



**F**or most people, seeking a balance between the emotional, mental, physical, social, and spiritual elements of life leaves them happier, more fulfilled and better prepared to meet life's challenges.

There is not a correct formula to guide how much of one's time and energy is best devoted to each aspect. What "balance" looks like is unique to each individual. In general, however, too much investment in one or two areas, to the exclusion of the others, spells trouble.

# Achieving Balance

## BALANCE IS...

We live in a fast-paced and complex world that generally values increased productivity and advancement. All around are pressures to strive for goals and "succeed." Our society often creates role expectations for men regarding work (e.g., that men must be "providers" and "climb the ladder"). Gender role socialization for women (who work inside and/or outside of the home) includes messages about disregarding their own needs and goals in favor of others'. For some, the pressure to succeed may also be internal or self-imposed (e.g., the result of a personal belief system about how hard one "should" work or what ideals one "should" strive for). Others receive direct (and sometimes unsupportive) messages from family or friends about the value of particular goals and interests.

With a lack of balance in life, stress is the most common result. While stress is necessary for normal human functioning, stress that is too intense or prolonged can be destructive. Frequent or long-term problems with stress can have serious effects on your emotional and physical health. Do not ignore the signs of stress and burnout!

It is not often that people consider themselves their own most important resource. As adults, we are privileged to make decisions about the functioning of our lives and how we will manage ourselves. Nurturing and protecting ourselves, then, becomes vital.

## WHAT STRATEGIES CAN I USE TO ACHIEVE MORE BALANCE IN MY LIFE?

Many people find the following strategies helpful in maintaining a sense of balance:

- Spend some time evaluating how you devote your energies. Are there areas of your life that receive very little of your attention? Would you like to redistribute how you spend your time? Your goal is to begin to make decisions about what aspects of life are most important (e.g., physical health, spirituality), set some goals and divide your attention between the elements of life that you value most.

## SIGNS OF TROUBLE

A lack of balance in life generally occurs when an individual focuses too many personal resources (e.g., time, energy, money) on one or two goals to the exclusion of other important aspects of life. For example, an individual may over-focus on social relationships to the detriment of academic responsibilities. Some common signs of a lack of balance in one's life include:

- Lack of exercise
- Inability to say "no"
- Poor diet
- Avoiding asking for help
- Persistent fatigue
- Lack of contact with friends
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope
- Struggling to feel a sense of peace
- Being over-scheduled
- "No time to think"
- Intense focus on a single goal
- Chronic sense of emptiness
- Drive for perfection  
No time to be alone
- Work to the exclusion of leisure
- Persistently feeling overwhelmed and stressed
- Difficulty expressing joy, sadness, anger
- Constantly rushing
- Low energy  
Lack of enthusiasm
- Performing below potential in key areas
- Loved ones express concern

- Remember that achieving balance is a life-long project. As we change and grow, and life changes around us, we are wise to remain open to shifting our focus, priorities and goals. Balance in one phase of life may not be in another.
- Remain aware of personal transitions. Transitions (e.g., starting University, getting married) can leave you more vulnerable to losing balance in your life; these are the times when you most need to maintain balance.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to eat nutritious meals, reduce your caffeine intake, exercise moderately, get enough rest and stop smoking.
- Make time for pleasant activities. Develop a hobby, see a movie, listen to music or read a favorite book.
- Examine your stressors. Ask yourself whether or not you have control over a problem. Take action when you can. If you don't have control over a problem, try not to assume responsibility for solving it. When you stop worrying about problems beyond your control you'll have more energy.
- Enhance your problem-solving skills. Set realistic goals and work toward them step-by-step. Prioritize. Deal with issues as they arise. Pace yourself. Look for choices. Ask for help when you need it.
- Maintain supportive relationships. Don't neglect your friends, family members, social club, church attendance, etc.
- Practice a specific relaxation technique. Techniques such as meditation, positive imagery or slow abdominal breathing promote relaxation.
- Maintain your sense of humor.
- Develop assertiveness skills. Try to take more responsibility for attending to your own needs. Learning to delegate and to say "no" are important steps in reducing your level of stress and maintaining balance.
- Make adjustments as needed. Remember that it is impossible to have a completely balanced life all of the time. Stay aware of how you are doing and make adjustments as need be.
- Seek professional assistance if needed. If mental health difficulties (e.g., substance abuse, depression, anxiety) are interfering with your ability to achieve balance in your life seek professional assistance.

## WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Student Counselling Services (966-4920)

Student Health Services (966-5768)