

Understanding Balance

Source: Lifeworks

You might relate to constantly juggling work, home, family, and social responsibilities and, increasingly, elder care commitments. Sometimes it feels relentless, like there is no time to stop and catch your breath. There is no better time than the present to stop, breathe, and take time to reflect, if your life is in balance.

Balance is important

With anything in life, moderation, balance, and stability are crucial for a happy and healthy life. Without balance, you will increase the likelihood of burnout; you can probably relate to overdoing one area of your life and naturally wanting to bring yourself into equilibrium, perhaps you have spent a period of your life overworking, or looking after a sick relative.

It is natural to follow the ebb and flow of life, changing like the seasons, with periods of time when you feel open with lots of energy, and other times feeling closed off, wanting to hibernate. These are natural rhythms of life. However, if you feel out of balance, it may be because you are over-extending yourself in one or more areas to a degree that is not sustainable.

Life balance is different for everyone

You are unique and will have wants and needs that are different from other individuals. It is important to assess your priorities in order to achieve balance. Perfection is unrealistic and you cannot expect yourself to be perfectly balanced all the time; however, it is important to strive for what makes you happy and healthy.

Balance in each area of life

Work. Are you working too much or just enough? Do you have a “side-hustle” or would you cut down on your hours to do other things?

Finances. Can you afford to cut down on work, or would it be easier to cut back on spending so you can live within your means? Or would you prefer to start saving for that new adventure, the course you’ve always wanted to take, or a new home?

Travel. Although there are world restrictions on travel now, do you want to spend parts of your year travelling? How can you work towards that?

Children. Do you want to spend more time with your children? What would that look like? Would you want to rebalance your time among family and personal hobbies?

Creativity. Do you feel you are spending enough time engaged with your creative endeavors in your free time? This could include playing music, dancing, art, technology, etc. What would balance in this area look like?

Social. How can you keep a healthy social life with all your other commitments? Could you schedule in weekly calls or monthly socially distanced walks with loved ones?

Partner. Are you in a loving relationship? If not, would you like to change this? What steps could you take?

Relaxation. When was the last time you relaxed or had fun? If you are not taking time to enjoy your life, you could be at risk of burnout. What do you like to do to relax? How can you do this every day – even if it's only for 10 minutes a day?

These wants and needs will change as you grow through life – the balance you sought 10 years ago will be different from the balance you seek today.

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.

Challenges to balance

You may know where your life is out of balance, but feel unable to change it. In today's busy environment, many of the following can challenge your life of balance:

- 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 discontent with work
- 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 vocabulary
- 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 social life
- You're in conflict with yourself; what you want isn't matching up to what you have

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 wellbeing 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
- Asking for help from someone who inspires you
- Trying something new; nothing changes if nothing changes

Though the stresses of life and the pressures on your time can sometimes seem insurmountable, there are few endeavors 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.