



Weekly Safety Tip

SCI Safety Slogan

*Life is short. Take a
break from work.
Enjoy Family and
Friends.
James Lehrke-SCI*

of the Week

Work-life balance: Ways to restore harmony and reduce stress

If your work life and personal life are out of balance, your stress may be running high. Here's how to reclaim control.

Finding work-life balance in today's frenetically-paced world is no simple task. Spend more time at work than at home and you miss out on a rewarding personal life. Then again, if you're facing challenges in your personal life such as caring for an aging parent or coping with marital or financial problems, concentrating on your job can be difficult.

Whether the problem is too much focus on work or too little, when your work life and your personal life feel out of balance, stress — and its harmful effects — is the result.

To take control, first consider how the world of work has changed, then reevaluate your relationship to work and apply these strategies for striking a more healthy balance.

Striking the best work-life balance

It isn't easy to juggle the demands of career and personal life. For most people, it's an ongoing challenge to reduce stress and maintain harmony in key areas of their life. Here are some ideas to help you find the balance that's best for you:

- **Keep a log.** Track everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy, don't have time for or do only out of guilt. If you don't have the authority to make certain decisions, talk to your supervisor.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Find out if your employer offers flex hours, a compressed work week, job-sharing or telecommuting for your role. The flexibility may alleviate some of your stress and free up some time.
- **Manage your time.** Organize household tasks efficiently. Doing one or two loads of laundry every day rather than saving it all for your day off, and running errands in batches rather than going back and forth several times are good places to begin. A weekly family calendar of important dates and a daily list of to-dos will help you avoid deadline panic. If your employer offers a course in time management, sign up for it.
- **Rethink your cleaning standards.** An unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes won't impact the quality of your life. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. If you can afford it, pay someone else to clean your house.
- **Communicate clearly.** Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if it helps.
- **Fight the guilt.** Remember, having a family and a job is okay — for both men and women.

LIVE SAFETY 24/7



Source: Best advice on Stress Risk Management in the Workplace, Health Canada, 2000

This model shows that high pressure plus low control at work contribute to strain, particularly when combined with home stress and the absence of social support.
Source: www.hrsdc.gc.ca/

WLB is an issue because work-life conflict (WLC) brings about a variety of undesirable consequences. Many of the consequences are health-related, but not exclusively so. The effects on employee health are well-documented (please refer to the diagram that follows):

The Costs of an Unhealthy Workplace



Source: www.hrsdc.gc.ca/



Work Kills If You Let It!
Take a deep breath

- **Nurture yourself.** Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as walking, working out or listening to music. Unwind after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga or taking a bath or shower.
- **Set aside one night each week for recreation.** Take the phone off the hook, power down the computer and turn off the TV. Discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends, such as playing golf, fishing or canoeing. Making time for activities you enjoy will rejuvenate you.
- **Protect your day off.** Try to schedule some of your routine chores on workdays so that your days off are more relaxing.
- **Get enough sleep.** There's nothing as stressful and potentially dangerous as working when you're sleep-deprived. Not only is your productivity affected, but you can also make costly mistakes. You may then have to work even more hours to make up for these mistakes.
- **Bolster your support system.** Give yourself the gift of a trusted friend or co-worker to talk with during times of stress or hardship. If you're part of a religious community, take advantage of the support your religious leader can provide. Ensure you have trusted friends and relatives who can assist you when you need to work overtime or travel for your job.
- **Seek professional help.** Everyone needs help from time to time. If your life feels too chaotic to manage and you're spinning your wheels worrying about it, talk with a professional such as your doctor, a psychologist or a counselor recommended by your employee assistance program (EAP).

Services provided by your EAP are usually free of charge and confidential. This means no one but you will know what you discuss. And if you're experiencing high levels of stress because of marital, financial, chemical dependency or legal problems, an EAP counselor can link you to helpful services in your community.

You now have some suggestions for improving the balance between your work and your personal life. Why not take the next step and give these suggestions a try?

Balance doesn't mean doing everything. Examine your priorities and set boundaries. Be firm in what you can and cannot do. Only you can restore harmony to your lifestyle. Source: www.mayoclinic.com

Ask EPA: Get Your Questions Answered in New Online Chats

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If you could sit down to chat with the nation's top environmental officials, what would you ask? Here is your chance. Beginning this week, Administrator Stephen L. Johnson will host the launch of EPA's new online interactive forum "Ask EPA." Join the administrator online as he discusses the agency's efforts to promote clean and dependable energy solutions, including the Energy Star Change a Light Campaign.

In this forum, patterned after Ask the White House (www.whitehouse.gov/ask), the public will have the opportunity to ask the agency's senior environmental officials questions on a wide range of environmental and human health issues. The live chat sessions will last approximately one hour and consist of 8-12 questions and answers. Individuals can submit questions up to two days in advance, as well as during the live discussion.

