



SPOTLIGHT ON YOUR SPINE

A Liberty publication



STAND UP FOR YOUR LIFE

It's time to relook your
office-bound lifestyle

TIGHTROPE WALKING

Finding a balance
between work and play

A BALANCING ACT

Most of us have crazy, busy lives juggling too many roles and responsibilities. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But an equilibrium is possible.

Modern men and women lead very full lives – sometimes too full. We play various roles – as a worker, as a spouse, as a parent, as a carer for elderly parents, as a cleaner and housekeeper, and as a person with hobbies. All too often, these different functions conflict with each other and they place stress on us as individuals, families and employees. At work, our office hours tend to be long. And even when we are at home, technology has made it difficult for us to leave our work behind at the office. We are constantly checking in or updating something via our mobile devices – sending emails and text messages and making or taking phone calls – and the limited time families get to spend together is disrupted. Unless we can assert some sort of control over our lives and separate our home and work life, this behaviour can cause overload and work-family conflict.

There have been many studies on the question of finding a balance between our work and home lives. In most cases, our caregiving roles take second place to our work roles, making us feel guilty that we are neglecting our loved ones in one way or another.

At work, the main sources of stress include long hours, job insecurity, lack of support, work demands, job dissatisfaction, conflict, and communication technology. Global issues of poor economic growth and high unemployment also play a role.

These difficult job conditions make it hard for employees to coordinate work and family life, and they have been linked to health risks such as depression, weight gain and increasing smoking and alcohol consumption.

As workers face these physical and mental challenges, employers are also affected by issues such as absenteeism, loyalty, performance and productivity costs. As a result, some have put wellness programmes in place to give their staff members something a little extra. Some offices, for example, offer lunchtime exercise classes, massages, healthy eating advice or more holidays. Other incentives include flexible work location and times, and more support from managers.

Combining a good career with a great family life and interesting hobbies may sound like an impossible dream. After all, there are always going to be compromises and sacrifices on one side or the other.

However, it is possible to limit the damage if work and family are carefully managed. Although

deliberate choices don't guarantee complete control, they can make a difference. Students at Harvard Business School conducted a major study involving around 4,000 executives over a five-year period. Its findings pointed to five main themes that successful business people considered when trying to balance their busy lives.

1. Define success for yourself. Success is not necessarily about money or reputation, it could be defined as spending at least four nights a week at home or making an effort to understand and appreciate family dynamics.

2. Manage technology. Technology gives you flexibility but it also infringes on family time. It's therefore important to set boundaries and decide when, where, and how to be accessible for work. Most executives viewed technology as a good and useful servant, but as a bad master that should not rule your world. Many noted the benefits of making the effort to rather communicate in person.

3. Build support networks. Managing both family and a professional life requires a strong network of supporters. At home, this might mean helping with practical things like shopping or cooking. At work, it might refer to surrounding yourself with the right team. Emotional support, like having someone to talk to, is also important both at work and at home.

4. Travel or relocate selectively. Time management is vital, but so is your location. International work experience may sound

like a good move for your career, but it's not necessarily the right thing for your family. Know that it's ok to say no to an opportunity if it conflicts with other elements of your life.

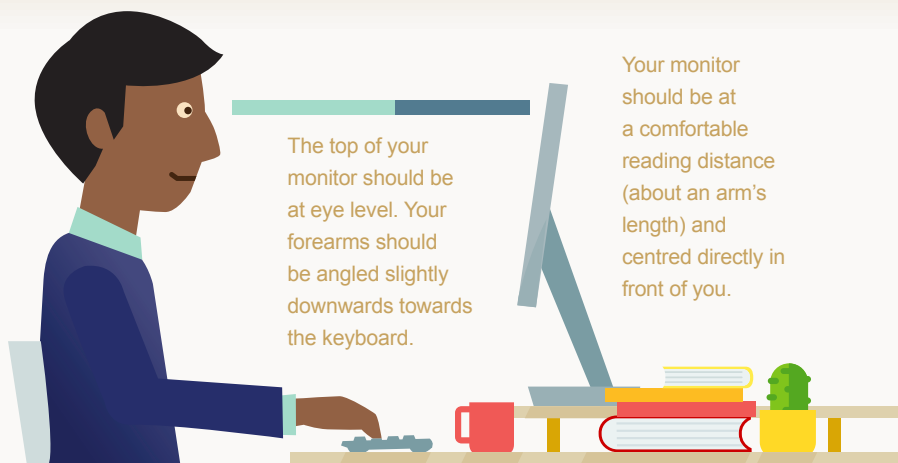
5. Collaborate with your partner. A shared vision will make your life at home and in the office much easier. A couple should ideally complement each other. The pair should understand, believe in and respect one another.

Striving to achieve a balance may not be easy. And life may throw you a curve ball and send your best intentions spinning out of control. However, there is more than one way to achieve success. If you try to look at things differently, maybe you'll be able to regain your feet and create more harmony in your life. Just note that you cannot do it alone.



EVEN WHEN WE ARE AT HOME, TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO LEAVE OUR WORK BEHIND AT THE OFFICE.

Your chair should completely support your thighs, and have a backrest that supports your lower back. Your legs should be bent in a 90-110 degree angle and your feet should be flat on the floor.



The top of your monitor should be at eye level. Your forearms should be angled slightly downwards towards the keyboard.

Your monitor should be at a comfortable reading distance (about an arm's length) and centred directly in front of you.

STAND UP FOR YOUR SPINE

“Sitting is the new smoking,” *Wired* magazine declared. And, although that might be a bit extreme, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that our sedentary, office-bound lifestyles are causing health problems.

Job stress has long been linked to poor emotional health, but now our physical health is also under the spotlight.

Not least, as we hunch over computers and mobile devices for hours on end, we are putting enormous strain on our spines. Quite simply, our bodies are not designed to be in that position for long hours each day.

In addition, most people do not get up and move around to stretch their muscles and get their circulation going frequently enough.

Our spines are vital and rather amazing parts of our bodies. They support our entire frames and provide strength, protection and movement.

Because of its function, the spine is put under a lot of stress every day and it is a frequent site of injury and other problems from normal wear and tear. You don't have to be an athlete to suffer; just working a desk job can be sufficient cause for back, neck and shoulder problems.

YOUR BACK

Back pain is something that most people will suffer from at some stage in their lives.

Lower back pain originates in the lumbar spine. It is usually either mechanical pain (back strain linked to the movement of the spine) or compressive pain (caused by pressure or irritation on the spinal cord).

Back pain can be caused by injury or disease, but you can also get it from bad posture, by sitting, standing, bending or lifting incorrectly. In most cases, it's not a serious condition and it will improve in a few weeks.

To prevent common back pain, avoid putting too much pressure on your back. The most important protective measure is to keep your back strong and supple. Regular exercise is one of the best ways to do this. Routines that strengthen and improve flexibility, like Pilates or yoga, are particularly good.

YOUR NECK

A stiff or painful neck is also a common occurrence, and again it is usually not a serious issue.

Just as you can wake up in the morning with a stiff neck if you slept in an awkward position, you can get a sore neck or muscle strain if you are bent over a desk all day.

Like your back, your neck is exposed

to tension and stress all the time. And, although you may not feel pain at the time of an injury, it can slowly degenerate your cervical spine.

To prevent common neck pain, watch your posture. Learn to sit properly at your desk. Get up and move around regularly, which will also release the rest of your body's tension.

At night, keep your head in line with your body (don't use too many pillows) and don't sleep on your front. Also make sure you have a good, firm mattress.

YOUR SHOULDERS

Shoulder problems are also common and develop from everyday use, overuse and injury. The natural process of aging can also cause them.

The shoulder joint has the greatest range of motion of any joint in the body, making injuries the most common cause of shoulder pain.

Good posture and exercising your arms and shoulder muscles will offer some protection against injury. Also avoid overusing your arm in repeated movements.

(Sources: allaboutbackandneckpain.com, webmd.com, nhs.uk, huffingtonpost.com, healthyliving.azcentral.com)