

## The Importance of a Work-life Balance

People generally believe that the more hours one works, the more work one accomplishes—but this conventional wisdom may be flawed. According to a 2014 survey conducted by the charity Working Families, Britons put in some of the longest full-time hours, not just in Europe, but across the globe as well. But these long hours do not always translate into greater productivity. In fact, working those extra hours can leave both your mind and body vulnerable to the deteriorating effects of stress—which increases your chances of developing heart disease and mental-health issues.

The Working Families survey found that 9 per cent of working parents never leave work early. More than half of survey respondents attributed their gruelling work schedule to employer expectations and workplace culture.

Sometimes working late is an unavoidable reality—but not always. Working Families established Go Home on Time Day in September 2014 to encourage healthier work-life balances. Go Home on Time Day encourages workers to ask themselves: Do I have a healthy work-life balance?

However you balance work and life responsibilities, you can always improve. Follow these five tips to improve your work-life balance:

- 1. Just say no.** You are only capable of completing so much in any given day, and there is a delicate balance between quality and quantity. Know what your limits are, and stick to them.
- 2. Leave work at work.** There is little point to going home at the end of the day if you still check email and work on projects after hours. Those tasks will still be waiting for you when you come in the next day, so it's OK to let them wait.
- 3. Forget about perfection.** You need to acknowledge that not everything you do will be absolutely perfect—and that is acceptable. Focusing on perfection can lead to undue stress and anxiety. Sometimes 'good enough' is sufficient.
- 4. Do not be a martyr.** You are not invincible nor are you a one-person team. You have co-workers who can help carry the load. So, work as a team, with each member sharing responsibility.
- 5. Set your own rules.** Work in a way that makes you comfortable and not according to others' unrealistic expectations.

**Working long hours does not mean higher productivity. Instead, it means a greater chance of heart disease and mental health issues.**



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## Managing Your Mental Health

Despite mental health problems being the number one cause of illness absence at work, there still is a stigma about vocalising mental health struggles. It is for this reason that Time to Change, England's largest programme to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination, organised the Time to Talk Day campaign. The focus is simple: Take five minutes out of your day to talk about mental health.

Mental health affects our mood and performance the same way that our physical well-being does. Neglecting to treat these issues can worsen work performance, negatively impact personal and professional relationships, and cause our physical health to deteriorate. Starting a conversation about your struggles with mental health can be daunting, but the alternative—silence—can be toxic. Silence can encourage your fears and anxieties to grow—forcing you to retreat and suffer. Discussing these issues with a co-worker, friend or GP helps drain the power mental health struggles have over your life.

Knowing how to start is the most difficult part of any conversation. Follow these five tips to make it easier to discuss your mental health:

- 1. Start small** – Not every conversation has to be formal. Sometimes, something as casual as talking about your morning can be a good start to discussing your mental health.
- 2. Say what you really feel** – Knowing what to say is not always simple or easy—especially when it is about mental health. Regardless, explain what you are experiencing as clearly as possible without relying on clichés that may mask how you are truly feeling.
- 3. Find out more** – Your mental health is important and you may want to consider looking into how you can manage it or how to discuss it with your doctor or those close to you.
- 4. Give yourself time** – While those close to you may be ready to discuss your health, you may not be. If you are feeling anxious about starting the conversation, give yourself some time.
- 5. Think about what you want** – Come up with what you feel is an ideal plan for getting your mental health back on track, and then when you are ready, discuss this plan with your doctor and/or those close to you to put it into action.



Safety in  
**NUMBERS 1<sup>2</sup>3**

**1 in 6 individuals suffer from anxiety, depression or stress**

Source: British Safety Council



## Real-life Case Study

At any given time, Bridget, a project manager at a London software development company, was in charge of at least half a dozen projects as well as being responsible for just as many clerical and managerial duties.

However, unbeknownst to her co-workers, she suffers from anxiety and depression. As she took on more projects and more responsibilities, her mental health disorders began to erode her personal relationships and her work performance.

One day, during an intense anxiety attack, Bridget drove her car off the road. After that, she talked with her manager, explaining her struggles with her mental health. He convinced her to see a mental health professional, and together they were able to develop a plan for an appropriate, healthy work-life balance.

Now, Bridget does not let her depression and anxiety overwhelm her. Had she not discussed her mental health issues with her manager, and then met with a mental health professional, she may not be on her way to a more positive, healthy place in her life.