



NEW JERSEY
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Tips for a Balanced Lifestyle

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Family, friends, work, school, health, and well-being. How do you balance it all? It's all very important, to a greater or lesser degree but how can one possibly manage a plate that's so full? Moderation and knowing yourself/what you want can help you to find a path that is balanced. This will in turn lead to well-being and happiness. We all know what we look and feel like when we are overworked, stressed, and burnt out. But, do we know what balanced, healthy, and happy looks like? If not, it serves to follow that we can't achieve that balance until we know what that would look like for each of us. This requires identifying our values and what we imagine our "balanced, satisfying lifestyle" might look like. Here are two exercises to help you identify this:

1. Imagine you could fast-forward to 5 years from now and look at your ideal life. What would it look like? How much time would you be working, playing, and taking care of your health? What would you be doing that you are not doing now? What do you wish you wouldn't be doing?
2. Another, albeit more macabre, way to look at this is to ask yourself, if you died and someone was eulogizing you, what would you hope they would say about your life and what would you hope they would not say? The things you hope they might say about your life are the things you value. And what you hope they won't say are the "issues" or things you need to address in your life. This can help you identify what's really important to you and what you want in life.

Once you've identified what you want or what balance would look like for you, the next step is how to make that happen. It's important to remember this is a work in progress. Some changes may happen immediately while others may require more foundation. For instance, adding a five minute mindfulness practice to the beginning of your day may be easy to implement. Getting promoted may take longer to accomplish, but may still require daily attention. Try thinking about things in terms of "have to's" and "want to's." Things like work, cleaning, and other obligations are things you have to do. Things like recreation, self-care, and spending time with friends and family are likely things you want to do. Some may be both, in which case you are lucky! The point is to mix it up, and strive for balance between what you want to and have to do. Each day, there should be at least one thing you want to do, but ideally there should be more. While all of this sounds good in theory, how can we make this happen? Here are some tips.

1. First, prioritize. It's important to get the hard things done first and the easy things last. This can help with procrastination.
2. Identify things you love to do and set aside scheduled time for them to happen.
3. Try to cut down on tasks that waste your time, like internet browsing or gossiping at work.
4. Do something that makes you feel accomplished and masterful each day.
5. Consider outsourcing chores like cleaning or make use of supermarkets that may deliver your groceries.
6. Try to let go of perfectionism and figure out what would be "good enough" in accomplishing tasks of low priority.
7. Look at your schedule and restructure it.
8. Be efficient, do one thing in the moment and you will waste less time.
9. Schedule recurring pleasant activities like an exercise class, haircut, after dinner walk or monthly massages.
10. Make weekends and vacations count. Make sure to set limits around working during these times.
11. Let go of the need to be productive at all times. It's OK to just sit outside and listen to the sounds of nature.
12. Give children more responsibilities and household chores as is developmentally appropriate.
13. Try to make work and chores fun with music or games.
14. Track how you spend your time and protect your down time.
15. Plan vacations early in the school year to have something to look forward to and help you carve out the year with balanced time off.

Finding and maintaining balance in your life can be tricky, but it's not impossible. Keep your eye on the prize, expect that you may need to remind yourself to follow these guidelines and revisit how you manage your time frequently. Remember to "mix it up" meaning try to accomplish multiple pleasant and work-related activities throughout the course of the day. Smartphone Apps can help remind you to take a moment to pause, keep track of daily activities, or offer guided meditations. One app that can help with time management is Flat Tomato. This free app enterprises on the Pomodoro technique developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980's. The technique uses a timer to break down work into intervals, traditionally 25 minutes in length separated by short breaks. The app lets you set a timer for tasks and helps you time your breaks as well. It can help you to be more productive, focused, and on-task by taking regularly scheduled and reasonably timed breaks. Other helpful apps include Pacifica, Stop Breathe and Think, or 7s Meditation, all free.