

# life lines

information for your life

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# Get Back to the Basics to Find Balance in Life



These are exciting times. Consider how different life is now than it was in the past. Until the industrial revolution in the 1800s, life was structured by the rhythms of day and night and the changing seasons. Excitement, stimulation, and change were all dangerous, to be avoided. Then imbalance was a sign of danger.

Now contrast this with modern life. All of the wondrous inventions—electricity, the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the internet—have stripped away the natural, external limits, boundaries, and structure that had dictated life in the past. Nowadays, you can do anything, anywhere, with anyone at any time. Life is filled with possibilities.

But this exciting, limitless life can leave you out of balance. Without the soothing structure that guided mankind over the ages, you can become driven by instinctive mental energy. When your nervous system senses that your life is out of balance, it cries out in alarm, as it was programmed to do by millions of years of evolution. You feel more and more stressed, uneasy, and worried.

The answer to this problem is creating a framework to achieve balance in your life. Think

of these seven rules of balance as operating rules for your brain—a guide to a healthy pattern of living.

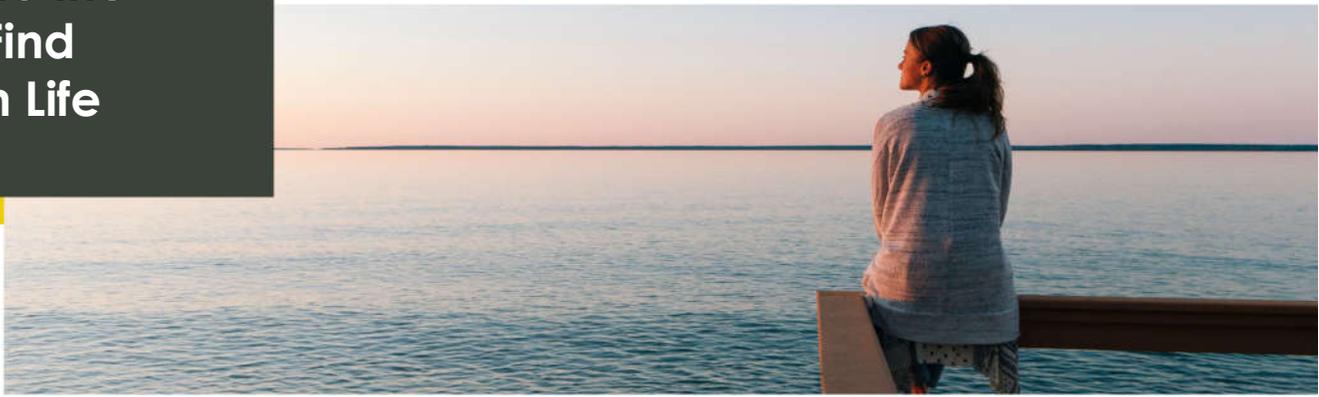
## **1. Balance your time alone and time spent with people.**

Too much of our contact with other people is superficial and virtual—through television, the internet, over cell phones, on crowded city streets, in shopping malls. Even though you may come into contact with dozens of people every day, in reality, you may be alone. Living without the calming structure of a relationship with a person you know and care about leads to depression, loneliness, and frustration.

Balance the overstimulated loneliness of modern life by maintaining at least five close, supportive relationships. Use your natural style to build relationships. If you like music, use it to find people. If you're an athlete, build relationships through sports and activities. If you're an avid reader, build close relationships through a book club. The antidote to today's superficial contact with people is to take time to build relationships based on who you are, and your unique interests and abilities.

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# Get Back to the Basics to Find Balance in Life (Contd.,)



## 2. Balance movement and rest.

If you spend your day sitting— in a car, at a desk, in front of a computer, sitting on a couch watching TV or talking on the phone—you can't feel rested and relaxed. Instead, you'll feel a gradually rising sense of tension and restlessness. You need healthy movement to truly relax.

The human body was designed to move. The purpose of resting is to let one gather strength and energy to move again. If you think of the lives of our prehistoric ancestors, it makes sense: You either moved—to find food, water and shelter, or to escape danger—or you died. In prehistoric times, movement was life.

A regular program of movement—walking, working out at a gym, yoga, dance, tennis, gardening, and so forth—will dissolve the restless tension that comes from a mentally stimulated but physically inactive state.

## 3. Balance living in the moment with thinking about the past.

The time-saving tools available to us—automobiles, mobile phones, the internet—are seductively efficient. They can draw you into a moment-to-moment, overstimulated, and overwhelmed kind of existence. Before you know it, you can lose focus.

Keep your balance by staying focused on who you are—what you've been good at and why you chose to do what you do. Are you doing things in ways that make sense for you? Are you sticking to your plans? Are you maximizing your skills and minimizing your risks and liabilities?

Get a sense of who you are. Then keep a reminder of your skills to orient you to the power of your own experience. Write down three to five activities that

you're good at, that you rely on, and that help you to stay on track. Then, when the action starts to get fast and furious, review your skills to make sure you're doing what's right for you.

## 4. Balance your appetites with energetic abstinence, creative problem solving, and planning.

The natural human reaction to abundance is to consume. For prehistoric people, this was adaptive since times of abundance were rare. Appetites such as hunger, thirst, and sex were signals from the brain that it was time to plan and take actions to satisfy those appetites.

Now many people live in a world of abundance. There are few periods of abstinence between periods of consumption. One's intuition sometimes says that the right thing to do when feeling a strong appetite is to consume. But intuition is wrong in this case. Physiologically, when feeling the stimulation of an appetite, the right thing to do is to plan an activity, carry out the activity, and then to consume.

You maintain balance in the face of the abundance of modern life by using your mind to think, to plan, and to take action instead of to simply consume. The next time you're hungry, give it a try. Go outside and weed your garden instead of eating. Or visit a friend. Or simply take a walk around your neighborhood. Plan an activity and substitute it for eating or drinking when you know that your appetite is greater than your body's need. That's the path to balance.

## 5. Balance thinking and feeling.

Your brain works best through a dynamic balance of thinking and feeling. Feeling, or emotion, is the energy of the mind. It powers action, memory, and

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# Get Back to the Basics to Find Balance in Life (Contd.,)



thought. When thinking is powered by feeling, your life has an elegant balance—it's meaningful and motivating and you know why you live the way you do.

Contrast this with the modern dilemma. Life has become mechanized, routine, and repetitive. Too little emotion and you can become flattened, demoralized, and apathetic. If you're feeling bothered and harassed by the inhumanity of it all, you can lose your patience.

Restore your balance by learning to soothe the inevitable frustrations of living in a mechanized world. Take baths, get massages, or sing in a choir. Anything that calms you will do. Then find out what matters to you. The key is to look back at times in your life when you felt powerful, positive emotions. Remember what you were doing, what mattered to you then, and try to recreate those feelings in your everyday life.

## 6. Balance sleep and waking hours.

Balancing sleep and wakefulness is critical. You need the right amount of sleep to refresh the energy and vitality of your body and mind.

It happened naturally in the past. Without electricity, people slept when it grew dark—in balance with the cycle of day and night, in cycle with the seasons. Now it is a 24/7 world and people are losing touch with the basic biologic need for sleep.

Balance sleep and wakefulness by finding out just how much sleep you need. Keep a chart to discover what amount of sleep feels best. Then get that amount of sleep. Train your sleep cycle by sticking to a regular time for waking, getting

lots of bright sunlight in the morning, and planning your activities so that you're most stimulated early in the day and gradually calming yourself in the hours before sleep.

## 7. Balance belief and doubt.

Every day you're flooded with information, images, and ideas that demand your attention. In our electronic, media-driven culture, every moment of life is dissected, analyzed, and questioned. It becomes difficult to know what to do next. The result is worry.

Belief quiets this worried state of mind. Mankind has long used religious belief as an antidote to worry. Researchers have shown that belief in a positive outcome can help rid you of social anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. And research shows that those who have firm beliefs generally have healthier, happier, and more successful lives.

Balance the cynical worrying of modern life by following some practices that strengthen your ability to believe. Learn to talk positively to yourself and reflect on images of success. Pray if you are religious. Accept guidance. Learn to follow the wisdom of leaders. And follow reassuring ritual—whether it's going to church or reading stories to your children at bedtime. Ritual strengthens your belief by reminding you of the simple but powerful truths of life.

Follow the seven rules of balance and you'll find natural pathways within yourself to live a healthy and meaningful life. Apply these principles to truly enjoy the excitement, possibilities and passion of life.

Sorgi, P. J. (Revised 2019). *Get back to the basics to find balance in life* (L. Zereski & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

# Being Mindful of Your Hunger



Without even realizing it, most people eat without much thought. When you do this, however, you tend to overeat, and you often miss the joy in eating — compelling you to eat more. The simple act of mindful eating is one way you can honor your body yet fill your soul. Check out this hunger-rating scale:

**E = Empty** — You are feeling faint or sick because you are so hungry, as if you haven't eaten for days.

- 1 You are famished and seriously uncomfortable, borderline nauseous.
- 2 You are extremely hungry. Your stomach is growling. You are easily irritated and edgy.
- 3 You are physically hungry — perhaps a bit low on energy and slightly uncomfortable. It is here that you want to eat. Carry snacks and plan ahead so that you are able to honor this hunger and not surpass it and enter the "danger zone."
- 4 You believe that you feel hungry, but signs and symptoms are manageable. You often find yourself poking around the fridge. Ask yourself what it is

that you really need. Maybe you are tired, bored or procrastinating something.

- 5 You feel neutral, though hunger is on the horizon.
- 6 You are comfortable and can eat with control; you could actually stop here, as the hunger pangs have subsided.
- 7 You are feeling full. Stop eating, or don't start eating yet.
- 8 You are feeling too full, because you may have had a few too many bites.
- 9 You feel uncomfortably full and bloated.

**F = Holiday-overeating full** — You are not hungry at all. You never want to look at food again.

### Practice your mindful eating.

Using the scale above, keep track of your hunger patterns on this chart.

TRACK YOUR HUNGER PATTERS			
Rate your hunger when you started eating.	Rate your hunger when you finished eating	What do you remember about your meal?	Were you satisfied?

Remember to slow down. It takes at least 20 minutes for the brain to get the message that you are full, so chew well and slowly, and savor every bite.

Workplace Options Wellness Team. (2017). *Being mindful of your hunger*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

# Building Social Bonds



## Connections That Promote Wellbeing

Strong, healthy relationships are important throughout your life. Your social ties with family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others impact your mental, emotional, and even physical wellbeing.

"We can't underestimate the power of a relationship in helping to promote wellbeing," says National Institutes of Health (NIH) psychologist and relationship expert Dr. Valerie Maholmes. Studies have found that having a variety of social relationships may help reduce stress and heart-related risks. Strong social ties are even linked to a longer life. On the other hand, loneliness and social isolation are linked to poorer health, depression, and increased risk of early death.<sup>1</sup>

As a child you learn the social skills you need to form and maintain relationships with others, but you can learn ways to improve your relationships at any age.

NIH funds research to find out what causes unhealthy relationship behavior. Researchers have created community, family, and school-based programs to help people learn to have healthier relationships. These programs also help prevent abuse and violence toward others.

## What is healthy?

Every relationship exists on a spectrum from healthy to unhealthy to abusive. One sign of a healthy relationship is feeling good about yourself around your partner, family member, or friend. You feel safe talking about how you feel. You listen to each other. You feel valued, and you trust each other.

"It's important for people to recognize and be aware of any time where there is a situation in their relationship that doesn't feel right to them or that makes them feel less than who they are," Maholmes advises.

It's normal for people to disagree with each other, but conflicts shouldn't turn into personal attacks. In a healthy relationship, you can disagree without hurting each other and make decisions together.

"No relationship should be based on that power dynamic where someone is constantly putting the other partner down," Maholmes says.

If you grew up in a family with abuse, it may be hard as an adult to know what healthy is. Abuse may feel normal to you. There are several kinds of abuse, including physical, sexual, and verbal or emotional. Hurting with words, neglect, and withholding affection are examples of verbal or emotional abuse.

In an unhealthy or abusive relationship, your partner may blame you for feeling bad about something they did or said. They may tell you that you're too sensitive. Putting you down diminishes you and keeps them in control.

In a healthy relationship, however, if you tell your partner that something they said hurt your feelings, they feel bad for hurting you. They try not to do it again.

## Social ties protect.

Studies have shown that certain factors seem to protect people from forming unhealthy relationships over their lifetime. The protection starts early in life.

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# Building Social Bonds (Contd.,)



NIH-supported research has shown that the quality of an infant's emotional bond with a parent can have long-lasting positive or negative effects on the ability to develop healthy relationships.

"The early bond has implications that go well beyond the first years of life," says Dr. Grazyna Kochanska, an NIH-funded family relationships researcher at the University of Iowa. The goal of Kochanska's research projects is to understand the long-term effects of that early bond and to help children develop along positive pathways and avoid paths toward antisocial behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

A family that functions well is central to a child's development. Parents can help children learn how to listen, set appropriate boundaries, and resolve conflicts. Parents teach children by example how to consider other people's feelings and act in ways to benefit others.

Secure emotional bonds help children and teens develop trust and self-esteem. They can then venture out of the family to form other social connections, like healthy friendships. In turn, healthy friendships reduce the risk of a child becoming emotionally distressed or engaging in antisocial behaviors.

On the other hand, having an unhealthy relationship in the family, including neglect and abuse, puts a child at risk for future unhealthy relationships.

"One caring adult can make a huge difference in the life of kids whose family structures may not be ideal or whose early life is characterized by abuse and neglect," says Dr. Jennie Noll of the Center for Healthy Children at Pennsylvania State University. "That caring adult could be an older sibling, or a parent, or someone else in the family, a teacher—the kind of people who have a large influence in communicating to the child that they matter and that they're safe, and that they have a place to go when they are needing extra support."<sup>3,4</sup>

Healthy friendships and activities outside of the home or classroom can play protective roles during childhood, too. In fact, everyone in a community can help support the development of healthy connections. Adults can serve as good role models for children, whether the children are their own or those they choose to mentor.

## Helping and Getting Help

At any age, your relationships matter. Having healthy relationships with others starts with liking yourself. Learn what makes you happy. Treat yourself well. Know that you deserve to be treated well by others.

Having an unhealthy or abusive relationship can really hurt. The connection may be good some of the time. You may love and need the person who hurts you. After being abused, you may feel you don't deserve to be in a healthy, loving relationship.

With help, you can work on your relationship. Sometimes in an abusive relationship, you may be advised to get out. Either way, others can help.

If you or a friend needs help with an unhealthy relationship, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at <https://www.thehotline.org> or 800-799-SAFE. If you know a child who may need help, find resources at the Child Welfare Information Gateway at <https://www.childwelfare.gov>.

## How to Help Someone in an Unhealthy Relationship

- Let them know that you're worried about them.
- Listen without judging or blaming.
- Tell them that it's not their fault.
- Offer to go with them to talk to someone who can help.
- Visit <https://www.thehotline.org> for more tips on how to help.

Wein, H. (Ed.). (2018, April). Building social bonds. *NIH News in Health*. U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov>

# Communicating with Your Child



Good communication between you and your child is important for developing a positive relationship. As your child gets older, good communication will make it easier for you to talk to him about things like alcohol and drugs. Good communication with your child can start early. Two skills that are helpful for good communication with toddlers and preschoolers are praise and active listening. You will learn more about these skills in this article.

## Keys to Communicating with Your Child

- Praise your child when she does something right. The more you praise a behavior, the more likely it is your child will behave the same way again.
- Pay attention to your child when he is talking to you or trying to communicate with you. Giving him your full attention will help you understand what he is telling you. It will also make him feel like you care about what he has to say.
- Set aside time each day to talk and play with your child. Creating a special time lets your child know she is important. It also strengthens the bond between the two of you.

## Take time to listen to your child.

When your child is upset, active listening can go a long way in helping your child know that you hear him and understand what he is trying to say. Active listening can also be helpful in calming a situation and preventing a tantrum before it starts!

## Let your child know when you think she has done something good.

Praising your child is an important way to encourage good behaviors. Sometimes it can also help to let your

child overhear you praising him to someone else like a grandparent, teacher, spouse, or even a toy if no one else is around. When the praise seems sincere and honest, it can reinforce good behavior.

## Read with your children.

Reading with your children helps to strengthen their vocabulary, knowledge, and understanding of their world. It also creates opportunities for you and your child to spend time enjoying each other. It is never too early to begin reading to your child, and no book is ever too short.

## Make time to laugh and be silly.

So much of parenting is making sure your children are fed, clean, clothed, and doing what they are supposed to be doing. Taking time to just talk or play with your children shows them how much you care about them and want to be with them.

## Avoid distracted parenting.

In the rush to get everything done, you may find yourself trying to have an important talk with your child while doing a million other things like cooking dinner, folding laundry, or paying bills. Chances are if you are multitasking, your child may be too. He may be playing or doing something else that keeps him from listening. Stop what you are doing and make the conversation a priority. Walk over to your child and talk to him face-to-face. This will help both of you focus on the issue at hand.

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U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (Reviewed 2017, October 2). *Communicating with your child*. Retrieved July 16, 2019, from