

The Balancing Act

Tips to Balance Your Life and Keep You Emotionally and Physically Fit

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Parking Stress At The Door

You've had a rough day at work. And while you'd like to forget about that disagreement with your boss or looming deadline, when you get home it plays over and over in your mind. Or perhaps trouble on the home front—whether family strife or care giving demands—is making it hard for you to focus on the job. While the havoc of stress truly knows no bounds, there are several strategies you can try to stop it at its source and prevent it from spilling over into other areas of your life.

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Take a breather

When we experience stress our breathing becomes shallow, less oxygen is pumped into the body, and we experience a reduction in mental clarity and physical energy. By managing your breathing cycle, from shallow and fast, to slow and deep you can help control your anxiety and take charge of your body. The more you breathe deeply, the healthier you get!

Deep breathing, even for as little as five minutes, can counteract the effects of stress, clear your mind, and rejuvenate your body. Several deep breathing exercises per day, especially before confronting a challenging situation can increase your self confidence, and bring about a more relaxed attitude, that even your co-workers will notice.

Create transition rituals.

Commuting to and from work each day is a fact of life for millions of Canadians. Rather than getting frustrated by traffic delays, why not make the most of this valuable time? If you drive, pop in an audio book or listen to your favourite radio station; if using public transit, read a book or catch up on the daily news. Listening to upbeat or relaxing music on your iPod or MP3 player is another good way to gear up for your work day or wind down as you head home. Combine this with 30 to 45 minutes of aerobic activity at your local gym before or after work, and you've created an effective daily ritual that will act as a detoxifying "bridge" to help you shed stress.

De-clutter your workload.

Setting aside enough time each day to tackle the key items on your "to do" list will help reduce anxiety and that feeling of being overwhelmed. At work this means staying focused on key tasks rather than getting dragged down by timewasters like e-mail, web surfing and overly chatty colleagues. At home, consider enlisting help to give yourself a break from time to time. If you can afford it, look into time-saving services like housecleaners or even personal catering services that offer healthy, home-cooked meals at a cost that is often cheaper than take-out. Too expensive? Enlist the support of friends and family. The people closest to you may be unaware you're struggling with stress and would be more than happy to help out if they knew you were feeling overwhelmed.

Consider the big picture.

It's easy to get so caught up in the daily stresses of life that you forget what's really important to you. When a problem or disappointment leaves you feeling unsettled and anxious, ask yourself if you'll even remember this moment five years from now. Staying focused on the big picture will help you avoid getting trapped in life's little daily dramas.

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Be open and honest.

Building and maintaining good rapport with your colleagues fosters an environment that lets you share both good and bad life experiences. Open dialogue at home, on the other hand, helps loved ones empathize with work challenges and be more understanding if you're cranky or distracted. What details you choose to share is entirely up to you, but by giving others a heads up to what's going on, you may find comfort in a sympathetic ear and reduce anxiety and stress.

Know your limits.

In the quest to accomplish more and achieve career success, many people have trouble saying "no." If you don't set some reasonable boundaries you'll probably end up feeling overwhelmed, stressed, tired and maybe even a little bitter. This applies to commitments you make both professionally and personally. Of course, you may not always be in a position to say no but, when possible, set some realistic limits on your time and stick to them.



Get support.

Look to family, friends and work colleagues for help. Perhaps your co-worker is itching for a new challenge or your sibling would love to baby sit the kids once in a while. Sometimes just a relaxing chat over coffee with a friend or colleague can go a long way in staying positive and de-stressing. Check out the self-help section of your local bookstore or take advantage of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services to discover new ways to better manage stress.

Of course keeping your stress tightly wrapped in a neat little package isn't realistic. But by being aware of how life's daily challenges affect your mood and the way you relate to others, you can learn to temporarily park stress at the door and tackle spill-overs as they happen.

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