Understanding balance

With so many of us sandwiched between work and home responsibilities and, increasingly, elder care commitments as well, it’s often hard to even catch our breath. Nevertheless, it’s well worth taking a little time to reflect on whether our lives are in balance and how the situation could be improved.

Balance contributes to optimum health, quality of life and strong, loving relationships. But it's important to recognize that the perfect balance for someone else is not necessarily the right balance for you. You have your own priorities and needs. Any lifestyle changes you plan should be carefully weighed to reflect these.

Tips and tools you can use

Even if you can't change many aspects of your life immediately, it can be helpful to understand where the right balance might lie, so that you can gradually plan to move towards it. Here are a few tips to get you started on the right path:

A balanced life

Though the circumstances of each person’s life are different, for most people, a balanced life includes many of the following:

- A fulfilling work life or meaningful daily activities
- Time for family and/or close friends
- A loving relationship with a partner
- Friendships and social activities
- Leisure, exercise and relaxation
- Other priorities you may have, such as community involvement, hobbies, learning new skills, etc.

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Challenges to balance

While the above list may sound dreamy, it’s not always easy to achieve. In today’s busy environment, many of the following can put a real kink in the best laid plans for a balanced life. These include:

- Increased workplace responsibilities
- Elder care commitments
- Child care or school problems
- Illness of self, children or partner
- Financial or marital problems
- Trying to do everything
- Weak organizational skills
- Major changes such as childbirth, moving home, new job, separation or bereavement

Signs of imbalance

Stress presents itself in many ways, but if you’re experiencing some of the following, it may be a cue that aspects of your life need to be brought back in line with your values. Signs of imbalance can include:

- You feel constantly anxious or stressed
- You feel tired all the time and/or have frequent colds
- Your sleeping or eating habits have changed

- You never seem able to arrive anywhere on time
- You can't remember the last time you had lunch with a friend
- The word exercise isn't in your dictionary
- You spend your time at work worrying about things left undone at home
- You spend your time at home worrying about things left undone at work
- Your alcohol use is increasing
- You wish you had a life

Regaining balance

Bringing your life back into balance can take time and effort, but it’s work that will do wonders for your health and well-being for years to come.
If you feel it’s time to get back on the path toward balance, start by:

- Scheduling time to reflect on your life and the challenges you face
- Determining your priorities and personal needs
- Creating a list or plan of actions, both small and large, that you will act upon

Though the stresses of life and the pressures on your time can sometimes seem insurmountable, there is little work more important than living your life well. By taking the time to reflect on the state of balance or imbalance in your life, you’re giving yourself the best gift you can—a chance to reduce stress and live life more fully.