

Hone these good habits as an M1—it'll pay off

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The habits that medical students form early in medical school can carry them through their entire careers. What do those tendencies look like?

Lawrence Lash, PhD, is a professor of pharmacology at Wayne State University School of Medicine. In addition to working with medical students extensively in their preclinical training, he is co-author of a chapter in the AMA's *Facilitating Effective Transitions Along the Medical Education Continuum* handbook that details how students can successfully start medical school. Download the handbook now.

As M1s continue to adjust to medical school at the midway point of their first year, Lash offered a few key habits that medical students can hone.

Manage time effectively

It is said time and time again: You can't cram for medical school. Falling behind early in medical school— with each lesson building on the previous one—can be a very difficult hole to climb out of. One key to staying on track is managing your time effectively.

Lash said Wayne State recommends students spend around 24 hours studying each week. Dividing that time effectively can lead to early medical school success.

“We give students a suggested schedule, and I think trying to stick to that schedule as much as possible helps,” Lash said. “the idea behind that schedule is it gives direction. If one falls behind, there's just too much material to catch up. I recommend they prioritize some resources too, but it's really important to keep up with the recorded lectures, which are sort of their foundation resources.”

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Prioritize process

Getting it right is important, but early on in medical school, that's not always easy. How you get to your answer is also very important.

"We are talking about a group of strong students who have had a history of excelling, but medical school is very difficult," Lash said.

"We have these problem-based learning sessions, and we tell the students that it's not about getting the diagnosis right or getting the right answer. It's about the process," he noted. "If you follow and develop a good process of learning of reinforcing and reviewing that, the grades will come along with it."

Be proactive

If you don't understand a concept or lesson, relying on your own devices to get it down isn't always possible with highly technical material. Lash said students need to ask questions of peers and faculty.

"When you have areas to work on, don't be afraid to talk to faculty and ask for assistance," Lash said. "A lot of medical students are afraid to do that, particularly in the early years."

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Protect your down time

In pre-clinical training, Wayne State offers breaks between course blocks. Some students want to get resources and study before classes. Lash, however, encourages them to get away from study while they can. In addition, he advocates for building breaks into your study schedule.

"You can't be on 100% of the time," he said. "It's important to have a diversion now and then. Being deliberate about [scheduling breaks] is important because when one is so busy, you kind of have to plan the diversions as well as all the things that you have to accomplish."

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