

Ways to improve work-life balance

Healthy work-life balance refers to maintaining a harmonious relationship between your work and personal life. It involves consciously managing your time and energy to meet both professional and personal commitments while prioritizing self-care and well-being.

Just like in our diets, to stay healthy and energized we need variety. When it comes to work-life balance, we need to include a variety of activities and rest. We tend to believe that we can be productive all the time, or that an eight-hour day at work equates to eight hours of output, but if you seriously think about it, that's almost impossible to achieve.

There's no prescription that will fit everyone when it comes to improving work-life balance. And you may have to play with what time scale feels best for you.

Trying to find balance in any single day may feel frustrating, but the balance may be easier to achieve across a week or more.

Here are a few tips:

Plan ahead

Plan ahead to combine work



activities with leisure, social, or fitness activities. If you find yourself with several virtual meetings back-to-back, try taking them while you go for a walk.

Embrace the way your brain works. Use productivity hacks like a timer to work in short, focused bursts. Block out all other distractions so you can make the most of your time.

End work at a certain time

Set a time to end work for the day, and reinforce it by powering down work-related devices, locking your office, or scheduling something afterward.

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness makes imbalance hard to ignore. When you practice

mindfulness techniques, like meditation or breath awareness, you become more in-tune with your emotions and physical sensations. Paying attention to these feelings helps you learn how to notice when you might be suppressing a need to work. It's hard to return to that spreadsheet after you notice your stomach rumbling.

Find something you love outside of work to engage in

If you have something that you're excited about doing after work, it will make it easier to disconnect from work messages or end your day at a predetermined time. Our hobbies boost our energy and vitality. When we play and feel creative, we bring our fresh selves back to work.

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Foods to help decrease inflammation

Have you heard the term “anti-inflammatory diet”? Perhaps your friends have been talking about it, or you have been reading more and more about it online. But why is inflammation bad for us, and what does food have to do with it?

According to the Mayo Clinic, Inflammation is a part of your body’s normal response to infection or injury. It’s when your damaged tissue releases chemicals that tell white blood cells to start repairing. But sometimes, inflammation is low-grade, spread throughout the body, and chronic.

This chronic inflammation can do damage to your body. It can play a role in the accumulation of plaque in your arteries that can up your risk of heart disease and stroke or other chronic conditions.

The choices you make at the grocery store can have an impact on the inflammation in your body. Scientists are still unravelling how food affects the body’s inflammatory processes, but they know a few things.

Research shows that what you eat can affect the levels of C-reactive protein (CRP)—a marker for inflammation—in your blood. That could be because some foods like processed sugars help release inflammatory messengers that can raise

the risk of chronic inflammation. Foods that are anti-inflammatory tend to be the same foods that can help keep you healthy in other ways, too.

Here are a few suggestions for anti-inflammatory eating:

Eat more plants. Start adding a variety of fruits, veggies, whole grains and legumes to your diet. Focus on antioxidants found in colourful fruits and veggies like berries, leafy greens, beets and avocados, as well as beans and lentils, whole grains, ginger, turmeric and green tea.

Get your Omega-3s. Omega-3 fatty acids play a role in regulating your body’s inflammatory process and could help regulate pain related to inflammation. Find these healthy fats in fish like salmon, tuna and mackerel, as well as smaller amounts in walnuts, pecans, ground flaxseed and soy.

Eat less red meat. Red meat can be pro-inflammatory. Are you a burger lover? Aim for a realistic goal. Try substituting your lunchtime beef with fish, nuts or soy-based protein a few times a week.

Cut the processed stuff. Sugary cereals and drinks, deep-fried food, and pastries are all pro-inflammatory offenders. They can contain plenty of unhealthy fats that are linked to inflammation.

Scents that make sense for your mood

The nose knows, and the scents it picks plays an important role in the physiological effects of mood, stress, and working capacity. Recent published studies from institutes such as The National Centre for Biotechnology Information explain that the sense of smell part of the limbic system and directly connect to the areas of the brain that process emotion and learning.

Here are six scents recommended by Vancouver-based West Coast Institute of Aromatherapy, to boost your productivity, mood and more:

1. Lemon. This scent promotes concentration and has calming and clarifying properties that are helpful when you’re feeling angry, anxious or run down. Lemon also has antiviral and antibacterial properties and can help fight sore throats and colds by boosting the body’s immune system and improving circulation.

2. Lavender. This essential oil has calming properties that help control emotional stress. Lavender has a soothing effect on nerves and can relieve nervous tension and depression as well as treat headaches and migraines.

3. Jasmine. Like lavender, jasmine it is also used to calm nerves, but this oil is also commonly used as an anti-depressant because of its uplifting capabilities that produce a feeling of confidence, optimism and revitalized energy.

4. Rosemary. In addition to improving memory retention, rosemary has stimulating properties that fight physical exhaustion, headaches, and mental fatigue.

5. Cinnamon. The stimulating properties in cinnamon can help fight mental fatigue and improve concentration and focus.

6. Peppermint. Try peppermint when brainstorming. An energy booster, this scent invigorates the mind, promotes concentration, and stimulates clear thinking.



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What are adaptogens?

Sleep is an essential aspect of our lives, but many people struggle to get the rest they need. One reason is they have trouble falling asleep. From stress and anxiety to physical discomfort and pain, many factors can disrupt normal sleep patterns. While many sleep aids are available on the market, some may come with unwanted side effects.

An alternative solution is to try adaptogens. Adaptogens are a class of herbs and plants that help the body adapt to stress and restore balance. They work by modulating the body's response to stress by reducing cortisol levels and promoting relaxation. This, in turn, can lead to better sleep quality and a more restful night's sleep. Adaptogens are a natural and gentle way to support your body's ability to adapt to stress and promote a sense of calm and balance. Perhaps you have been using adaptogens without even realizing it. Have you ever had a cup of chamomile tea before going to bed or to calm your nerves? Chamomile is considered as an adaptogen.

One of the key benefits of adaptogens is their ability to help reduce cortisol levels. Cortisol is a hormone released in response to stress. When levels are too high, it can lead to feelings of anxiety, irritability, and restlessness, making it difficult to unwind and fall asleep.

Here are two more examples of adaptogens. Remember before trying anything new, especially if you are taking medication for any other condition such as high blood pressure or blood thinners, speak with your health care professional or do some research of your own. Natural

herbs and plants can conflict with such medications and may also produce unwanted side effects.

Ashwagandha Root

A popular adaptogen for sleep is ashwagandha, an herb used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine for centuries. It is known for its calming properties and ability to reduce stress and anxiety.

Studies show ashwagandha helps improve sleep quality and duration, making it an ideal natural sleep aid. In support of its effectiveness, a double-blind, randomized, parallel-group, placebo-controlled study found that ashwagandha root extract can improve sleep quality and help manage insomnia.

Valerian root

Another powerful adaptogen for sleep is valerian root, a natural sedative used for centuries to promote relaxation and improve sleep. It works by increasing the levels of GABA in the brain, which helps calm the nervous system and promote sleep. Valerian root is available in supplement form and can be taken before bed to help induce sleep.

Studies show that valerian root is likely safe for short-term use, but no studies are looking at its effect long term. Plus, it can interact with some medications.

Adaptogens are not a magic cure for sleep issues. They work best in combination with other healthy sleep habits, such as sticking to a consistent sleep schedule, turning off electronics before bed, and creating a comfortable sleep environment.

Thoughtfulness in romantic relationships

If your romantic partner has ever hinted that you take them for granted or are inconsiderate of them or their feelings, perhaps you should be more thoughtful. Before you can do that, you may wish to remind yourself what thoughtfulness comprises, why it's significant, and what you can do to show your romantic partner you care.

Being thoughtful means taking the time to consider others and their feelings. You should ask yourself how your significant other feels and what they might need from you.

To be thoughtful means being empathetic and putting yourself in someone else's shoes. For instance, instead of just pondering things from your perspective and thinking of what you feel and need after a disagreement, try to think about things from their standpoint.

Showing consideration for your partner also means going out of your way to do something kind or helpful for them without expecting anything in return. Do not think in terms of owing or being owed. Instead, do things and give things freely and without expectation.

Showing attentiveness to your partner is significant because it shows that you care about them and their well-being. Considering their feelings, needs, and desires strengthens your bond, creating a foundation of trust and respect. Being thoughtful can also help prevent misunderstandings and conflicts in the relationship.

Thoughtfulness encourages open communication and a willingness to compromise. A caring attitude towards your partner is fundamental to building a happy and fulfilling partnership.

Here are a few ideas to be more thoughtful:

- * Listen actively instead of merely hearing. Focus on their needs and desires. Try to be there for them when they need you.
- * Show your love and appreciation by doing small things for them, like leaving a note or a small gift. Small gestures can make a big difference in a relationship.
- * Be patient and understanding. Relationships are not always easy. There will be times when your partner may need your support. Be there for them, even when things get tough. Be sure to show your partner that you value them and their feelings. Tell them how much they mean to you.
- * Do not be afraid to show your affection. With effort, you can strengthen your relationship and build a deeper connection with your partner.



Top cooking methods to help reduce fat intake

Maintaining a healthy diet often involves making conscious choices about the types and amounts of fats we consume. By adopting cooking methods that minimize added fats and preserve the nutritional value of ingredients, we can enjoy delicious and wholesome meals without compromising on taste. Remember to choose lean cuts of meat, use heart-healthy oils in moderation, and prioritize fresh, wholesome ingredients. Here are a few ideas:

Steaming

Steaming is a gentle cooking method that preserves the natural flavours, textures, and nutrients of food. It involves using hot vapour to cook ingredients, usually by placing them in a steamer basket or a covered pot with a small amount of water. Steaming is ideal for vegetables, fish, poultry, and grains. Using this method, you can avoid the need for oil or butter, resulting in lighter and healthier dishes.

Stir-frying

Stir-frying is a quick and efficient cooking technique that requires minimal fat. It involves cooking small, bite-sized pieces of food over high heat in a small amount of oil. By using a non-stick pan or a wok, you can reduce

the need for excessive oil. Stir-frying allows ingredients to retain their vibrant colours, textures, and nutrients while imparting delicious flavours. Use heart-healthy oils like olive oil, avocado oil, or coconut oil in moderation for added taste and health benefits.

Baking and roasting

Baking and roasting are dry-heat cooking methods that require little to no added fats. The dry heat of an oven can achieve caramelization and develop rich flavours in ingredients without the need for excessive oils. These methods work well for meats, poultry, fish, vegetables, and even fruits. Use herbs, spices, and natural marinades to enhance taste while keeping the dish low in fat.

Poaching

Poaching involves gently simmering food in a liquid, such as water, broth, or stock. It is an excellent method for cooking delicate ingredients like fish, eggs, and chicken breast. Poaching allows you to infuse flavours into the food while keeping it moist and tender. Avoiding the use of oils or fats, this technique helps reduce unnecessary calories and fat content in the final dish.

Ailments older Canadians should think about

(NC) As we age our bodies may need a little more care than it did in years past. Regardless of how young we may feel at heart, there are illnesses that are more common as we get older.

Here are three conditions to be aware of:

1. Shingles

Herpes Zoster, typically referred to as shingles, is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. If you had chickenpox in the past, the virus remains dormant in your body and can reactivate later in life as shingles. Shingles often shows up as a painful rash or blisters that can last for weeks and can lead to nerve pain lasting for months or even years. It's estimated that one in three Canadians will get shingles in their lifetime, and with ninety percent of us thought to have had chicken pox, shingles is a concern for older Canadians.

Treatment may have limited impact, but shingles can be prevented. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Comité sur l'immunisation du Québec (CIQ) recommend that people aged 50 and over consider vaccination to help prevent shingles. The CIQ also recommends vaccination for people aged 18 years and older who are immunocompromised.

2. Chronic obstructive pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is a lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis or emphysema. It causes a narrowing of the airways and can progress slowly over several years. It's typically diagnosed in those over age 40, and many people may not realize they have the condition. Symptoms can include a cough lasting longer than three months, wheezing or whistling when breathing, long-lasting colds and shortness of breath during everyday activities. Feeling short of breath is not a normal sign of aging and those experiencing it should seek medical guidance. Those with the disease are also at higher risk of developing heart conditions, diabetes and low bone density. The good news is COPD is manageable with treatment.

3. Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

RSV is a common and highly contagious virus that affects the lungs and breathing passages. Despite commonly being associated with infants and young children, adults aged 60 and older are also at increased risk for serious infection from RSV.

The natural decline in immune function as we age makes the older-adult crowd more vulnerable to infections and health complications, including RSV. Additionally, immunity against RSV is short-lived, so you can catch it again even if you've already had it. There is currently no vaccine available in Canada for adults to help prevent RSV, so practising steps to avoid coming into contact with the virus is sound advice. Washing your hands frequently, disinfecting surfaces around you, and avoiding time spent close to anyone who is ill are a few steps to help avoid contracting the virus.



Are you acting out your dreams while sleeping?

(NC) We all know how important sleep is to our mental and physical health. But how you sleep can be an early indicator for later health issues. If someone has noticed that you act out your dreams, especially yelling, punching, kicking or getting out of bed, you may be living with rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep behaviour disorder, also known as RBD.

During normal REM, the time when we dream, the brain prevents movement. But for those with RBD, brain pathways are disrupted and people are able to act out their dreams. People with the condition often have very active dreams in which they're playing sports, running or even being chased or attacked.

Sleep problems, including this one, are common in people diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Although not everyone with RBD develops Parkinson's, studies suggest a strong link between having the condition and a future diagnosis of Parkinson's or related conditions. RBD can occur years before more well-known symptoms, such as tremors, stiffness or slowness. Other possible early signs of Parkinson's

include constipation, depression and smell loss.

If you have symptoms, including acting out your dreams, talk to your doctor. Other sleep problems may mimic RBD, so it's important for a sleep specialist to confirm the diagnosis. Once diagnosed, a movement disorder specialist (a neurologist with expertise in Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders) can help provide care and offer an individualized treatment plan.

You also may want to consider joining a research study. In Canada, The Michael J. Fox Foundation's landmark brain health study, the Parkinson's Progression Markers Initiative (PPMI), follows people with and without Parkinson's over time to learn more about how brain disease starts and changes. It's exploring the connection between RBD and brain disease to understand who gets Parkinson's, who doesn't and why. Find more information about the study or learn how to get involved at michaelfox.org/ppmi.

A reality check on vaping

(NC) Vaping in Canada is on the rise, but it's an activity that is not without risks. There is growing evidence of its harmful effects on both oral and overall health.

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling an aerosol produced by devices, such as e-cigarettes, vape pens, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and e-hookahs. Users may inhale nicotine or THC (a chemical in cannabis), which may be addictive and can have many adverse side effects, including lung damage, dry mouth, cavities, periodontal disease and oral cancer.



Here are the facts:

- A single vape pod may contain as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes.
- Nicotine-containing vaping products may alter youth brain development and can affect memory, concentration, judgement and mood.
- Vaping may increase your risk of mouth sores, cavities and gum disease.
- Other vaping dangers include explosions, burn injuries, unintentional poisoning, second-hand vapour and related lung injuries.
- Coughing, shortness of breath and/or chest pain may be signs of vaping-related illness.
- Vaping has not been approved by Health Canada as a method to quit smoking.
- You can speak with your dental hygienist to understand more about the oral and overall health risks associated with vaping. They can give you the information you need to make a choice that's right for you.

Find more information at dentalhygienecanada.ca/vaping



Tips to calm your mind

Sometimes situations can overwhelm us and even if we don't want to keep thinking about it, we do. Our thoughts keep racing and racing, until we have thought of every bad scenario possible. There does not seem to be any escape. Can we get out of this vicious cycle?

According to the expert panel at Psychology Today repressing anxious thoughts won't work; they will just come back, sometimes with more intensity. But there are more effective techniques you can borrow from mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive-behavioural therapies:

Practice mindfulness

Practice observing your thoughts, rather than reacting automatically to them. Think of your thoughts as clouds floating by. Which draw you in and which make you want to run away? Is there a way you can untangle yourself and just observe your thoughts, rather than reacting?

energy zone

The term "smoothie" has been around since the early 20th century, but it wasn't until 1930 that it was used to describe a drink. Early smoothies were simply fruit, fruit juice and ice, and they were an obscure concept until the natural food craze of the 1960s and 1970s.

Just about anything can be made into a smoothie. Some smoothie makers add vegetables such as spinach, carrots, seaweed and even hot peppers to make their smoothies extra healthy. For the most part, smoothies contain healthy ingredients, such as vitamins and protein powder, and are often lower in fat than other creamy drinks.

Here are some ingredients for a great superfood smoothie:

Kale – low in calories, powerful anti-oxidant with anti-inflammatory properties

Get up and get going

Worrying over an issue without creating a solution will not help you solve the problem. It may, in fact, make you less likely to act by feeding your anxiety. When your mind is stuck in a loop, you can interrupt it by getting up and moving around or doing a different task or activity. When you sit back down, you should have a different perspective.

Decide whether a thought is helpful

Just because a thought is true doesn't mean that it is helpful to focus on—at least not all the time. If, for example, only 1 in 10 people will get the job you want to study for, and you keep thinking about those odds, you may become demotivated and not even bother studying. This is an example of a thought that is true but not helpful. Focus your attention on what is helpful and let the rest go.

Smoothy Goodness

Blueberries – one of the highest antioxidant capacities of all fruit which helps to combat free radicals in your body

Greek yogurt – double the protein and half the carbs as regular yogurt

Chia + Flaxseeds – rich in Omega-3 and fibre benefits



Family members can be toxic too

There is an old wise saying that goes something like this: "You should love your family, but that doesn't mean you have to like them". Sometimes, a relationship with a member of your own family can be just as toxic as any relationship you might have experienced at work or in your social circle.

Psychologist Dr. Ellen Hendriksen, also known as the savvy psychologist, shares a few options to distance yourself from a toxic person in your family:

Get clarity. With toxic family members, we are often blinded to reality. Sometimes we're blinded by optimism, but sometimes we're blinded to the reality of the situation by resentment. We ignore their efforts to reach out because we think they're being manipulative or aren't capable of change. Start by trying to see things as they really are. A helpful way to do this is to make a big list. On one side, write down the good times—those times you've felt supported by them, or they came through for you. On the other side, write out the bad times—the times they hurt you, or ignored you when you needed help. Look at both frequency and magnitude. Seeing your interactions in black and white can help you determine whether your relationship deserves to be thrown a life preserver or is essentially dead in the water.

Test out new rules of engagement. A toxic family member is like a forest fire—they need to be contained by drawing some lines. There are lots of ways to contain how you interact with them:

You can set limits on the size of the group, duration of contact, location, and more. For example, you can decide you're willing to visit but only if you stay in a hotel. Perhaps you'll only see them at big events like weddings or funerals, not intimate gatherings. Maybe you're willing to see them when they're less likely to be drinking, like kids' birthday parties or brunch. Maybe texts and emails are fine, but not long, draining, one-sided phone calls. Perhaps you'll see them for a meal, but nothing longer.