



**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

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## Information for Employees

Many feel that there's nothing they can do to bring their lives back into balance. After all, the demands of the workplace continue to increase, as do the number of hours most Canadians spend at their jobs. According to Human Resources and Social Development Canada, one in four Canadians work 50 hours per week or more, compared to one in ten a decade ago. But you can make changes happen – significant changes that will make your work more effective and your time with family and friends more enjoyable.

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### Bring Yourself into Work/Life Balance

"I'm over-worked and overwhelmed, but my boss sets the deadlines, and there's nothing I can do."

"The demands don't end at 5 pm – on top of work, I have to make time for all my other responsibilities, too. I don't remember the last time I did anything just for me."

"I feel like I'm rushing all the time. I'm always hurrying to get the next thing done – sometimes I make mistakes that take even longer to fix! It feels like an endless cycle."

Do the comments of these overloaded workers sound familiar? If the answer is yes, you're not alone. Most Canadians have difficulty finding time for all their roles and responsibilities. In fact, 58% of Canadians report "overload" as a result of the pressures associated with work, home and family, friends, physical health, volunteer and community service.

Some of the signs of work/life imbalance include:

- Feeling overwhelmed, like you've lost control of your life
- Feeling guilty that you're neglecting areas of your life
- Difficulty concentrating

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## Ask Your Employer for Support

Many organizations have policies in place to help employees achieve better work/life balance. Most businesses recognize that workers who are healthier and more balanced are better for the organization's productivity and long-term success – and that work/life imbalance hurts business.

In fact, according to some estimates, burnout costs Canadian business an estimated \$12 billion every year in health claims, lost productivity and absenteeism.

If you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed, first try asking your employer for their support.

- Start by determining what you need to achieve work/life balance
- Research the policies and practices your employer has in place (such as flexible work hours, telecommuting and job sharing)
- Seek out examples in your workplace where these policies have been applied successfully
- Use an appropriate opportunity to discuss your work arrangements, such as an annual review, a return-to-work after leave or at the beginning or end of a new project
- Look at the situation from your employer's point of view; be ready to outline a clear plan, how it will impact the workplace and how that impact will be addressed

Even without formally making changes to your working conditions, there are a number of other ways you can improve your work/life balance.

## Work/Life Balance Tips

While you can't control all of the factors that impact your work/life balance, there are some things you can control. Acting on these tips will help you achieve better work/life balance, and make you more productive at work!

### At Work

- **Schedule brief breaks for yourself throughout the day.** Your productivity and effectiveness will increase if you take even a ten-minute break every two hours and overall, you will get more accomplished.
- **At the end of each day, set your priorities for the following day.** Be realistic about what you can achieve in the time you have available.
- **Only respond to email once or twice a day.** Then, shut off your email program to avoid being distracted as messages come in.
- **Make a distinction between work and the rest of your life.** Protect your private time by turning off electronic communications. Don't be available 24/7.
- **Address concerns about deadlines and deliverables early.** As soon as you see that a deadline is unrealistic, communicate your concern to your employer – don't wait until the deadline passes.
- **Take all of your allotted vacation time.** Taking vacation allows you to come back to work refreshed and

more productive.

## At Home

- **Create a buffer between work and home.** After work, take a brief walk, do a crossword puzzle, or listen to some music before beginning the evening's routine.
- **Decide what chores can be shared or let go.** Determine which household chores are critical and which can be done by someone else. Let the rest go.
- **Exercise.** Even if it's only for 15 minutes at a time, you'll feel more energized and refreshed.
- **Create and implement a household budget.** Start by setting aside some money from each pay cheque for the future.
- **Make healthy food choices.** Healthy eating will give you and your family more energy.
- **Pursue a hobby.** Either with friends or family or for some quality time on your own.

## In Your Community

- **Make choices.** Social, community and volunteer obligations pull us in many directions. Choose the ones that are most fulfilling and learn to say 'no' to the rest.
- **Manage expectations.** Be clear at the outset about how much time or support you can contribute to community organizations or your children's school events.

## Benefits of Work/Life Balance

Finding a 'perfect' balance between work and life is rare. The nature of that balance is different for every person, and changes over time for each person. So we shouldn't strive for perfection, but to constantly be aware of making choices that will benefit all aspects of our lives.

Achieving work/life balance is an investment – it does take time and effort to implement the changes necessary. But it's worth the effort! Work/life balance offers some major rewards. Here are some of the potential benefits:

### At Work

- Feeling more rested and energized
- Working more productively and getting more accomplished, leading to greater career success
- More fulfillment from work

### In Life

- Improving relationships with family and friends
- Better physical and mental health
- Making choices about your priorities, rather than sacrifices among them
- More leisure time to spend with loved ones, or time for yourself

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