the same competence scores as men.
- Psychology professors were given credentials of fictitious candidates for professorship, “Brian” was preferred 2:1 over “Karen” despite identical credentials.

What Is The Result Of Imposter Syndrome?

- Anxiety that we won't meet our expectations or what we think others expect from us
- Worry that others will find out that we really don't belong where we are
- Feeling small due to lack of confidence in our true abilities
- Inability to feel proud of our many accomplishments
- Fear of taking on new responsibilities because we may fail
- Feeling unqualified to apply for jobs that we want

All of which lead to you feeling stuck, unhappy, unfulfilled and not reaching your true potential.

What's The Alternative?

- Confidence in who we are and what we are capable of
- Power in our position as a leader
- Satisfaction with your skills and a passion to cultivate new ones
- Clarity about our goals and what we want in the future
- Security in our authenticity.

What if this is how you felt? Take a moment to really imagine what it would be like for you to feel like this.

This is possible for you.

Previously Touted Advice

- Talk about it
- Acknowledge your achievements
- Be open to compliments

**I encourage all of these,
but it's not enough.**

The Secret To Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Our thoughts create our feelings.

Maybe you knew that. I did not.

I thought that the circumstances in my life were responsible for my feelings.

I was on call so I felt anxious.

What I eventually realized was that it wasn't the circumstance (being on call) that made me anxious.

It was the thoughts I was having about being on call ("I don't know what I'm doing and everyone is going to find out") that made me anxious.

Once I really understood that, ***it changed everything.***

So What Can You Do?

There are thoughts that are causing you to feel like an imposter. Once you identify these thoughts, you have the power to change them. Once you change these thoughts to empowering ones, your life will change forever.

I know this because that's exactly what happened for me.

But... You have to commit to yourself. Commit to your goals. Commit to working on this every single day.

The 3 Rs

1 | Recognize

The thought that is creating the feeling that you are an imposter. **"You don't know how to do that surgery and everyone is going to figure it out soon enough."**

Pay attention to the thoughts that you have when you are feeling under-qualified and like an imposter. As soon as you are able to, write them down. All of them. Don't censor yourself.

2 | Review

The thoughts and identify if they are even true. Write down a true statement to take its place. **"I actually do know how to do that surgery and I have done it several times"**

Analyze the thoughts. Can you think of any evidence in your life that makes them not true? I suspect you will find that the things you wrote down are not the absolute truth.

3 | Replace

The new statement with the thought that was causing you to feel like an imposter. This will need to be done over and over again until the new (true) thought happens automatically.

Pick a new thought that is **true and positive**. From now on, whenever you find yourself thinking that old thought, replace it with the new thought until the new one is automatic.

Cheat Sheet

3 Rs	Your thoughts
<p>Recognize: Pay attention to the thoughts that you have when you are feeling under-qualified and like an imposter. As soon as you are able to, write them down. All of them. Don't censor yourself.</p>	
<p>Review: Analyze the thoughts. Can you think of any evidence in your life that makes them not true? I suspect you will find that the things you wrote down are not the absolute truth.</p>	
<p>Replace: Pick a new thought that is true and positive. From now on, whenever you find yourself thinking that old thought, replace it with the new thought until the new one is automatic.</p>	

Picking a new thought

EMOTION FOCUSED

How do you want to feel at work? With your kids/spouse? About yourself? Do you want to feel confident? Happy? Satisfied? What do you need to think/believe in order to feel that way?

GOAL FOCUSED

What is your goal? Where do you want to be 5 years from now? What do you need think think about yourself in order to achieve that goal?

HABIT FOCUSED

What habits do you want to break? Which ones do you want to develop in order to achieve your goals? What types of thoughts do you need to have in order to create those habits?

Take Home Points

- You are where you are because of hard work and dedication. You belong here.
- You don't have to believe the thoughts that you have.
- Changing your thoughts takes time and effort, but it has the ability to change your entire life for the better. It's worth it.
- You get to believe anything you want. Choose wisely
- Start today.

A glowing lightbulb sits on a wooden surface, casting a warm, golden light. The wood grain is visible, and the overall atmosphere is cozy and inspiring.

**You
Belong
Here**

What To Do Next

- Commit to this process
- Actively think your new positive thoughts every day.
- Don't give up on yourself. When the old thought pops into your mind, just brush it to the side, no judgement. It's part of the process
- Email me or schedule a call with me if you need help getting started or if you get stuck
- Listen to my Podcast "Imposter to Unstoppable" to hear about other women's struggles with Imposter Syndrome and what helped them
- Join my [Facebook Group](#)
- Self-coaching course:
<https://self-coaching-mastery.mykajabi.com/>