

# October 2006 Health Bulletin

This publication compiled and edited by the H.E.E.L. Program  
(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff

## *Work-Life: Be In Balance*

### What is Work-Life?

All of us serve many roles in our day-to-day life. We are people with many demands on our time both at home and at work. These demands come from personal commitments such as families and life events. In addition, if we work, as an employee we play a role at a business or organization that has needs and responsibilities. Our employer depends on us to get our work completed for the good of the business. While fulfilling the needs of our employer, we must fulfill our personal needs and commitments as well.

This is where the concept of work-life comes to light. From the view of our employer, work-life is all about helping employees complete work-related tasks to the best of their ability. **Work-life is about creating and maintaining a flexible work environment in which the employee feels supported and focused on work.** Most often, completing good work means we have the ability to balance our work and life responsibilities in a way that meets our personal needs and the needs of our employer.



### What Does Work-Life Have To Do With Health?

What is the first thing that happens when our work-life gets out of balance and our to-do list at work and home is never ending? We feel pulled in different directions, or simply put, we get stressed-out. Too much stress in our lives can have a negative effect on our health. Over time it can result in headaches, back pain, increased blood pressure, and even strokes and heart attacks. In addition to physical health, stress can affect work performance by causing a lack of concentration, feelings of burnout and frustration, lack of sleep and feelings of exhaustion. Balancing the responsibilities of work and life can relieve stress and the symptoms that come with it.

### How Can I Improve Work-Life?

It is true that many areas of work-life are controlled by our employer and the type of work we do. These include flexible starting and ending times, reduced work schedules, compressed work weeks (four – 10 hour days instead of five – eight hour days), working from home or paid time off. However, there are things within our control when it comes to balancing work-life, reducing stress, and maintaining good health. Follow these tips to take an active role in improving your work-life and staying healthy.



- **Explore your options.** A place to begin is call the Work-Life Department if there is one at your place of employment. This office will provide assistance and information about the various flexible work arrangements that are available to employees, work-life friendly policies, and other programs and benefits to help employees balance their work and personal responsibilities.

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- **If your employer does not have a Work-Life Department, you might want to pull out the policy and procedures manual, look it up online, or speak with someone in human resources.** Find out if there are any ways that your employer helps with work-life issues or if there is any room for flexibility. Some things to look for or ask about might include:
  - o Are flexible work schedules available?
  - o Is help given for finding and/or paying for child or elder care?
  - o Are there options for fitness and wellness such as educational classes or discounts at a recreation center in your town?
- **Take care of your own health,** which can relieve stress and give you the energy to balance your tasks at home and at work.
  - o Take a break for physical activity. Try to get in 30 minutes of activity, such as a brisk walk, everyday. Take a few minutes for a stretch break during the day.
  - o Eat a variety of healthy foods. Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy everyday. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and energized.
  - o When you have breaks during the day, use them to reenergize or clear your head. During set breaks such as lunch time, get away from your workstation for a while. Eat in a community area or take a walk.
  - o Plan ahead. Take time to look ahead at your week and plan your tasks. These might include shopping, appointments and the activities of your children. Planning ahead can help you to avoid wasting time that could be better spent accomplishing important tasks.
  - o Take time to enjoy the moments with family and friends. Nurture your relationships by sharing a meal together, sending a card, or placing a phone call.



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