



# The Challenge of Balance

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*Seek balance.*

*Balance emotions with reason.*

*Combine detachment with doing our part.*

*Balance giving with receiving.*

*Alternate work with play, business with personal activities.*

*Balance tending to our spiritual needs with tending to our other needs.*

*Juggle responsibilities to others with responsibilities to ourselves.*

*Balance caring about others with caring about ourselves.*

*Whenever possible, let's be good to others, but be good to ourselves too.*

*Some of us have to make up for lost time.*

— Melody Beattie

## Today's busy lifestyles

If you think you don't have satisfactory balance in your life, you're not alone. More than a quarter million working women, when surveyed in 1994, said their number one concern is difficulty in balancing work and family.

Over half of these women indicated that "too much stress" was a serious problem for them.

Stress is your body's signal that an area in your life needs attention. When

## CHALLENGES CHOICES

you receive the stress signal, don't ignore it. Often, this alert tells a woman that it's time to rest, acknowledge a limitation, make a decision or meet a need.

When ignored consistently, stress escalates to distress. A permanently distressed woman develops burnout and exhaustion.

She also becomes increasingly vulnerable to physical and emotional setbacks such as anxiety, heart attacks, and ulcers.

A positive approach to managing stress is to develop a balanced lifestyle and become more attentive to personal needs. Yet many women neglect themselves trying to meet everyone else's needs, both at home and at work.

A balanced life can include work, friends, family, play, love, time for self and time for spiritual enrichment. The likely result of such balance is not exhaustion but rather a greater sense of well-being.

This guide can assist you in managing stress and balancing your multiple responsibilities. It discusses the nature, causes, and symptoms of stress; pro-

vides activities to identify stressors and monitor responses; and suggests a variety of preventive and coping strategies. Some of these strategies can help relieve the "pile-up" effect of daily hassles, and some can help you manage long-term distress.

## What is a stressor?

A stressor is any demand on your body or mind. It can have external causes such as the irritability of your boss, or internal causes such as a distorted belief that tells you caring for your needs is selfish.

Stressors can also be pleasant or unpleasant. For example, while losing a job is stressful, so is moving on to a better one. Getting a divorce or getting married to the person you love can also place additional demands on your mind and body.

Everyone is different. Situations that are considered stressful for one person may have very little effect on another person.

In order to better manage your stressors, first learn to recognize your body's signals and identify the causes of your distress.

Use the Daily Stress Record, page 2, to record stressful events, and your body's response to them.

## Daily Stress Record

Event	When it occurred	Stress Signal(s)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Sometimes, a short-term response is enough. Try doing something you enjoy such as taking a short walk, reading from an inspirational book or listening to your favorite music. However, when the stressor is reoccurring, it's time to find a long-term solution. Consider a stressful situation that you are currently facing, think it through and write down your ideas. Often, writing what you think and feel can clarify the situation and give you a new point of view.

### Thinking through a stressor

Stressor: \_\_\_\_\_

What I can change about it: \_\_\_\_\_

What I cannot change about: \_\_\_\_\_

The people who can help: \_\_\_\_\_

The first step I can take: \_\_\_\_\_

My action plan includes the following steps:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If your first attempt to manage the stressor does not work, don't give up. Finding a permanent solution to a highly stressful situation may take some time and effort. Consider the following alternatives:

- ▶ Can you physically change the situation to make it less stressful?
- ▶ If the stressor can't be changed, can you pay less attention to it?
- ▶ Can you lessen the negative impact of the stressor by thinking about any more positive ways to look at the situation?
- ▶ If the stressor can't be changed, what other stressors can you change in order to avoid stressor pile up?

By admitting that there are some situations you can change and some you can't, you can stop wasting emotional energy on those unchangeable situations and put your mind and effort to finding solutions to situations you can control.

### Points to remember about stress

- ▶ Life events don't necessarily cause stress. You have the power to respond either positively or negatively.
- ▶ Many stressors are rooted in your daily habits and the ways that you "talk to yourself" about what has happened.
- ▶ Rigid standards and expecting perfection often lead to stress.

## Stress signals

- ✓ fatigue \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ headaches \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ anxiety \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ sleeplessness \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ anger \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ irritability \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ lack of appetite \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ overeating to cope \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ high blood pressure \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ muscle tension \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ indigestion \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ inability to concentrate \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ depression \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ decreased sexual interest \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ burnout \_\_\_\_\_



▶ Unmanaged stress can cause disease. Examples include ulcers, heart attacks and depression. Other diseases can be caused by habits people acquire in order to cope with stress such as smoking, drinking or drug abuse.

▶ There is a spill-over effect between work and home environments. Distress or satisfaction in one area influences how an individual feels about the other.

▶ A low level of personal control in combination with a high level of demands can create severe stress.

▶ Stress can result from major life events such as a divorce, or from the accumulation of "daily hassles."

Pay attention to how you currently react to life's events. Stress can have a cumulative effect without you realizing it. The pile-up effects of everyday hassles can become very harmful to your mental and physical health if you aren't managing them effectively.

Women's employment outside the home may or may not cause distress depending on the circumstances. If a working mother receives adequate support with household chores and child-care, then outside employment can contribute positively to a woman's well-being. Results from the 1994 National Working Women Count! survey indicated that the majority of women do like their jobs, but they would like to have policies established that are more supportive of family responsibilities.

## Setting priorities

Gaining a greater sense of control over your life can come as a result of thoughtful planning.

Decide what your short-term and long-term goals are and develop realistic strategies to achieve them. Consider the various aspects of your life by asking yourself these questions:

- ▶ What is really important in my life?
- ▶ Who are the important people in my life?
- ▶ What do I want to achieve for myself and my family?
- ▶ How will I give priority to the things that are the most important?

## Stress reduction

To reduce stress and set more reasonable standards for yourself and others, the following suggestions may be helpful to you. Select those from the list that are the most useful to your own circumstances. Work on making one or two changes at a time.

- ✔ Focus on what's really important to you and your family. (Develop a list of priorities.) Try having regularly scheduled meetings to talk about family matters.

- ✔ Practice saying "no" to added demands on your personal time.

- ✔ Involve family members in household responsibilities. Get outside help if necessary.

- ✔ Learn to value yourself and what you do; don't wait for the approval of others.

- ✔ Live in the present; don't dwell on the past or worry about the future.

- ✔ Try to be more flexible and forget about being perfect; you only need to do your best and continue to grow.

- ✔ Build fun and relaxation into your daily and long-term plans.

- ✔ Plan ahead. Allow sufficient time for making important decisions and developing alternative plans.

- ✔ Focus on your accomplishments rather than on your shortcomings.

- ✔ Discard your negative beliefs, and learn to talk to yourself in positive ways.

- ✔ Invest in your health. Eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and sleep enough hours.

- ✔ Learn to listen well, and communicate your needs and preferences clearly.

- ✔ Keep a sense of humor and laugh often. Avoid taking everything too seriously.

- ✔ Learn to negotiate. When faced with conflict, seek solutions that maintain positive feelings.

- ✔ Establish networks of cooperation, support and friendship at work and in your community. Learn to delegate responsibilities to capable others.

- ✔ Learn to accept disappointments, and go on.

- ✔ Let go of anger in physically healthy ways. Brisk exercise is one of the best tension relievers.

- ✔ Do one thing at a time. When faced with a demanding project, break it into manageable steps, and avoid procrastination. Remember to celebrate your small successes.

- ✔ Reduce tension by becoming more organized. At work and at home, adopt methods for keeping track of commitments, due dates, and events.

- ✔ Develop problem solving skills and explore a variety of alternatives.

- ✔ Work with others to establish more family-friendly policies in the community and the workplace.

- ✔ Take advantage of the various human resources in your community.

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For additional information, request these publications from Extension Publications, 2800 Maguire, Columbia, MO 65211; 1-800-292-0969:

GH6641 Family Councils

GH6830 Negotiation Skills

MP636 At Home Alone

MP668 Issues of Today's Changing Work Force

GH6652 Women's Self-Esteem

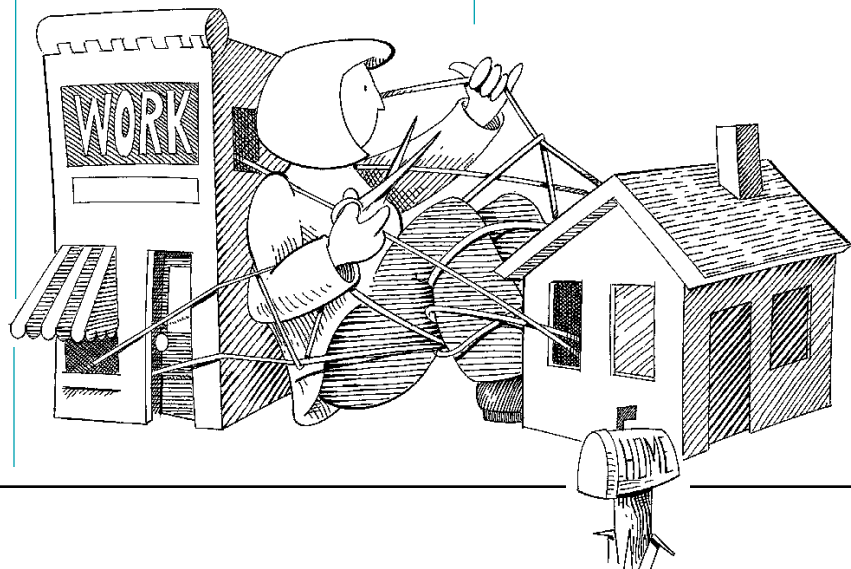
GH6653 Time Effectiveness: Prioritizing Your Time

GH6654 Family Health

GH6655 Fit for Life

GH6656 Deciding to be Healthy

GH6657 Elderly Caregiving



## Community resources

Check your phone book for numbers not listed below.

- ▶ Public library
- ▶ County Extension office
- ▶ Local hospitals
- ▶ Support groups in your area
- ▶ Health care providers
- ▶ Division of social and family services
- ▶ Counselors in your religious community
- ▶ Marriage and family therapists
- ▶ Human Resource Managers at place of employment
- ▶ ParentLink 1-800-552-8522
- ▶ Parental Stress Helpline 1-800-367-2543
- ▶ The Missouri Women's Council (employment and training) 573-751-0810
- ▶ U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Region VII, 1-800-252-4706
- ▶ Career Planning and Placement, MU 573-882-0697

### A parting word —

*It is rewarding to find someone whom you like, but it is essential to like yourself.*

*It is quickening to recognize that someone is good, but it is indispensable to view yourself as acceptable.*

*It is a delight to discover people who are worthy of respect, admiration and love, but it is vital to believe in yourself deserving of these things.*

*You are the only one who you will never leave or lose, and therefore you must learn to take care of yourself.*

— Jo Coudert

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