

## Work-life Balance

Tips to reclaim control when your work life and personal life are out of balance, your stress level is likely to soar. Use these practical strategies to restore harmony.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

(<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/work-life-balance/WL00056>)

There was a time when the boundaries between work and home were fairly clear. Today, however, work is likely to invade your personal life — and maintaining work-life balance is no simple task. Still, work-life balance isn't out of reach. Start by evaluating your relationship to work. Then apply specific strategies to help you strike a healthier balance.

### Married to your work? Consider the cost

It can be tempting to rack up hours at work, especially if you're trying to earn a promotion or manage an ever-increasing workload. Sometimes overtime may even be required. If you're spending most of your time working, though, your home life will take a hit. Consider the consequences of poor work-life balance:

- **Fatigue.** When you're tired, your ability to work productively and think clearly may suffer — which could take a toll on your professional reputation or lead to dangerous or costly mistakes.
- **Lost time with friends and loved ones.** If you're working too much, you may miss important family events or milestones. This can leave you feeling left out and may harm relationships with your loved ones. It's also difficult to nurture friendships if you're always working.
- **Increased expectations.** If you regularly work extra hours, you may be given more responsibility. This may lead to only more concerns and challenges.

### Strike a better work-life balance

As long as you're working, juggling the demands of career and personal life will probably be an ongoing challenge. Use these ideas to help you find the work-life balance that's best for you:

- **Track your time.** Track everything you do for one week, including work-related and personal activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy or can't handle — or share your concerns and possible solutions with your employer or others.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Ask your employer about flex hours, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting or other

scheduling flexibility. The more control you have over your hours, the less stressed you're likely to be.

- **Learn to say no.** Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to manage the class play, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit doing the things you do only out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll make more room in your life for the activities that are meaningful to you and bring you joy.
- **Leave work at work.** With the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there may be no boundary between work and home — unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When you're with your family, for instance, turn off your cell phone and put away your laptop computer.
- **Manage your time.** Organize household tasks efficiently, such as running errands in batches or doing a load of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off. Put family events on a weekly family calendar and keep a daily to-do list. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if necessary.
- **Bolster your support system.** At work, join forces with co-workers who can cover for you — and vice versa — when family conflicts arise. At home, enlist trusted friends and loved ones to pitch in with child care or household responsibilities when you need to work overtime or travel.
- **Nurture yourself.** Eat healthy foods, include physical activity in your daily routine and get enough sleep. Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as practicing yoga or reading. Better yet, discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends — such as hiking, dancing or taking cooking classes.

## **Know when to seek professional help**

Everyone needs help from time to time. If your life feels too chaotic to manage and you're spinning your wheels worrying about it, talk with a professional — such as a counselor or other mental health professional. If your employer offers an employee assistance program (EAP), take advantage of available services.

Remember, striking a healthy work-life balance isn't a one-shot deal. Creating work-life balance is a continuous process as your family, interests and work life change. Periodically examine your priorities — and make changes, if necessary — to make sure you're keeping on track.