



4 STEPS

Toward Achieving Work-Life and Home-Life Balance

By Sara Taylor, MD

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”
~ Stephen R. Covey

As a forty-something female physician, the concept of work-life balance continues to be elusive to me. Can we truly find a balance between work and the rest of our life, or perhaps to more accurately put it, can we find balance in work-life and home-life?

My husband and I had both of our children during our residencies and first 2 ½ years of my practice, leading me to feel out of balance from the get-go. Subsequently, I have had times during my career when I worked more than I wanted, worked less than I felt I should (notice I didn't say wanted), and more rarely, times like right now, when I feel I am working the right amount. That is one side of the work-life balance equation.

On the flip side, sometimes we can have our work-life balanced but our home-life is imbalanced. I would argue that this is more dangerous, but fortunately may be easier to modify. Can this pendulum ever truly come to rest at its fulcrum?

Finding work-life & home-life balance

Every phase of life has its unique challenges to finding balance, but by incorporating some core principles, we can enable ourselves to strive to achieve that desired goal. The following four steps are a good place to start.

1. Sort out what is important versus what is urgent

I have discussed this concept before in my blog ([Link 1](#)) Key to Stress Management – Time Management, based on the teachings of the late Stephen Covey in his book *First Things First*. My take-away message from this invaluable book is that if we spend more time dealing with things that are important (described as quadrant II), such as planning, preparing and personal development, we



spend less time in the “crisis/deadline” mode (quadrants I and III) that lends itself to feeling frenzied and imbalanced. Covey cleverly describes urgency addiction as “a self-destructive behaviour that temporarily fills the void created by unmet needs.” Some people are drawn to urgent tasks or ideas to maintain a sense of busyness and ultimately, security.

In quadrant II, or the “first things,” the focus is on weekly planning and goal setting. This does not mean to keep an exhaustive to-do list (like I used to), but rather to write down three “must-do’s” each day. You can either do this for work-life and home-life separately, or as I do, approach it more globally. For instance, #1 may be a business meeting which is deemed important for your career and #2 may be getting groceries which is deemed important for your family. Covey accurately states that what is important in our lives is often overshadowed by what is urgent. What we need to do is tease out what is important versus not important and what is urgent versus not urgent.

2. Spend more time being & less time doing

Fortunately, word is getting out that running around proclaiming how busy we are doesn’t serve us or anyone around us. As mentioned above, creating “busyness” often prevents us from tackling the truly important things in life. The easiest way around this is to give ourselves permission to “just be.” In the book, *An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, Drs. Mark Williams and Danny Penman describe our common state of “Doing mode” versus “Being mode.” This constant idea of “Doing” ends up depleting us, leading to exhaustion and burnout. By consciously attending to “Being,” or mindfulness, we are more able to give both our body and mind what they need to be nourished.

Mindfulness, a way of living in the present moment, can radically change our ability to feel calm. It has been scientifically proven to transform our lives by not dwelling on past and/or future events, but rather living in the present. As Williams and Penman say: “Mindful awareness — or mindfulness — spontaneously arises out of this Being mode when we learn to pay attention, on purpose, in the present moment, without judgment, to things as they actually are.” One way to practice mindfulness is through meditation.

3. Incorporate more use of the word “No” into your vocabulary

Ironically, one of the first words we ever speak as an infant ends up being one of the hardest words to say as an adult. As I have discussed in my blog *How to Politely Decline — The Art of Saying “No”*, learning to politely decline without making excuses is essential to finding balance with all things that serve us in life, and in turn, to our overall well-being. It not only helps us set boundaries, but also prevents us from falling prey to other people’s agendas. (Link 2)

4. Prioritize self-care

A) Schedule time for your physical wellness: Physical activity is proven to not only improve your health but also lower your stress level. When we feel we don’t have time for exercise is often when we need it the most. Don’t have time to get to a yoga class? Take advantage of our digital world and follow a yoga class online, for example.

B) Make sleep & rest a priority: First and foremost, when adopting good sleep hygiene do not allow electronic devices in the room where you sleep (it may be unavoidable, such as being on-call). Developing and prioritizing a consistent bedtime routine helps your body and mind get the rest they need.

C) Set digital limits: This is critical in order to achieve some semblance of balance in our digital era. Scheduling device-free time is the only way to truly disconnect. I am trying to adhere to this, particularly in the evenings, when I feel compelled to respond to an e-mail or text. It often disrupts my sleep and as a result I am further behind, not ahead.

Of the above outlined four steps, which one do you consider to be most important for you to achieve work-life and home-life balance?

Resources:

1. Covey, S. (1994). *First Things First*. Free Press: New York.
2. Williams, M. and Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness – An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. Rodale, New York.
3. Stop, Breathe & Think App
4. Headspace App (<https://www.headspace.com>)



Sara Taylor, a family physician for 15 years, currently lives in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada with her husband who is also a physician and their two teenaged children. In March 2013, she started her own blog as part of pursuing her passion related to wellness, physician wellness, personal development and subsequently social media.

She works for the provincial physician health program and has a part-time clinical practice limited to sexual health.

Links:

- 1 (<http://www.saratmd.com/how-to-politely-decline-the-art-of-saying-no-2>)
- 2 (www.saratmd.com)

been long understood that our eyes can get dry when our blink rate is reduced but a 2013 study by Dr. Portello and colleagues at SUNY Optometry revealed that it may not only be the decreased blink rate that exacerbates dryness during computer use but also the fact that some people may not be blinking as fully as they should during certain near tasks. Incomplete closure of the eyelids during the blink can also accelerate dryness because the area of the cornea where the lids do not come together is repeatedly left exposed and its tear layer not properly replenished.

Decrease overexposure to blue light. *Setting screen brightness to half of the available intensity or less can help to reduce the level of potentially troublesome blue light emitted by computer screens and digital devices. Wearing lenses that filter out some blue light is even more effective.*

The screens and lights of today seem whiter and brighter because they emit a higher concentration of blue light than their predecessors. Older computer screens, televisions and even lightbulbs used to emit a high concentration of yellow light. While blue light does seem to make things look nicer, there are some disadvantages to it, especially if we are overexposed to it at the wrong time of day.

Blue light from natural sources like the bright blue sky and from artificial sources like your smartphone can affect a person's sleeping pattern. There are specialized cells in the

retina that sense blue light, and when they do, they signal the body to remain awake and alert. The absence of blue light tells your body it is likely nighttime and time to get some rest and go to sleep. If you are stimulated by an artificial blue light source at the wrong time of day, your body will temporarily

suppress its melatonin production, a hormone that makes the body sleepy and helps to set your circadian rhythm. Experts say you shouldn't be stimulated by artificial blue light sources like tablets, smartphones and computer screens within an hour of your desired bedtime, otherwise you might be shifting your body's sleep cycle to a later than desired time, and that can have negative effects on your health.

Even during the daytime, people should consider limiting their exposure to blue light. Studies have shown that like ultraviolet light, overexposure to blue-violet light specifically may lead to cumulative damage of retinal cells. "We now believe that there is a link to the HEV light (emitted) from our digital screens and damage to the macula," says Dr. Bazan. "I let patients know that a

great way to reduce this risk is to make sure their computer eyewear has an HEV light filter."

The Vision Council says that a staggering "72.5 percent of adults are unaware of the potential dangers of blue light to eyes." Gearing up against blue light by wearing glasses that

9 SIGNS YOU'RE EXPERIENCING DIGITAL EYE STRAIN

Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS), or digital eye strain, is a pretty uncomfortable condition that affects the majority of Americans. To see if you're experiencing symptoms of digital eye strain, here are some key signs to look for.

- HEADACHES**
If you get headaches toward the front of the head or around your eyes, it's another sign that the muscles in your head are strained from looking at digital devices for too long.
- TIRED EYES**
Eye fatigue is another common symptom that especially affects office workers. If your eyes are sore or itchy, it's a good sign you may be overworking them by staring at digital devices for an extended period.
- BODY FATIGUE**
Feeling overly tired and like closing your eyes at the end of the day? It may be your body's way of telling you that your eyes have been working too hard. When your eyes are closed, there is nothing to look at, so the muscles in your head have time to relax.
- FLUCTUATION OF VISION**
This occurs when the muscles in your eyes are so tired from focusing on a digital device from a short distance away that they can't relax when you look somewhere else. As a result, your vision fluctuates throughout the day.
- LIGHT SENSITIVITY**
The muscles we use to focus the lenses in our eyes are also tied to the muscles that control our blink rates. So when light hits our eyes — especially at night — and the pupils contract, it can be painful and cause sensitivity.
- POOR NIGHT VISION**
If it's the end of the day and it's dark, you may experience poor vision due to eye muscles that are overworked from constantly trying to focus on light sources and digital devices.
- DRY EYES**
When people are just walking around, they blink an average of 20 times per minute. When we're reading a piece of paper, it drops to 15. Looking at a computer screen (or a phone or tablet screen) is even lower, which dries out the eyes.
- ITCHY EYES**
Rub your eyes frequently? It may be because the muscles in your eyes are stressed from overuse. This can cause irritation and a sense of itchiness, which is why you want to massage them.
- REDUCED CONCENTRATION**
If you have a hard time focusing on tasks or reading, it may be due to digital eye strain. Since most of the symptoms of CVS are uncomfortable, it causes a distraction.

SEIKO VISION
To learn how you can prevent digital eye strain and these symptoms, talk about your concerns with an eye doctor today.

SOURCE: SEIKO VISION