

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Scheduling your time

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average American spends roughly 26 minutes commuting by car from their homes to their workplaces on a typical weekday and four hours doing housework or caring for children or other dependents. Add in sleeping, and there's not much time for personal pursuits.

Scheduling may sound boring, but it can be a useful tool in helping to make time for the things you really want to do with your time.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

The key to easing time pressure is to eliminate some of the forces pulling you in so many different directions, and weeding out those that are complicating or distracting you from leading a productive, happy life.

Decide on Your Priorities

Be they attending your children's sports activities, spending more time with your spouse or working out at the gym, make sure to schedule time for the things that are important to you. Making a "date" with your spouse or entering the trip to the gym as an official item in your day-timer might seem mundane, but it will help ensure that these events don't become victims of the time squeeze.

Make sure your goals are realistic. Remember that no one has time to do it all. Learn to say "no." Be diplomatic, choose your words carefully and suggest alternatives or a reorganization of priorities when others try to infringe on the time you've set aside for yourself.

Make a Personal Time Survey

Keep a log of what you do each week, including the following:

- Hours of sleep
- Time for grooming
- Meals (including preparation time)
- Working hours
- Travel time on weekdays and weekends
- Regular clubs, get-togethers, classes, children's activities, etc.
- Time for chores and errands, e.g., grocery shopping

Once you have the log, ask yourself what can be cut to make time for other activities you would like to do.

Five time-saving tips for work

1. Do the most difficult tasks when you're most focused and have the most energy.
2. Make to-do lists, that way you don't waste time worrying about which task has to be done next.
3. When you're overloaded at work, cut back on your other commitments.
4. In meetings, give the attendees your undivided attention. Ignore phone, pager and e-mail messages, when possible.

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5. Schedule uninterrupted time so that you can concentrate on one task at a time. Arrive early or stay late at work, if needed, and forward calls to voice mail where possible. Politely suggest that talkative coworkers tell you their stories over lunch.

Scheduling Tips for Home

Involve your family in time-scheduling decisions. For example, if your children's extracurricular activities are becoming unmanageable, ask them to choose their top one or two activities. Or, have a family discussion to plan the week's activities to ensure schedules run smoothly.

Allow for uninterrupted "family time," a time when you will concentrate on nothing else but your family. For example, leave the answering machine on at dinnertime, so that you're not jumping up from the table. The meal will become a relaxed time for family bonding.

Set boundaries between home and work. Don't let coworkers call you at home, and discourage receiving lengthy phone calls from friends and family at work.

Time scheduling is really about knowing what is important in your work and home life, and ensuring it gets the attention it deserves. Try some of these tips today for a more balanced and rewarding life.