

Work Life Balance for Health & Well Being

We all have a fuel tank with limited fuel: Every one of us has a fixed amount of energy to use each day. How we distribute this energy between the main components of our life (eg work, rest, family and leisure) influences our work-life balance. If we put too much energy into work, too little energy into rest, family and leisure, and if we do it for too long, our well-being will suffer. Our health suffers, and our family and relationships suffer. We may be on the road to ***Burnout!***

Balance involves giving appropriate amounts of attention/ time/energy to the important aspects of our life and often this needs to be flexible in order to deal with life's natural challenges. Sometimes we need to work a bit harder, and sometimes rest a bit harder.

Individual differences: Because we are all different, we will also have different balance needs and we discover this with experience and self reflection.

Balance requires self management: Because life challenges, work load, other people and our own standards can pull us away from balance we require effective self and people management skills to build and maintain balance including: Self awareness, (what's needed); Time management (managing the load); Goal setting (what needs to be different); Problem solving (removing the obstacles); Stress management (managing pressure) and Assertiveness & saying no (managing others).

Components of Balance

- Work - paid, voluntary, home duties, study
- Personal Development – Identity, self esteem, learning & stimulation
- Social - family, friends, groups, teams
- Spiritual - values, beliefs, religion, heart and mind
- Heart and Mind – managing emotions and thinking
- Physical - exercise, sport, activity, diet, health
- Relaxation - leisure, rest

Benefits of Balance: A lifestyle that balances these activities will increase our personal health and well-being via the following avenues:

- Reduces stress and prevents burnout
- Stimulates the immune system and promotes recovery from illness
- Increases sense of happiness and well-being
- Provides perspective
- Increases physical health, energy and motivation
- Increases self esteem, self development, productivity and flexibility
- Provides social support and connectedness

Recognising Imbalance: signs of imbalance include the following and maybe either a result of being off balance or an underlying cause of imbalance: decreased energy, motivation, flexibility; increased stress, frustration, worry; withdrawing from others; getting overly involved in work; negative attitude towards work, people or self; changes in general health and performance; lifestyle habits - increased smoking, drugs, caffeine, fast foods and reduced activity. Over time, these reactions can impact on the health of our heart and immune system leading to an increased risk of burnout and lifestyle diseases (ie heart disease, obesity, ulcers, diabetes, and some cancers).

Balance is often blocked by the following, all of which can be managed with effort and assistance:

- Lack of motivation
- Running out of Time & Energy
- The load on our plate (& responsibilities)
- Lacking assertive time management skills
- High levels of stress or illness
- Thinking negativity -eg 'I can't say no'
- Unaware that there is imbalance - can't see it
- Life happens - unexpected critical events

Tips for Balance

Getting Balanced

- Make balance a priority and commit to it - make it a change that you want!
- Make time to reflect on your life and balance needs
- Make note of where your energy is going (actual balance) and decide on how you would like your life to be (ideal balance)
- Make plans to achieve balance by setting reasonable goals and removing obstacles
- Start small by adding enjoyable activities back into your day or week and reward yourself for gains made
- Stay focused and motivated by getting others involved in your attempts to balance and by making dates, reminders and other changes to your routine that support your plans.

Tips for Work (paid, voluntary, home duties, study)

- Know your role and responsibilities - expectations
- Accept your limits (time, energy, skills) as a natural part of working life
- Take proper breaks to relax or energise
- Manage your workload by prioritising, and when appropriate, by seeking assistance or delegating
- Slow down – your inbox will never be empty
- Talk to your colleagues - shared problem solving brings other options and support
- Seek good advice and 'perspective' by asking helpful questions such as - 'what is the best step to take here?'
- Learn to say no to things that are not 'essential'
- Cultivate a sense of humour, creativity and fun at work (and use appropriately – Politically correct)
- Think ahead and set achievable goals
- Maintain your interest and curiosity in your work and others; stay fresh by looking towards what could be learnt or done differently
- Focus on the positive aspects of your work & personal Life. Record and remember these often.
- Learn to accept what you cannot change; take positive steps to change what you can.

Heart & Mind

- Accept that you will experience a full range of emotion and learn how to express this appropriately
- Get to know your personal signs of stress
- Prevent stress from creeping up - develop a personal daily/weekly plan/habit to management stress.
- Learn how to use breathing and other techniques to relax (bath, massage, read, music, hobbies)
- Control negative thinking (worry) by rationally reviewing each situation. Ask yourself, 'what would I be telling a friend in this situation to help them?'
- Take one situation at a time – sit down and problems solve the best approach and plan positive and assertive approaches to interpersonal stressors
- Be reasonable: Practice what you preach; Take good advice; Check if your attitude is helping or hindering you: Look at the glass half full versus half empty
- Nurture positivity; read positive literature, share something positive, watch positive movies

Tips for Physical Well-being

- Regular activity & exercise (walk; swim; ride; sports) improve general and heart health, increases energy and concentration
- A healthy, balanced diet provides excellent stress buffering. The Heart Foundation recommends following the Kellogg's cereal box Healthy eating Pyramid!
- Reduce your intake of caffeine; nicotine; alcohol; drugs
- See your GP, dietician, exercise physiologist, etc

Tips for Relaxation - (leisure, rest)

- Make a list of pleasant activities and do more of them - eg movies, reading, music, massage, time with pets
- Make time for rest and ensure a healthy sleep pattern
- Try to reduce intensity - don't book yourself full

Tips for your Social Self

- Spend time with children, family, friends and people you like and get involved with social activities regularly
- Add more fun and play to your life - games and parties
- Build a support network in your friends and family for talking and sharing regularly- reduce isolation

Personal Development (identity, self esteem, learning)

- Make time for yourself to reflect on your achievements, strengths, goals etc
- Take up a new hobby or interest
- Try a short course at Uni or TAFE
- Talk about people, the world and your thoughts on life
- Listen to what others have to say

Tips for your Spiritual Side

- Take time to clarify and discuss your values, beliefs and the meaning of life!
- Discover more of you: try new/different things; try meditation, church, interest groups, adventures, etc
- Make efforts to see and develop your personal 'bigger picture' of life