

Are you ticking the work-life balance box?

For many, work-life balance is something they desperately want but don't know how to attain. Others simply don't realise how important it is until it's too late, and their health or home life takes a dive as a result of working too hard.

Leah Lambart of Relaunch Me Career Consulting says, "Everyone seems to be on the treadmill; working late, coming in early, eating at their desks and working weekends. The problem is that lack of work-life balance over an extended period can lead to burnout, which can be dangerous, so it's important to recognise the symptoms ahead of time."

Key indicators that your work-life balance is out of whack

It can be difficult to recognise when you need to focus on restoring your work-life balance, but there are obvious indicators you can be aware of.

Lambart says, "Working for long periods without leaving your desk, taking work home with you every night, checking emails when you should be present with family or friends, working weekends and eating lunch and/or dinner at your desk are all signs that you don't have a good work-life balance."

If you find that you cry easily, you feel increasingly negative, you're losing confidence in yourself or you're feeling detached from friends and family then you could also be heading for burnout.

"More serious symptoms may include consistent health problems such as headaches, back or neck pain, constant fatigue or insomnia." If this sounds like you, it's time to do something about it.

How to improve your work-life balance

- **Examine your situation.** Think about what your most important values are and how you wish to spend your time. Lambart says that once you've established

that, you can brainstorm small changes you can make that will have a big impact overall, such as forcing yourself to have a lunch break several times a week to exercise or meet up with a friend.

- **Manage other people's expectations.** Set boundaries by telling colleagues and clients when you will and won't be working, so they don't expect you to be available 24/7. And be honest about your personal needs. Let your boss know which regular activities in your personal life are non-negotiable, for example putting your children to bed or taking a yoga class.
- **Take care of your health.** Ensure you get enough sleep and exercise by including it in your routine, and make sure to reward yourself for your hard work by treating yourself every now and then. To do this you might need to "delegate where you can, to free up your time for what's most important," says Lambart. "Ask for extra resources if you need them."
- **Learn to say no.** If you need to take your work home with you constantly just to get by, let your boss know that your workload is unsustainable. And if you tend to put other's needs before your own, "learn to say no occasionally to new projects and extra commitments that will eat up your time and won't contribute to achieving your work or personal objectives," Lambart advises.
- **Plan fun activities for your personal time.** Get organised with family and friends, to ensure your personal time is fulfilling. "Turn off electronic devices for a certain time period every evening or weekend so that you can give your full attention to the people and activities that are most important to you," says Lambart. "Try and follow a daily routine that includes some time for yourself every week that's unrelated to your career."