

Have you found your BALANCE?

Does one area of your life take up all your time and energy, while another barely gets a look-in? Here's how to level things out

Everyone has different priorities - some are home birds, some social butterflies, others workhorses. OK, enough animal analogies. The point is, that's no bad thing. However, if one area of your life has become all-consuming, it could be making you, or the people you love, unhappy. Find out if you need to redress the balance - and how...

How it works

For the different areas of your life, we've written two statements. Give each a score out of 5 - 1 meaning you strongly disagree, 5 meaning you strongly agree. Add them together for a score out of 10 for each category.

WORK

A My job gives me purpose in life

B I find it hard to say no to my boss

A + **B** =

FAMILY

A I shoulder a lot of responsibility for my family's happiness and health

B I prioritise my family's needs over my own

A + **B** =

SOCIAL LIFE

A My diary is packed with social plans at the start of the week

B A 'quick coffee' with a friend often results in us hanging out for hours

A + **B** =

HEALTH

A Considerations about my long-term health affect my day-to-day life

B I'm religious about sticking to healthy habits

A + **B** =

HOBBIES

A I can lose hours absorbed in my hobby

B Friends would describe me as 'obsessed'

A + **B** =

The results

If you scored 4-6 for an area of your life, it's probably in balance. Good for you! If not, read on for advice on how to even things out...

WORK

IF YOU SCORED 3 OR LESS...

Your job isn't a priority. And hey, that's OK. 'However, work can give a sense of purpose, which is pleasurable,' notes Chartered Counselling Psychologist Jessica Valentine (brightonwellnesscentre.co.uk). Want to boost your work mojo? 'Meet a friend weekly to discuss career goals. Being accountable to someone is powerful,' says Jessica.

IF YOU SCORED 7 OR MORE...

Your job may be taking over. If you feel other areas are suffering, Jessica says routine is key: 'Start and finish work at the same time every day and only work within those hours. Set an alarm as a clear reminder to clock off.'

FAMILY

IF YOU SCORED 3 OR LESS...

Family commitments probably don't take up much of your time. Depending on your circumstances, that may make complete sense. However, if you - or your family - want more QT together, Jessica suggests this tactic to reprioritise. 'Think five years ahead: Got kids who'll have done lots of growing up? Elderly parents who may no longer be around? What memories do you want? This reminds you how precious 'now' is.'

IF YOU SCORED 7 OR MORE...

It's important you carve out me-time. 'Set aside one day a week to do something just for you,' says Jessica. 'Write it in your diary, then verbally affirm it (ie, 'Today is Tuesday. I do netball on Tuesdays') to make certain that it happens.'

Did you know?
A quarter of professionals are unhappy with their work/life balance

HOBBIES

IF YOU SCORED 3 OR LESS...

You may not have any hobbies. Understandably. Life's busy. However, Jessica notes: 'Hobbies keep you connected with other people - and yourself.' Need inspiration? 'Think back to what you enjoyed when you were a child. Revisiting something you used to love can help you experience that carefree childhood feeling again,' explains Jessica.

IF YOU SCORED 7 OR MORE...

You're probably a fanatic about your hobby, which is cool - as long as other areas of life aren't sliding. 'If you're not performing well at work because it has taken over, it's worth reframing your job as something that facilitates your hobby, by allowing you to afford it, which might motivate you,' notes Jessica. 'Mind you, if you're that passionate about a hobby, it's worth considering whether it could be a career!'

HEALTH

IF YOU SCORED 3 OR LESS...

You may have slid into unhealthy habits. 'The secret is working out what motivates you, as people are driven by different things,' says Jessica. For example, focusing on the fact that exercising more may help you shift a few pounds won't inspire you if you're happy with the size you are. Drill your motivation down to one short sentence: 'I want to be able to run around with my kids' or 'I want to live longer', for example - and say it to yourself when your resolve waivers.

IF YOU SCORED 7 OR MORE...

It's commendable that you're health conscious but if you never cut yourself any slack, you may be missing life's pleasures. 'Having a calendar where you schedule all your activities can help,' suggests Jessica. 'If you can see you have plenty of exercise planned and evenings in to cook healthy meals coming up, you might find it easier to allow yourself an indulgent meal out or a lazy evening, without worrying about falling off the wagon.'

SOCIAL LIFE

IF YOU SCORED 3 OR LESS...

You may find it hard to pin down pals meaning that you never catch up and feel disconnected. The key, says Jessica, is never finishing one meet-up without fixing the next in your diaries. 'The momentum of regular plans is easier than arranging something from scratch,' she says, 'plus consistency in a relationship means you develop stronger bonds.' Diaries at the ready.

IF YOU SCORED 7 OR MORE...

You're seriously gregarious, which is lovely. But an overactive social life can become a chore, so pencil in plenty of downtime. 'If you're prone to letting plans with friends overrun, decide on a definite start and finish time, and communicate it beforehand,' suggests Jessica. It can be helpful to have something scheduled in right after - work or an appointment, for example - to help you stick to the timeframe.