

Compass

Take a break: regain your best self

Although it can seem heroic to be always on the go and getting a lot done, there's a downside to that whirlwind of activity. If you don't take enough time for breaks, the stress can snowball—and start to sabotage the effectiveness you've been seeking.

Some stress is positive (eustress) and helps propel you forward. However, when stress is prolonged, the repeated triggering of the body's stress response can leave you vulnerable to countless physical and emotional setbacks. A few of these are anxiety, depression, exhaustion, irritability, headaches, stomach problems, sleep disorders and burnout.

It's important to remember that when you take a break—whether it's a five-minute timeout at work, a restful weekend trip or a full vacation/ staycation—you're not dodging your duties. In fact, you're responsibly "recharging your batteries" so that when you return, you're able to be at your best. Breaking up stress improves your energy, clarity of thought, creativity and productivity.

This edition of *Compass* provides:

- Tips for finding time in life to unwind—a common challenge today.
- Ways to attain better work-life balance.
- Ideas for fitting quick breaks into your day that can cut stress.

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Finding the time to unwind

Many people struggle to carve out enough relaxation time. However, restoring your energy and vitality is a necessity, not a luxury. Some tips:

- **Analyze your time.** Plot a calendar week, document how you're spending all your time, and start limiting activities you find draining.
- **Have realistic expectations.** While being the best at everything is a nice ideal, it's not realistic. Instead, ease up on yourself in certain areas, and you'll find more time to relax.
- **Value and preserve free time.** Strive to uphold the commitments in your personal life just as you do those at work. If you've scheduled a nature hike with the kids or dinner out with a friend, don't let those plans get derailed.
- **Seek counsel on reorganizing your activities.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, get some support. Seeking advice from a counselor through your program can help you build a plan for attaining better balance.

Maintaining your work-life balance

Sometimes, achieving the proverbial work-life balance seems about as easy as lassoing a rainbow. The rigors of long working hours and daily commutes, plus responsibilities at home, can seem overwhelming at times. Here are some suggestions for maintaining balance in life.

Stick to your priorities

Identify what you value most both at home and at work. Look for areas where you can set boundaries on your time. Don't hesitate to say "no" sometimes. Keep your to-do lists realistic.

Stay strong

Consider any unhealthy stress relief habits you may have such as eating junk food, smoking or drinking. These don't conquer stress. Instead, focus on getting enough rest and eat a healthy, balanced diet. Get moving by taking walks, riding a bike or doing fun fitness activities at the gym or pool. If you're short on time, get at least a little exercise—it's better than nothing!

Give yourself a break

Where possible, take brief breaks throughout the day to detach from your work. Breaks help you deal with stress and regain mental stamina. Also, don't skip lunch; it provides both a physical and mental recharge.

Insist on some quiet time

Add some rejuvenating downtime—some "me" time—into your daily schedule. Practice a stress-reducing technique such as meditation, yoga, tai chi or aromatherapy.

Do a firm unplug at home

Whenever feasible, fully unplug from work issues when you get home. Your body and mind require a clean break from the day's efforts. Set your phone aside and be truly present with your loved ones. Avoid social media, texting and television prior to bedtime. Screen time at night disrupts the body's natural sleep cycle.

Ideas for quick breaks at work

Breathe deeply. Take 20 or so very deep breaths, in and out, focusing on your breath. This can help you regain balance.

Grab some quick exercise. Zip up several flights of stairs, take a walk around the block or do some push-ups.

Do a five-minute meditation. Sitting meditation is easy to learn and can help you get grounded and feel calmer.

Have a laugh. Finding something to laugh at heartily when stressed can help you feel better fast.

Recharge in place. Stuck in your work area? Take a moment to stand up, stretch, breathe deeply and shake off tension.

Progressively relax. Alternately tense and release all of your body's muscle groups. Start with your facial muscles, then move downward.

