

Balanced Living

January 2022



DOWNTIME: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR BREAKS

You're rushed. You're overbooked. You're going at top speed. Yet the more you do, the less you seem to get done. But there's a way to stop this stressful cycle.

"Pull the plug and give yourself some downtime," suggests Maryann Troiani, Psy.D., a psychologist in Barrington, Ill., and co-author of "Spontaneous Optimism: Proven Strategies for Health, Prosperity and Happiness." "Everybody needs some time just for themselves, to refresh and recharge both mentally and physically. When you come back after a break, you feel better and you work better, too."

Dr. Troiani defines downtime as a "break from the gottas -- as in I gotta do this and I gotta do that." It's unstructured and usually unplanned time when you do something you really want to do -- or, even better, nothing at all. She prescribes at least one hour of downtime two or three times per week.

Most Americans don't get even this small amount of time to themselves. "Even when you're alone, there are too many ways the world can intrude on you and vice versa -- cell phones, e-mail, voice mail. All those distractions dilute your creativity and energy," she says.

People also become experts at multitasking. Juggling family, career and other demands leaves little time for oneself.

Those lucky enough to have leisure time often believe they have to fill it with hobbies or errands. "But that's not downtime," says Dr. Troiani.

By the same token, you're missing the point if you obsessively schedule periods of downtime at the same time each week, whether you're in the mood or not.

Instead, just go with the flow. Give in to that urge to take a walk or to pick up that book you've been wanting to read. Pour a cup of tea and stop to watch the sunset.

Find the Time

"Don't think of downtime as goofing off," says Dr. Troiani. "It's an investment that helps you get control of your life -- particularly of the stress and tension. It calms down your body and makes your mind more focused so you can deal with things more effectively."

Even when you give yourself permission, though, it can still be hard to spot opportunities to take a break -- at least at first. The following suggestions can help you find more time for yourself:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cut the cords. Don't feel you have to respond to every signal from the outside world. Turn off your computer and leave the cell phone behind.• Say no to "emotional vampires." "People who use you as a sounding board for whining and complaints can drain away a lot of your time and energy," says Dr. Troiani. If someone is constantly coming to you with gripes, set boundaries. Tell the person you have only five minutes, then use the time to focus on solutions.• Play hooky. Look over your daily routine to see what's truly important and where you might cut yourself some slack. Can you miss that meeting or put off that trip to the store? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brown-bag it. Instead of fighting the crowds at the cafeteria, bring lunch from home and find a quiet, pleasant place to enjoy it. Use the extra time to take a walk.• Seize the moment. The best downtime opportunities are often unplanned. Open your mind to what's happening around you and be willing to respond.• Free your mind. Worries and other negative feelings can keep you from enjoying your downtime. To get rid of the clutter, visualize a vacuum cleaner as it pulls the bad feelings out of your head.• Relieve the pressure. Don't expect too much of your downtime. The point isn't to write the great American novel, it's just to relax. Keep your expectations simple. |
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"Listen to your inner voice," advises Dr. Troiani. "See what your mind and body need at that moment. You don't need to make a lot of plans -- just do what feels right."

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MAKE HEALTHY EATING A HABIT

When Jodie Shield's three children order fast food, they know the rules: They can eat fries only once a month, and "super size" is never an option.

The earlier you teach children such sound habits, the more likely they are to maintain a healthy weight. But helping a child learn the right skills takes patience and repetition. "Parents need to be vigilant," says Ms. Shield, a Chicago-area dietitian and coauthor of *The American Dietetic Association Guide to Healthy Eating for Kids*.

Well-meaning parents often fear their children are eating too little rather than too much. Overfeeding starts as early as the toddler years.

For toddlers, serve a tablespoon of vegetables per meal for each year of age. Pennsylvania State University professor Leann Birch, Ph.D. says that may help head off future struggles over getting your child to eat vegetables.

Snacks should be healthful, just like meals. Make produce a key element. Vary the selection of fruits and vegetables to introduce children to new foods. Between ages 2 and 6, children fear new foods, and it may take several tries. But if you don't make the effort, Ms. Shield warns, your kids may never develop a taste for healthful foods.

Nine easy steps:

1. Add volume to high-fat foods so kids feel satisfied without getting too many calories. For example, top a frozen pizza with mushrooms or broccoli.
2. Have a plan for eating out. Choose fast-food restaurants that offer salads and order low-fat or fat-free dressing.
3. Let children choose lunch foods to take to school. Tangerines, grapes, apples, bananas, carrot sticks, raisins, or graham crackers are healthy, enjoyable examples.
4. Don't let children leave home without breakfast. At least serve a piece of fruit, whole-grain cereal, or a slice of whole-grain toast.
5. Take children grocery shopping and let them choose a new fruit or vegetable.
6. Stock the refrigerator with fruits and vegetables, such as berries and low-fat plain yogurt for making smoothies.
7. Play with food. Vegetable "faces" made from carrots may get a child's attention.
8. Don't ban popular snacks like chips; kids may sneak them. Just buy small amounts and offer them less frequently.
9. Urge kids to trade soft drinks for water and make sure the soft drinks they do get are diet drinks.

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LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT: GREAT WAYS TO MOTIVATE YOUR TEAM

Being a facilitator -- making it easier for your team members to do a better job -- will make you a more competent team leader.

"Rather than telling people what to do, effective leaders help bring out the best in their team members," says Andrew J. DuBrin, Ph.D., a management professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York, and author of *The Breakthrough Team Player*. "One way to succeed is to perfect your coaching style. As a coach, you can make on-the-spot suggestions and offer team members encouragement."

Supporting Your Team

Following these tips will help you improve your effectiveness as a team leader:

Provide specific feedback - Pinpointing behaviors, attitudes and/or skills that need improvement will help you coach a team member to perform at a higher level.

Help your team devise a mission statement - Creating such a statement can help team members focus more clearly.

Be supportive - Providing emotional support and encouragement can help a leader improve the work of team members who aren't performing at their best. Just being helpful may be enough.

Be a model of what you expect - An effective leader spurs others to act appropriately by setting an example. For instance: Cooperating with people from other organizational units will encourage team members to do the same.

Foster teamwork - Promote the attitude that working together effectively leads to success for everyone. Refer to those in the group as team members or teammates instead of subordinates or employees. Make frequent use of the words "we" and "us." For example: "We achieved the new sales goal."

Encourage team members to treat one another as customers - Most people treat customers with more respect and concern than they do fellow employees at or below their levels. Encouraging team members to treat each other as customers fosters cooperative behavior and politeness.

Bring team members together for meetings, meals and occasional parties - Schedule most get-togethers during regular office hours so you don't intrude on people's personal time.

Emphasize that yours is a winning team - Frequently remind team members that their work is important. Help them identify tasks they're particularly good at and promote them as key members of the group. Build the commitment and confidence of each team member. "For the group to develop a strong team spirit, individuals must feel a sense of mutual accountability," DuBrin says. "Frequently reminding team members of what they're doing right is one way to build commitment and self-confidence."

Emphasize group recognition - Giving rewards for group accomplishments promotes team spirit by enabling team members to take pride in the entire team's contributions and progress. "Consider creating a display wall for postings of team activities, certificates of accomplishment and upcoming events," says DuBrin. "If you have room in your budget, you might want to order T-shirts, athletic caps, mugs or key rings imprinted with your team name or logo."

Don't keep the best assignments for yourself - Doing this dampens team spirit and hampers performance. "Look for opportunities that will allow other team members to perform at a high level," DuBrin says.

Welcome all input - Team spirit increases when everyone contributes. DuBrin says, "It's especially important that the leader not allow one or two people on their team to do most of the work."

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National Birth Defects Prevention Month

January is recognized by the CDC as National Birth Defects Awareness Month. While we all hope for a healthy pregnancy, there are steps that women can take to lower the risk of birth defects. Even if you're a partner or family member, you can still educate yourself on how you can help.

Why do birth defects happen?

Birth defects are structural changes that can impact any part of the body. Some are unavoidable, but there are changes women can make to lead a healthy pregnancy. Reasons for birth defects include:

- Genetic or hereditary factors
- Infection during pregnancy
- Drug exposure during pregnancy
- Environmental impacts

What can I do to prevent birth defects?

Testing has come a long way to prepare parents for how their genetics may impact their unborn child, but it's still outside of one's control. A pregnant woman can take several steps to ensure any environmental impacts on her and the child are lessened, such as:

- Take a prenatal vitamin daily, especially one that contains 400mcg of folic acid
- Manage diabetes, blood sugar levels, and your physical activity
- Avoid alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes
- See a healthcare professional regularly

Modern medicine and science have ensured that children born with birth defects can grow up and live full lives. However, it's still important to ensure that you and the people around you are taking the necessary precautions to ensure a healthy pregnancy. This will give your baby a great start and provide peace of mind.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/awareness-month/before-during-pregnancy.html>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/12230-birth-defects>



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Bullying Prevention

Emotional wellbeing and awareness can be taught to our children, the same way we teach ourselves every day to increase self-esteem. Studies show that more and more students every year experience bullying behavior that makes them feel uncomfortable at school. You always have the power to stop bullying before it escalates. Adults who respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior send the message that it is not acceptable.

One out of every five (20.2%) students report being bullied.

41% of students who reported being bullied at school indicated that they think the bullying would happen again.

The first thing that parents, school staff, and other adults in the community can do to help kids prevent bullying is create opportunities to talk about it. One of the best ways to help a victim is ensuring there is open communication and trust. When this is established, the victim will not only feel comfortable discussing bullying with you, but also see you as support system and resource.

In order to build a safe school environment, it's important to create a community-wide bullying prevention strategy. Victims can better prevent bullying, when they understand what bullying is and how they can identify it. Defining bullying will help victims learn what to look for and how to better stand up to bullies in a safe manner. While you may not be able to prevent bullying from happening directly, giving the victim tools and strategies will help restore their confidence and empower them to protect themselves and stand up to bullies in a safe way.

To help prevent bullying in your community follow these tips:

- **Spot the Bullies** – Boys and girls can be bullies. Boys bully more often and are more likely to experience physical bullying. Girls are more likely to experience emotional bullying and sexual harassment
- **Know the Targets** – Those who are labeled as weak, depressed, or unpopular are more likely to experience verbal abuse.
- **Make the effort to stop it** – Stop, look, and listen to all of the early warning signs and build a checklist of ways to communicate.

[Read more](https://www.mhanational.org/bullying-tips-parents) about strategies that will build your child's self-esteem and prevent bullying before it starts:

<https://www.mhanational.org/bullying-tips-parents>

Bullied students indicate that bullying has a negative effect on how they feel about themselves (27%), their relationships with friends and family (19%), their school work (19%), and physical health (14%).

Sources:

<https://www.teachthought.com/technology/7-ways-to-prevent-cyberbullying/>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/how-to-prevent-bullying>

[National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019](#)

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/info/stats.asp>

<https://www.mhanational.org/bullying-tips-parents>

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach.

Here for you as life happens





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The Importance of Blood Donation

January is a critical month for the American Red Cross, who is responsible for roughly 40% of the national blood supply. The entire month is recognized as Blood Donor Month to drive participation and gather as many blood and platelet donations to save lives all around the world. On average, the Red Cross needs to collect more than 13,000 donations every day to keep the blood supply ready and available to meet the needs of about 2,500 hospitals, clinics and cancer centers across the country.

2022 is a turning point for the Red Cross, in terms of an emergency blood shortage. With COVID-19 and similar variants still a major part of society today, donor turnout has reached record lows and has decreased by about 10% since August 2021. All eligible donors are strongly encouraged to donate a pint of blood at their local blood drive in January to help overcome the current shortage.

"We recognize that this is a trying time for our country as we balance the new demands of returning to former routines with the ongoing pandemic, but lifesaving blood donations remains essential for hospital patients in need of emergency and medical care that can't wait. The Red Cross is working around the clock to meet the blood needs of hospitals and patients – but we can't do it alone."

Chris Hrouda

President - Red Cross Biomedical Services

QUICK FACTS

Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood. Those needs do not diminish during disasters or pandemics.

About 38% of the U.S. population can donate blood — but only 10% actually do.

There are two ways those who have recovered from COVID-19 can make a big difference:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A convalescent plasma donation: The Red Cross is collecting convalescent plasma at over 170 locations throughout the country. If you've recovered from COVID-19, you may be eligible to donate your plasma to help others going through COVID-19 treatment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A whole blood donation: Plasma from whole blood donations that test positive for COVID-19 antibodies may be used to help COVID-19 patients. |
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Schedule an appointment to give blood or platelets as soon as possible by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org) or calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767). All blood types are needed.

Sources:

<https://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/press-release/2021/emergency-blood-shortage-donor-turnout-reaches-lowest-levels.html>

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/how-to-donate/how-blood-donations-help/blood-needs-blood-supply.html>



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Recipe: Slow Cooker Butternut Squash and Farro Chili

Ingredients

- 2 lb. butternut squash, peeled and diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 (15 oz.) cans diced tomatoes
- 3 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 (15 oz.) can black beans, drained
- 1 (15 oz.) can cannellini beans, drained
- 1 ½ cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup farro, rinsed
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. salt

Directions

1. In a 6-quart slow cooker, add butternut squash and the rest of ingredients, cover and place on high for 3 to 4 hours or low 6 to 8 hours.
2. Spoon chili into bowls and add desired toppings. Enjoy!

Nutrition

Per serving: Each serving (1 ½ cups) contains about 323 calories, 8.5g sugar, 1,566.5mg sodium, 1g fat, 0g saturated fat, 67.1g carbohydrates, 14.5g fiber, 13g protein

Source: <https://www.eatyourselfskinny.com/slow-cooker-butternut-squash-and-farro-chili/>

Eat Strategically!

Proteins - meats/fish, dairy, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds - take longer to digest than carbohydrates, so you feel full longer. Discover ways to easily incorporate more protein into your diet with the tips below:

- ***Start with breakfast*** - replace cereal with eggs.
- ***Eat greek yogurt*** – it has twice as much protein as traditional yogurt.
- ***Add protein to your salad*** – try chicken, salmon, cheese, beans.
- ***Plan easy on-the-go-snacks*** – try nuts and seeds.

Action: ***Think ahead*** – include a high protein food at every meal.

Ghosting at Work (Abandoning Communication)

You may have heard of “ghosting” by now. It means someone has quit communicating with you entirely without apparent cause or reason. You might phone, email, or text, but no response is received—you’ve been ghosted. Ghosting has been associated with the dating app scene, but this behavior has noticeably crept into the workplace. Essentially, ghosting is abandoning communication to avoid conflict, responsibility, or accountability. What fuels ghosting is using denial to cope with the anxiety or awareness that you should be doing something else to face the conflict constructively. Poor workplace communication is universally the #1 workplace complaint, so ghosting is the ultimate poor communication maneuver. Avoid ghosting by recognizing it as a coping strategy with serious consequences for your reputation. There’s no better way than ghosting someone to be remembered for the wrong reasons.

Is Your Team Too “Teamy”?

Workplace teams periodically struggle with problems that interfere with their performance. Lack of leadership, unresolved conflicts, and, of course, communication struggles are part of team growth. But what about *lack* of disagreement, no debate over ideas, or no constructive arguing that can lead to better solutions? Inability to challenge each other is referred to as “groupthink.” The term reflects on Orson Wells’ book, “1984.” Groupthink makes team harmony more important than productive work and sees cooperation as the ultimate value. Solutions then take a back seat. To be a solution-producing group, value the creativity, uniqueness, and independent thinking of your group members.

Avoid “Procrastination with Awareness”

Have you started on your 2022 goal(s)? Or are you procrastinating with the best of intentions? Procrastination has many cousins. They all lead to having your motivation fizzle out. Waiting for the right time to start, still getting prepared, waiting until after the next holiday, or trying to get everything in order and just right—this procrastination “with awareness” requires its own intervention. If you are waiting for just the “right moment,” it’s arrived! Take an action step today.

Seek Support Early in a Crisis

All of us will experience crises in our lives from time to time. A crisis is a serious problem that is beyond our ability to resolve by using everyday coping skills and resources. It overwhelms us. Its irresolvable nature means we must apply new resources or skills to intervene and return to normalcy. This is crisis intervention. There is usually an opportunity for positive change and personal growth in resolving a crisis, but help should not be delayed, because the crisis may resolve itself out of your control in an unfavorable way. Use the employee assistance program to explore options or to obtain the help needed to help manage a crisis. If you do it without delay, you will more likely arrive at the most desirable outcome.



Facing an Anniversary of a Traumatic Event

Do you experience anxiety, depression, or sadness during the anniversary of a personal loss or traumatic event? This is an “anniversary effect” around the date or season when a loved one passed, an assault occurred, or an accident happened. Local or national tragedies may also prompt anniversary effects. As an employee, you may find it challenging to work or you may lack the motivation to complete your assignments during such a time. If you experience a difficult time when a painful anniversary comes around, ease your emotional distress with an action plan: 1) Don’t deny or ignore the upcoming date of the event in an attempt to suppress a reaction to it. 2) Identify relationships that feel supportive, and plan to socialize with these people during this time. 3) Consider engaging in a symbolic gesture of healing—for example, planting a tree or adding a special plant to a garden—if a significant personal loss, like that of a loved one, occurred. 4) Avoid news stories during the anniversary period that can prompt unnecessary flashbacks or feelings of reliving the event or incident. 5) Take care of yourself. Make healthful decisions, and do some self-nurturing during the period of the anniversary to help you ensure a proper diet, sleep and rest, stress management, and leisure time. 6) Visit your EAP for guidance on implementing any of these tips, self-care strategies, and other support you might need.

Getting Help for Post-Holiday Financial Stress

You knew the bills from holiday spending would eventually arrive, and now they are here. One out of five families goes into debt during the holidays, but has debt grown over the years with your inability to get a handle on it? Consider using a consumer credit counseling agency for help. Wait! Suspend all preconceived notions about consumer credit counseling agencies. They won’t scold you, fuss, or tell you only things you already know. They have tips, resources, knowledge, relationships with creditors, credibility to help you communicate with debtors, counseling, education, and budgeting tools that will excite you about the future again and give you the relief you’ve only dreamed about until now. Ask your EAP about local resources, or visit the nearest credit counseling agency location online.

Maintaining Morale in the Hybrid Workplace

“Hybrid workplaces”—those with on-site and remote workers—have grown dramatically in the COVID-19 era. They can be a win-win for employees and employers, but be mindful and avoid “remote worker bias.” This is the tendency to view remote coworkers as inherently less worthy. This form of workplace classism based on perceived level of contribution or importance can lead to morale problems and decreased productivity if unhealthy competition for resources, benefits, awards, and information becomes part of a “we versus them” culture. To prevent slipping into remote worker bias, 1) avoid participating in biased “water cooler” gossip about remote coworker performance, 2) share information and opportunities with remote workers to elevate and value an inclusive workforce, and 3) meet with off-site workers so you see the “real person” frequently or whenever possible. This reality check will help keep a wall from growing between you and your coworkers.

When Worry Wakes You Up

Anxiety and stress are different things, but people often are confused about their meanings. Both can contribute to wakefulness at night, night sweats, and nervousness as well as sleepiness during the day. Both can also affect the part of the brain responsible for our fight-or-flight response. While examples of stress might be driving to work in the rain, arriving late for a presentation, and forgetting a thumb drive you need for the presentation, anxiety is a true mental health disorder that fuels nervousness, worry, and apprehension. Are you one of the 40 million people who suffer from anxiety, or is stress the culprit? Talk to a medical, mental health, or employee assistance professional to discover the right intervention and get relief

Here for you as life happens ...

