

Mind, body and working at home - *Work life balance and self care*



Hints, tips and links to keep you and your teams calm, connected and well

Getting the right balance between work and home life is always important but especially now when many of us are living and working at home and it's easy for boundaries to become blurred. Finding the right balance between your professional and personal life is a good way to protect yourself against the detrimental effects of stress. 'All work and no play will make you sad and grey', so how can you address the balance and make time for self-care?



So what is work life balance?

The dictionary definition of work life balance is 'The division of one's time and focus between working and family or leisure activities.' Sounds simple right? Well it's certainly something that a lot of us could improve to benefit our mental health and wellbeing. According to a report published in 2019 by the TUC, workers in the UK work the longest hours in the EU.



Are you balancing, or spinning plates?

Work stress merging into your home life is a primary indicator that your work life balance is off. It's important that you can separate aspects of your life so you can leave work stress at work and life stresses at home. Getting the mix right between work, family and leisure time is a tricky balancing act and when you don't get it right it can leave you feeling like you're spinning plates which is exhausting.

Advances in technology can certainly work against us. Whilst it's great that we have so many options for keeping connected to those we know and love, ease of access to email and social media in particular are affecting our ability to switch off completely. To focus properly on any aspect of your life so you are looking after your wellbeing and can feel happy and fulfilled, you need to be able to switch your focus.



Improving your balance

A good work life balance doesn't mean structuring your time out equally between professional and personal commitments. Life doesn't stick to a schedule and children certainly don't! Fluidity is key and what works well for you today may not be quite right tomorrow, so you have to be willing to flex and adapt but you can set yourself some boundaries that will help you to address your balance.



Top tips

- Be mindful about where you choose to work at home – you may not have a separate office but try not to base yourself in a room you would usually spend your evening in
- Follow a routine during the day – having regularity in your day like you would expect if you are working in an office will help you come to a close more easily
- Switch off and pack away – stick to your working hours and pack your things away at the end of the day – to make a physical separation. Out of sight out of mind
- Plan an activity for the end of the day – some experts suggest actually walking out of your house for a mini commute can help end your working day. Why not plan to do something in the evening like a family and friends zoom call or an online fitness class.

Take some time to look after number one

Part of your balancing act is making sure that you look after yourself so you can be at your best. A little bit of self-care can go a long way to improving your wellbeing and the way you feel as well as helping you relax and get some down time from daily life. It's not selfish; it's something you actively need to do to balance your mental, emotional and physical health and although it is frequently overlooked, it can really help you to refuel, reduce anxiety and improve your mood. Self-care has been described by some as the key to leading a balanced life – if you don't look after you, how can you look after or support others?

Here's a self-care check list from Psych Central you could follow to make sure you're spending enough time looking after the most important thing – you!:

- Create a “no” list, with things you know you don't like or you no longer want to do. Examples might include: Not checking emails at night
- Eat healthily – make sure you have a nutritious and well balanced diet
- Get enough sleep - adults usually need 7-8 hours of sleep each night
- Exercise - it's as good for our emotional health as it is for our physical health. It increases serotonin levels, leading to improved mood and energy
- Try using relaxation exercises and/or practice meditation



- Spend enough time with your loved ones
- Do at least one relaxing activity every day
- Do at least one activity you love every day, such as reading, cooking, crafting, gardening – this list is endless
- Look for opportunities to laugh – laughter is great for relieving tension and stress and can boost your immune system

Self-care activities could involve something as simple as listening to a piece of music you love or reading a book. You could have a relaxing bath, go for a walk or spend time in the garden. Any interest you have that you enjoy doing will give you a break and chance to refocus, clear your mind and re-energise.

If you like challenging yourself and trying new things, why not have a look at the LV= 30 Day Challenge as part of your self-care routine. It includes 30 activities you can try that don't need to take up a lot of your time but have lots of benefits for your wellbeing. The tasks are designed to help improve either physical or mental wellbeing, so just pick the ones that interest you the most and see how you get on. You don't have to do them all and you don't have to limit yourself to one per day either if you're feeling adventurous!

1. Spend an evening listening to your favourite music 	2. Try Meditation 	3. Enjoy a Bath 	4. Spend an evening star gazing 	5. Cook something new 
6. Read a book 	7. Do a yoga pose 	8. Try a new fruit 	9. Complete over 5000 steps 	10. Write your top 5 favourite things to do 
11. Set up a video call with friends 	12. list 3 things you are grateful for 	13. Have a dance off 	14. Tap into your creative side and paint something 	15. Get an early night 
16. Give journaling a try 	17. Drink only water for a day 	18. Have a sneaky afternoon nap 	19. Have a phone free evening 	20. Watch your favourite film 
21. Play a board game 	22. Take part in a virtual quiz night 	23. Learn something new 	24. Take a night off social media 	25. Try to juggle 
26. Support a small business by shopping online 	27. Recognise someone 	28. Bake something 	29. Try a face mask 	30. Listen to a podcast 



Balancing the pressures of work, family and life in general is difficult for everyone and sometimes the scales are going to tip one way more than the other. Making sure you're practising self-care so you can be at your best is a great way to ensure you're ready to tackle balancing all the aspects of your life, so that you have time and energy to focus on and enjoy the things you love in equal measure. These are unusual times and we're all doing what we can so make sure you're not too hard on yourself and look out for number one.

Useful links and further reading

- Worklife Balance – what it is and tips to help you achieve it
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/work-life-balance>
<https://www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/how-to-achieve-a-worklife-balance/>
- PHE – Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing>
- What is self care
<https://psychcentral.com/blog/what-self-care-is-and-what-it-isnt-2/>

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