

Do you feel like you have no control in your life?

Do you feel bad for spending time in one area of your life versus another?

Do you run out of energy to spend on important areas of your life?



You may need to work on your work-life balance.

In our lives, we have all kinds of priorities, obligations, relationships, interests, and activities that compete for our time. We have the things that we really must do, like going to school, going to work, caring for others, and paying bills. We also have things that we enjoy and make us happy, like spending time with family and friends, working on a hobby, or playing on a team.

Balance is how we do the things we have to do and the things we want to do ... without changing the number of hours in the day.

Why does balance matter?

Do you generally feel well and capable when you feel overwhelmed? Most of us would say that the opposite is true. And this stress can be harmful. It can:

- Add to poor mental health and make it difficult to concentrate, make decisions, feel confident in our abilities, and handle problems or difficulties
- Negatively affect our relationships
- Negatively affect the way we act—we may avoid or lash out at loved ones, use alcohol or other drugs to cope with difficult feelings, or avoid stressful situations
- Negatively affect the way we work at school or at our jobs
- Contribute to a mental illness and add to difficult feelings we're experiencing
- Contribute to (or even cause) many physical health problems

what does balance look like?

Balance means that we can fully engage in what we need or want to do without that nagging guilt or worry that we should be doing something else. And it means really understanding our own boundaries and needs so that we have the freedom to pursue all the various roles and identities we have or want to have in life. Finding balance leads to greater life satisfaction and well-being—which improves your ability to find balance in the future.

Balance is individual. For example, some people need a lot of down time to relax, while others like to be busy much of the time. Some people like being more connected, while others appreciate more time on their own.

more than one way to balance ...

Some people may prefer ...

- A fixed work schedule, such as leaving work at a set time to avoid staying later than you intended
- Turning off mobile devices and not checking work emails after a set time
- Tackling school assignments alone in a quiet space

While others may prefer ...

- A flexible work schedule—for example, working later when you have extra time and then working shorter days to balance the difference over time
- Checking mobile devices and emails as messages come up
- Working with friends at a coffee shop to prepare for a school assignment

A big part of balance is deciding what tasks or activities are priorities and what tasks or activities aren't important or can wait. Of course, there are things that we really must do—our bosses, teachers, and professors expect us to complete work on time, and we need to eat and maintain a home to stay healthy, and we may provide care for others. The problem is that we often spend so much time on things we think that we must do that we neglect the things that make us feel happy and well.



So, how do you know if you've found balance? Ask yourself two questions:

1. When I've taken care of everything I have to do, do I have the time and energy to enjoy the things I want to do?
2. Can I get absorbed in something without worrying about another task or feeling guilty because I'm not doing something else?

If you can say, "Yes!" you're probably on the right track!



Of course, there are times when balance is a little more complicated. Realistically, balance isn't something that people achieve in a single day. It's something that you achieve over time. For example, you may need to spend more time on studying during final exams, or you may have to spend more time at work for a short period of time. And, of course, unexpected obligations will come up from time to time. It's still important to take time for yourself, but you may find it difficult to fit everything into your day. That's okay—as long as you have a plan that gives you time for other important pieces in a reasonable period of time.

If you constantly find yourself putting off important pieces, you may need to re-evaluate the balance in your life. You may also need to re-evaluate the pieces on your priority list that you're putting off.



what can I do about it?

Working toward work-life balance can be as simple as prioritizing your own wellness.

What it means is this: your obligations to your own well-being is just as important as your obligations to your boss, teacher, family members, and any others who expect your time.

Do you enjoy a specific yoga class? Schedule it in your daily calendar and stick to it.

Do you need 30 minutes after work to relax before you start taking care of responsibilities at home? Talk with others in your home and work out a strategy to protect your time.

Do you feel most productive when you go for a walk on your lunch break? Let co-workers know that your time is non-negotiable (within reason, of course).

Do you feel like you don't have time? You might be surprised how your choices can free up time. A big part of finding balance and setting priorities is learning to say no. At some point, most of us have agreed to take on an obligation when we really didn't have the time or energy for it. 'Yes' may seem like an easier response, but it doesn't help anyone. Learning how to say no is a real skill that takes practice. It's called assertiveness. Assertiveness means that you're honest about your own feelings and needs while respecting others. It's an incredibly powerful tool for wellness.

It's unfortunate that people sometimes view the priority of self-care as selfish or indulgent because it's so helpful. People who prioritize their own wellness tend to feel better about themselves (of course). They also tend to have better relationships, better productivity at work or school, and stronger abilities to handle problems as they come up. If you're having a hard time making changes or you feel like you're always beating yourself up over your choices, try the Problem-Solving and Healthy Thinking Wellness Modules at this series.

tips for balance at school

- Figure out how you like to work. Do you prefer to study at the library, with a group of friends, or at home?
- Set a schedule that includes all of your obligations and fun activities—and stick to it
- If you're feeling overwhelmed by an assignment, talk with your teacher or professor
- See how your school can help—many offer help with studying strategies, planning, writing, and other areas
- Join a group or club around something you enjoy—it can be fun and broaden your social networks
- Try to start assignments early so unexpected problems or events won't be as difficult to work around

tips for balance at work

- Bring up workload concerns with your supervisor
- Make sure that your to-do list is realistic. It's easy to underestimate how long a task will actually take
- Be clear about expectations around work in off hours (such as answering emails after hours)
- Take your breaks away from your desk, and try to work in some physical activity. A short walk is a great way to take a break and reduce stress!
- Figure out how you work best, and ask how your workplace might support you. For example, if you work best in a quiet space, you may talk to your supervisor about working from home at times
- Talk to a co-worker at your workplace who you admire for finding more balance and find out how they achieve it
- If you have one, access free resources like an Employee and Family Assistance Program for short-term one-on-one support from a counsellor
- Encourage your employer to study and implement the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, a free resource that outlines a plan for addressing 13 factors that contribute to mentally healthy workplaces. One of the factors in the Standard is balance

tips for balance at home

- Give everyone a chance to talk about their own needs and expectations and then talk about realistic ways to share the load at home
- Work together to solve problems and find solutions—like figuring out a childcare schedule so Mom can meet with her walking group once a week, for example
- If caregiving is creating a lot of stress at home, look into community support services. Respite care and home visits are two options that may be available

activity: are you in balance?

Think of your balance over the last few months—how you felt, the kinds of choices you made, and how satisfied you felt with your life. Read each statement below and check ‘yes’ if it often applies to you or ‘no’ if it rarely applies to you.

1. I often feel like I have no control over my work or school life.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
2. I usually don't have time for hobbies or interests outside of work or school.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
3. I often feel guilty because I can't make time for everything I want to.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
4. I often feel anxious or upset over something that happened at work or school.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
5. I feel like I don't spend enough time to spend with my loved ones.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
6. I have a hard time feeling relaxed or comfortable when I get home.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
7. I usually don't get around to doing things just for me.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
8. On most days, I feel overwhelmed and over-committed.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
9. I often find that taking time off from work or school is hard for me.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
10. I often feel like only have time or energy for one or two roles in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
11. I usually don't have time to take good care of my physical well-being.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
12. My loved ones often tell me I need more balance in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

Each ‘yes’ is one point. Count up the total number of points to find your score.

9–12 points: You need to work on finding balance. Think of what you've learned in the info sheet and how you can use it in your own life.

5–8 points: You're getting there! You may need to take some action, but you're on the right track.

0–4 points: On point and on balance! How can you maintain your balance in the future?

Adapted with permission from The Work-Life Balance Quiz by the Canadian Mental Health Association at www.cmha.ca/mental_health/work-life-balance-quiz