

Health Promotion / Wellness / Psychosocial

Work-Life Balance

On this page

[What is meant by work-life balance](#)

[Why is it important to maintain a good work-life balance?](#)

[What are work-life balance initiatives?](#)

[Why should a workplace consider these programs?](#)

[How does a workplace implement work-life balance initiatives?](#)

[What are some steps to take when setting up a program?](#)

What is meant by work-life balance

There are often two main aspects associated with work-life balance – the first is lack of time and scheduling conflicts, and the other is feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles. Balance is not necessarily about splitting time equally, but rather that the individual feels fulfilled and content with both aspects of their life. Work-life conflict occurs when the overall demands of work and personal roles are incompatible in some respect making participation in one role more difficult by participation in the other role.

Health Canada has identified four broad categories associated with work-life balance:

- **Role overload:** This form of work-life conflict occurs when the total demands on time and energy associated with the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too great to perform the roles adequately or comfortably.
- **Work-to-family interference:** This type of role conflict occurs when work demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill family-role responsibilities (e.g., long hours in paid work prevent attendance at a child's sporting event, preoccupation with the work role prevents an active enjoyment of family life, work stresses spill over into the home environment and increase conflict with the family).
- **Family-to-work interference:** This type of role conflict occurs when family demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfill work-role responsibilities (e.g., a child's illness prevents attendance at work, conflict at home makes concentration at work difficult).

- **Caregiver strain:** Caregiver strain is a multi-dimensional construct defined in terms of "burdens" in the caregivers' day-to-day lives, which can be attributed to the need to provide care or assistance to someone else who needs it.

From: [Reducing Work-Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?](#), Health Canada, (2008)

Balance is also one of the identified psychosocial risk factors that can impact an individual's [mental health](#).

Why is it important to maintain a good work-life balance?

Each person can be affected differently based on factors such as frequency and duration of work, the nature of the job or role, roles outside of work, etc.

When an individual must spend more time at work, they may experience any combination of the following:

- [Work-related musculoskeletal disorders](#), including the impacts of [psychosocial factors](#)
- Occupational injuries
- [Fatigue](#)
- [Burnout](#)
- Poor [mental health](#) effects such as [stress](#), depression, anxiety, etc.
- Job dissatisfaction
- Absenteeism
- Lower quality of work

When an individual must spend more time with other roles, they may experience any combination of the following:

- Missed work or lower quality of work
 - Job dissatisfaction
 - Loss of income
 - Boredom
-

What are work-life balance initiatives?

Simply put, work-life balance initiatives are any benefits, policies, or programs that help create a better balance between the demands of the job and the healthy management (and enjoyment) of life outside work.

Work/life initiatives can potentially deal with a wide range of issues including:

- [disconnecting from work](#)
- on-site childcare,
- emergency childcare assistance,
- seasonal childcare programs (such as March break or holidays),
- [carer friendly initiatives](#), including assistance to a child, relative, close friend, or partner who needs help because of physical, mental, or cognitive conditions,
- referral program to care services, local organizations, etc.,
- [flexible working arrangements](#),
- parental or family leave
- other leaves of absence policies such as educational, volunteer, community service, self-funded, or sabbaticals,
- [employee assistance programs](#),
- on-site seminars and workshops (on such topics as [stress](#), nutrition, [smoking](#), communication etc.),
- internal and external educational or training opportunities, or
- fitness facilities, or fitness membership assistance (financial).

Why should a workplace consider these programs?

The need for balance is essential. Studies on work/life balance programs have reported such benefits as:

- attracting new employees,
- helping to retain staff,
- building diversity in skills and personnel,
- improving morale,
- reducing injuries, illness, and absenteeism,
- enhancing working relationships between colleagues,
- encouraging employees to show more initiative and teamwork,
- increasing levels of production and [satisfaction](#), and

- decreasing stress and burn-out.
-

How does a workplace implement work-life balance initiatives?

Work/life balance plans cannot be a one size fits all model. There are many factors to consider such as the different generations at work, age, culture, family needs, and socioeconomic status.

Work/life balance initiatives can be part of a complete health and safety or a health promotion program in the workplace. The initiatives can be written as part of existing health and safety policy, or particular guidelines can be referenced in the overall company human resources policy or the collective agreement (if applicable).

Meeting both the 'workers' and overall business needs requires a significant commitment from senior management. Each workplace should tailor its work/life policies to suit their own particular needs and corporate culture. This 'best fit' should be done with frequent consultation with workers. As with other health and safety programs, for work/life initiatives to be successful and sustainable, both employers and workers must take responsibility for making the program work effectively. An evaluation or feedback systems should also be part of that process.

What are some steps to take when setting up a program?

When starting, it is best to appoint an individual or in some cases, form a joint work/life balance committee. To research needs and to implement the program, suggested steps to take are as follows:

1. Assess the workplaces' current situation and objectives.
 - Survey workers, supervisors, and managers.
 - Ask about needs, concerns, etc. Find out about underlying concerns (e.g., workers report not being able to cope with workplace stress. What is the true source of this stress?)
2. Get support from all levels of the organization. Educate all members of the workplace about the benefits and challenges of introducing these programs. Be clear on the intentions and goals of the program. Provide any necessary training or education to help these address concerns.

Some common concerns or challenges that may need to be addressed include the misconceptions that:

- people should keep their personal lives at home,

- being present equals being productive or that hours at work equals high performance or results,
- benefit programs can make people happier, but not more productive,
- family-friendly policies are soft human resources issues, mainly for women,
- management will lose control,
- it's only for non-managerial positions,
- one program is good for everyone, or
- participation will be a career-limiting move.

3. Be clear how hours, productivity and deadlines will be monitored. Address fears and apprehension expressed by both employees and managers. Be sure that workload issues are resolved and set realistic targets.

4. Create a comprehensive policy or guideline:

- Clearly state its use and purpose.
- Be clear about the impact on vacation time, compensation and other benefits, if any.

5. Initiate a trial period and/or pilot studies.

6. Monitor, re-survey, and make any adjustments that are necessary.

- Act on recommendations for modification or for further enhancements.

Please see the OSH Answers document [Workplace Health and Wellness Promotion - Getting Started](#) for more information about establishing a workplace health or wellness program.

(Adapted from: [Comprehensive Workplace Health Program Guide](#), CCOHS)

Fact sheet last revised: 2022-10-26

Disclaimer

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.