

## Wellness

## Work life balance

# Live well, work well

As you pursue your career, relationships and interests, it's normal to experience tension from time to time. Conflicting parts of your life can demand your attention and time. However, Australians have some of the longest working hours in the Western world, and many struggle to get the balance between their work and personal lives right. If you're one of these people, don't be disheartened - there are plenty of things you can do to help improve the balance for your health and wellbeing.

### Defining the balance between work and personal life

Having balance often means adjusting your day-to-day activities to minimise the tension between your work and personal interests and commitments. This doesn't necessarily mean, as the commonly used term 'work-life balance' suggests, that you have to give equal time and attention to your work and personal life. It's all about the ratios of time and commitment that help you lead a healthy, fulfilled, and satisfying life. Perhaps it's more helpful to think of life as more of a balancing act that needs continual adjustment and refinement.

### The five pillars of life balance

Australian researchers consider the following five pillars as essential to understanding what affects your life balance between work and personal commitments.

1. 'General interference' - that is, how often work interferes with your responsibilities or activities outside of work.
2. 'Time strain' - how often work restricts time with family or friends.
3. How often work affects your ability to develop or maintain community connections and friendships.

4. Satisfaction with your overall work-life balance.
5. Frequency of feeling rushed or pressed for time.

Periodically checking in on how you're going with your balance between work and personal commitments is a good thing to do. This is because the factors involved, and their relative importance, will change with the different stages of your life.

### Tips for maintaining a good balance in life

You don't need to overhaul your life to help improve your life balance. The trick is to make small gradual shifts. Focus on what you can control (e.g. how you manage your time) rather than what you can't (e.g. certain work policies).

- **Prioritise what makes you tick.** Take time to know what's important to you - people, passions, hobbies and interests - and make time to enjoy them. Also, assess your financial priorities. Is it worth doing a stressful, demanding job to meet your financial goals? Could these goals be pared back so you can do a job that you find more meaningful or that gives you more time for family and personal interests?
- **Assess your values and attitudes.** Research shows that your beliefs and values, and how you view the world, can

have a big impact on your ability to enjoy your working life. Positive attitudes like enjoying a challenge, feeling that you are making a difference, gaining a sense of achievement from your work, or gaining a sense of purpose from working towards some higher cause that you believe in can all contribute to a more satisfactory working life. If your feelings are getting in the way of your satisfaction with work, take time to reflect on your core beliefs. If there's a mismatch, it may be time to consider a change of job or even career.

- **Manage your time effectively.** Make use of technology to do things more efficiently, communicate effectively, delegate where necessary, and regularly plan and review your activities and priorities.
- **Set boundaries.** In a world where technology often means you can now be reached anytime, anyplace, anywhere, it's important to set boundaries. Limit access to work emails and your availability to answer the phone outside of working hours, and learn to say 'no'. Get to know your work policies regarding working hours and any flexible working practices that may be available to you.
- **Negotiate flexibility with the employer.** If you are struggling to manage your work around personal commitments such as caring for a family member or your own health, discuss the situation with your manager. The Fair Work legislation of 2010, updated in 2013, enables you to request flexible working arrangements if you have certain responsibilities or circumstances. This includes people who care for children, have a disability, or are older than 55 years of age.
- **Make time for your health.** Exercising regularly and eating a healthy, well-balanced diet will help keep you on top of your game so you can better juggle the demands of life.
- **Get enough R&R.** Make sure you have downtime to allow yourself to recuperate and do something you enjoy. And get enough sleep with a regular habit – most adults will need around 7-9 hours of sleep daily.

## Further Information



**Safe Work Australia**  
[www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)



**beyondblue**  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

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