

Finding Balance

There is no such thing as work-life balance.

Everything worth fighting for unbalances your life.

-Alain de Botton

How is balance related to health?

We know it is important to have balance between different parts of our lives, including work, family, free time, and so on. There are many ways to define balance.¹ Some people look at it in terms of how they fit within their community, and others with how they are doing as an individual person. Each of us must define what balance means. For some people it is a state of mind, or a place of less stress. For others, it involves how much time they spend on different activities. Many people simply say they know when they are or are not balanced. When it comes to Whole Health, balance might be feeling good about how you are doing with all the different parts of the Circle of Health.

However they define it, people will usually say that balance is an important part of being healthy. Studies confirm this.² For example, a study of 25,000 people in 27 countries in Europe looked at how healthy people were based on how they rated the balance between their work lives and their personal lives. People with poor balance had twice the odds of being in poor health.³

What makes for a healthy balance in my life?

There is no simple way to answer that question, because everyone is different when it comes to defining balance. You might feel like you must devote a lot of time to work, or you may only feel truly happy when you are with loved ones. Some people are happiest when they are serving others, some when they are able to focus on a skill or talent, and others when they are in nature. Most people care about all of these things, and the trick is to figure out how to give enough time to each one, based on your values. Setting goals for your health can help you to feel more balanced.

Part of working toward Whole Health in your life is to pause and really ask what matters to you. How would you answer the following questions?

- What matters the most to me?
- What is my mission in life?
- What are my dreams and goals?
- What is my calling? My life purpose?

Answers vary. Some people will talk about their faith. Some will talk about important people in their lives, and how they fit in. For others, it may be tied in more with being able to do something they love to do. It might also tie in to service, or work, or learning something new.

The secret to finding balance is to know what you value, and how to give it regular attention.

What are some tips for improving balance in your life?

Topics like “Work-Life Balance” have been getting a lot of attention lately, because many people find that they are not balanced. The following are some tips to consider, from various experts:

- What we want changes over time. As one couple who does work with burnout put it, a perfectly balanced life is a myth.⁴ They talk about balance as something that is always changing, because our lives are always changing. It is like walking across a stream on slippery rocks—we have to keep watching and changing our course.
- Focus on reaching one goal at a time. Some people find it easier to focus on details. Instead of saying “I want more balance with my family time and the other parts of my life,” they set a goal to have some time with at least one special person in their lives every day. Or they make it a goal to do one thing that is fun every day, or to feel like they reached a goal at work every day. The focus of each day (or week, or month) can be a different one of those goals.
- Do not wait for a better time to try something, for a different phase of your life. Don’t tell yourself, “I’ll find more balance when I retire” or “I’ll get to that when the kids are grown” or something like that. We do not know how much time we have, so balance should be a focus in the present, every day.
- Keep trying, without being too hard on yourself if things are not balanced. It is not about whipping yourself to find balance. In fact, it may be easier to find if you are gentle with yourself. Be careful to have realistic expectations.
- Talk about balance with others. How do your friends and coworkers find balance? What can you learn from them? What can you teach them?

What is the “Integrative Whole Health Health Grid?”

This was created by a person who felt like he was caught in a tug-of-war when it came to different parts of his life. He showed his health care team a grid he made, using all the white self-care circles from the Circle of Health. It looked like this table:

Day	Nutrition & Diets	Physical Activity	Personal Development	Meaning & Purpose	Surround-ings	Sleep & Rest	Power of Mind	Family, Friends, Coworkers
Monday	X	XX	X	X	X		X	X
Tuesday	X	XX	X	X		X		XX
Wednesday	XX	X	XX	X	X		X	X
Thursday	X			X		X	XX	X
Friday		XXX		XX		X	X	X
Saturday	X	XXX	XXX	X	XXX	XXX	X	XXX
Sunday	XX	X	XX	XXX	XX	X	XX	XX



At the end of each day, he would rate himself in each area of self-care. He gave himself one mark (X) if he did at least something helpful that day, two (XX) for above average days, and three (XXX) if he really felt something went well. What he found was that it really helped him to balance different things if he could look over several days and see if something was low on X's.

He also noticed some other patterns, which was helpful. For example, he found he concentrated time with family and taking care of his surroundings on weekends. He also noticed that he liked the social part of his work. It helped him see that he needed to focus on his sleep too; he had been thinking of all the things he was doing, but not about pausing to rest the way he wanted and needed.

For you to consider:

- Consider trying to make your own grid like the one at the bottom of page 2 for a week. Was it helpful? What did it teach you about balance in terms of self-care?
- Is there anything you can do in terms of day-to-day goals to help you feel better about an area of your life?

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**

For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
University of Wisconsin Integrative Health	A variety of handouts on Personal Development	https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/integrative/resources/modules/

Books on Balance

- Drago RW. *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life*. Boston, MA: Dollars & Sense; 2007.
- Kelly M. *Off Balance: Getting Beyond the Work-Life Balance Myth to Personal and Professional Satisfaction*. New York: Penguin; 2011.
- Molloy A. *Stop Living Your Job, Start Living Your Life: 85 Simple Strategies to Achieve Work/Life Balance*. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press; 2005.
- Johnston RK, Smith JW. *Life Is Not Work, Work Is Not Life: Simple Reminders for Finding Balance in a 24-7 World*. Berkeley, CA: Wildcat Canyon Press; 2001.
- Sunnarborg MT. *21 Keys to Work/Life Balance: Unlock Your Full Potential*. Michael Thomas Sunnarborg; 2013.

If you do a web search on "Balance in Life," you can find lists of ways to increase balance in life on a number of popular websites.



This handout was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Adam Rindfleisch, MPhil, MD, Director, Integrative Health Program, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health.

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References

1. Lipworth WL, Hooker C, Carter SM. Balance, balancing, and health. *Qual Health Res.* 2011;21(5):714-725.
2. Greenhaus JH, Collins KM, Shaw JD. The relation between work-family balance and quality of life. *J Vocat Behav.* 2003;63(3):510-531.
3. Lunau T, Bambra C, Eikemo TA, van der Wel KA, Dragano N. A balancing act? Work-life balance, health and well-being in European welfare states. *Eur J Public Health.* 2014;24(3):422-427.
4. Sotile WM, Sotile MO. *The Resilient Physician: Effective Emotional Management for Doctors and Their Medical Organizations.* Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 2002.