

Balanced Living

December 2023



Less is More: How to Simplify Your Life

Life today is complicated. Most Americans are pulled in multiple directions every day by commitments to their families, workplaces and communities.

Many people have responded to the pressures of modern life by seeking ways to consciously simplify their routines and attitudes at home and work.

"The goal of living a more simple life isn't to arrive at a static point in your life but to become skilled at balancing your personal relationships, workplace issues, finances and other demands," says Heather G. Mitchener, co-author of **The 50 Best Ways to Simplify Your Life**.

Being in the Moment

One way to simplify your life is to practice mindfulness—to slow down and recognize and appreciate the simple things in life. To be mindful instead of mindless, stay in the moment and be conscious of what you're doing. Don't think ahead or look back.

"When we look ahead constantly, we not only rush through the less pleasant tasks, we also tend to hurry through the things we love to do, because we're always thinking or worrying about what we have to do next," says Ms. Mitchener.

A good way to practice being in the moment is to follow your breath, a technique that doesn't require any special training or self-consciousness. To breathe mindfully, take notice of your breaths and try to make them as calm and even as possible. Your breaths should be long and slow and should come from your diaphragm rather than your upper chest. Pay attention to each breath, letting thoughts fall away.

"You can do this exercise any time you think of it," says Ms. Mitchener. "Make it a goal to be mindful, in general, but also set aside short periods to practice. This will improve your ability to make mindfulness a habit. As you learn to live this way, you'll feel more centered."

Slow Down

If you feel like you have too much information in your life, stop subscriptions to magazines, newspapers, or emails you rarely have time to read. Leave the radio and TV off unless you're really listening to something that matters to you. Turn off your cell phone unless you're making a call or waiting for one that's important.

To reduce the amount of "stuff" in your home, ask yourself these questions before you buy something: Do I really need it? How often will I wear or use it? Where will I store it? Is there a reason why I must buy it?

Get Organized

Begin by sizing up the problem areas in your home or workplace and making a plan of attack. If you're easily discouraged, start with a small, confined area, such as a single drawer. Otherwise, target an area that gives you the most grief. Your goal should be to clear out clutter that causes you to waste time—a hall closet that has become a catchall for everything from clothes to sports equipment.

Learn to focus at work. Multitasking can be an asset, but often the lack of focus it requires means you actually get less done in a day, or less done well. To increase your focus and break free from distractions:

- Begin each day by setting priorities on what you want to accomplish.
- Check email at set times, rather than letting each new message interrupt you.
- Set aside a time to retrieve voice mail and return calls.
- Keep a calendar of your deadlines and obligations.

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Developing Empathy and Compassion to Avoid Division in the Workplace

The increased diversity and division in our culture these days makes empathy and compassion in the workplace an even more critical skill for employees and employers to develop. Without empathy and compassion, the workplace would be an emotional battlefield where no one would feel safe to share their ideas or concerns, ask for what they need to improve their work, or have a healthy work-life balance for fear of being fired. Empathy and compassion are the cornerstones to creating a work environment that promotes healthy interaction, positive morale, and a sense of feeling valued in the workplace. In fact, according to research conducted by McKee, David, Chaskalson, and Chussil in 2017, increased empathy impacts our work effectiveness, thereby improving our skills as workers and managers.

The general consensus among researchers is that empathy is the ability to sense another person's emotions, while also being able to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. Empathy is the foundation of compassion, which is defined as the concern for the suffering or misfortune of others and a desire to alleviate that suffering. In other words, empathy is identifying and sympathizing with what the other person may be experiencing and feeling, while compassion is the act of helping that hurting person either physically and/or emotionally.

Many corporations have been utilizing employee trainings with a focus on developing the five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Emotional intelligence is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as: "The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically." Although empathy is not an attribute that all people are born with, it is a skill that can be learned by using self-awareness and mindfulness to notice how our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors affect those around us. Empathy is also gained through the process of reading non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.

According to PositivePsychology.com, there are eight strategies to developing empathy:

1. **Cultivate curiosity** about the people you interact with who may come from different religious, ethnic, or political backgrounds.
2. **Step outside your comfort zone** and learn something new, which can foster feelings of humility and lead to empathy.
3. **Ask for feedback from others** regarding your active listening and relationship skills, and identify areas that you can improve.
4. **Examine how your biases** impact your capacity to empathize when you make judgments about others who are different than you.
5. Spend time with others who you usually don't connect with and practice active listening to help you **"walk in their shoes."**
6. Practice having **difficult but respectful conversations** with those who have different points of view by listening without interruption and being open to new ideas.
7. **Work on a shared cause** with people different than you. Research has shown this can help to heal differences and **remove biases**.
8. **Expand your reading** and expose yourself to different points of view through a variety of articles, books, and newspapers.

As we become more mindful of the way we treat others, we can take responsibility for doing our part to create a more accepting and validating environment in the workplace. Developing the skill of empathy, which is a necessary step to compassion, is crucial to promoting the evolution of a supportive and thriving workplace atmosphere.

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Finding Time for Rest and Relaxation

Some people feel like they have to be productive or doing something all the time. It can be difficult to find time to rest and relax with looming to-do lists and various responsibilities. However, try to make it a priority to incorporate some downtime in your daily life. When you know you need a break, give yourself permission to relax and recharge.

Finding Balance

You can't—and shouldn't—be productive all the time. Life is about finding balance. Don't feel guilty for giving yourself a break at times, especially when you really need it. And how do you know when you really need a break? Luckily, our bodies have a way of letting us know when rest is needed, so work on being in tune with yourself and listening for these signals.

Monitor Your Stress Levels

A certain amount of stress is healthy and manageable. It can be a driving force to get things done. However, too much stress can wear you down and isn't good for your overall wellbeing. When you start to feel your stress levels are more than you can manage, give yourself a break and incorporate relaxing activities into your day. What activities help you destress and take your mind off your to-do list? This is different for everyone—maybe it's reading a good book, taking a bath, getting some exercise, calling a friend, or taking a nap. By letting yourself rest when you need to, you'll be more productive and clear-headed when you are tackling your to-do list.

Schedule Relaxation into Your Day

You can help yourself feel more balanced in daily life and proactively avoid stress overload by scheduling downtime into your week. For instance, if you know you're going to have an extra busy week ahead, find time in the evening or on the weekend for some self-care. It's always nice to have something fun to look forward to, and you can even use this as motivation to cross items off your to-do list. Use your downtime wisely by allotting time to recharge and practice self-care.

Practice Mindfulness

When you are engaged in a leisure activity, be fully present. If you catch yourself worrying about what happened yesterday or what you have to do tomorrow, bring your focus back to the moment. Focus on the sights and sounds of wherever you are. You can plan to do something relaxing, but it will not actually be relaxing if you are worrying the entire time. Cultivate an ability to be in the moment, without rushing through it or worrying about what comes next.

Exercise and Relaxation Go Hand-in-Hand

Incorporating regular movement into your day helps manage stress levels and can make you feel more relaxed. Aim to engage in some form of physical activity most days of the week. If you spend most of your day sitting at a desk, take regular breaks to get up and stretch or walk around when possible. Find a workout buddy to hold yourself accountable. Even if you're not working out together, you could plan to check in with each other or use an app to share workouts. Notice how you feel after you get your blood pumping a bit: Often, exercise increases focus, can help you feel more clear-headed, and decreases stress levels.

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Webinar Now Available:

Relaxation Rx

Most of us feel too busy to even think about taking time out to relax. But the reality is that regular relaxation is crucial. If we don't stop regularly to "refuel," we risk emotional and physical burnout. Even a small investment of 5-10 minutes a day can have a huge return. This webinar will include demonstrations of relaxation techniques that provide immediate as well as long-term benefits. We'll also learn how to detect burnout "triggers" and discover ways to regain a sense of balance and motivation. You will leave feeling recharged and better able to tackle daily demands.

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Tie One on for Safety

In our fast-paced world, it's easy to get caught up in the rush of life and forget the importance of safety. That's why "Tie One on for Safety" is a health observance worth highlighting. This campaign, which takes place during the holiday season, serves as a reminder to make responsible choices when it comes to alcohol consumption and driving. It's a time to spread awareness and promote a culture of safe and responsible celebrations.

As we approach the holiday season, it's essential to remember that the roads can become more dangerous due to increased festivities and alcohol consumption. "Tie One on for Safety" encourages us to tie a red ribbon on our vehicles as a symbol of our commitment to making safe choices. It's a simple yet powerful gesture that can potentially save lives.

Drinking and driving is a dangerous combination, and its consequences can be devastating. Not only can it lead to accidents and injuries, but it can also result in legal trouble and lifelong regrets. By participating in this observance, we demonstrate our dedication to being responsible citizens and protecting ourselves and those around us.

Here are some tips to "Tie One on for Safety" effectively:

Designate a Driver: Before going out for a night of celebration, appoint a designated driver who will abstain from alcohol. This ensures a safe ride home for everyone.

Use Rideshare Services: In this day and age, rideshare services like Uber and Lyft make it easier than ever to get a safe ride home after drinking.

Plan Ahead: If you're hosting a party, consider offering non-alcoholic beverages and ensuring your guests have a sober ride home. Encourage responsible drinking.

Spread the Word: Share the message of "Tie One on for Safety" with your friends and family to raise awareness and encourage responsible choices during the holiday season.

Let's make the "Tie One on for Safety" campaign a part of our holiday traditions. By doing so, we can help create a safer environment for everyone and ensure that the season's joy isn't overshadowed by tragedy. Remember, it only takes a moment to tie a ribbon on your vehicle, but it can make a world of difference in keeping our roads safe.



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Setting Positive Goals Beyond Exercise

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, it's the perfect time to reflect on our aspirations and set positive goals that promote overall wellbeing. While fitness resolutions are common, focusing on holistic self-improvement, like learning a new skill or picking up on new hobbies, is equally essential. Let's explore how to set these positive goals for the upcoming year.

Improve Relationships

Consider setting a goal to nurture relationships with friends and family. Allocate quality time for meaningful conversations, engage in regular catchups, or plan memorable experiences together. Strengthening these connections can lead to greater emotional wellbeing.

Read More

Reading is a fantastic way to expand your horizons, gain knowledge, and escape into different worlds. Challenge yourself to read a certain number of books in the new year.

Volunteer and Give Back

Setting a goal to give back to your community or a cause you care about is an excellent way to feel more connected and fulfilled. Volunteer your time or skills to a local charity, non-profit organization, or community project. The act of giving can bring a sense of purpose and happiness.

Explore a New Hobby

Finding a new hobby can be a refreshing and enriching experience. Whether painting, playing a musical instrument, gardening, or cooking, investing time in a creative pursuit can be a great source of joy and personal growth.

Learn a New Skill

Lifelong learning is a powerful way to boost self-esteem and personal growth. Choose a skill you've always wanted to acquire, whether it's a new language, cooking, coding, or a craft, and dedicate time to mastering it.

Disconnect from Technology

Setting new boundaries for technology use can significantly enhance your mental wellbeing. Commit to disconnect at certain times of the day and use that time for self-reflection, creative activities, or spending quality time with loved ones.

Setting positive goals for the new year beyond exercise is a valuable way to enhance your overall wellbeing and happiness. These goals contribute to personal growth and foster a sense of fulfillment, connection, and a more balanced and mindful life. Embrace the new year with enthusiasm and the determination to become the best version of yourself.

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, well-being & legal issues.

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Giving Back During the Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time of joy, gratitude, and togetherness. It's also a perfect opportunity to give back to those in need and positively impact your community. There are numerous ways to get involved and share the spirit of giving. Here, we explore meaningful ways to give back during this time of year.

Angel Trees

Angel Trees are a classic holiday tradition. These trees are adorned with paper ornaments, each representing a child or family in need. You can choose a decoration, purchase the requested gifts, and bring them back to be distributed to the recipients. It's a simple but effective way to brighten a child's holiday.

Volunteer at a Local Shelter

Local shelters, food banks, and community organizations often need extra hands during the holiday season. You can volunteer to serve meals, sort donations, or assist with various programs that benefit those experiencing hardship.

Donate to a Toy or Coat Drive

Many charities organize toy drives to ensure every child receives a holiday gift. Consider donating new, unwrapped toys to these drives, making a child's holiday dreams come true. Or, donate gently used coats, scarves, and gloves to a local coat drive to help individuals in need stay warm during the colder months.

Make Care Packages

Assemble care packages with essentials like food, toiletries, and warm clothing. Distribute them to homeless individuals in your community or distribute them to local shelters.

Visit a Nursing Home

Many seniors spend the holidays alone in nursing homes. A visit and a small gift or card can brighten their day and provide companionship.

The holiday season is a time for compassion and generosity. Giving back helps those in need and fills your heart with warmth and satisfaction. Embrace these opportunities to positively impact your community and share the joy of the season with others. Giving back is a true reflection of the holiday spirit.



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Creamy Chicken and Mushrooms

Ingredients

- 4 4- to 5-ounce chicken cutlets
- 4 cups mixed mushrooms, sliced if large
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

Directions

1. Sprinkle chicken with 1/4 teaspoon each kosher salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon canola oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
2. Cook the chicken, turning once, until browned and just cooked through, 7 to 10 minutes total. Transfer to a plate.
3. Add 1 tablespoon oil and mushrooms to the pan; cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has evaporated, about 4 minutes.
4. Increase heat to high, add wine and cook until it has mostly evaporated, about 4 minutes.
5. Reduce heat to medium; stir in cream, any accumulated juice from the chicken and 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper.
6. Return the chicken to the pan and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve the chicken topped with the sauce and sprinkled with parsley.

TIP!

You can make your own chicken cutlets from two 8- to 10-ounce boneless, skinless chicken breasts. Remove the tenders (the strip of meat on the underside of the breast) and save for another use. Cut each breast in half crosswise. Place between pieces of plastic wrap. Pound with a meat mallet or skillet until about 1/2 inch thick.

Nutrition

Per Serving

Calories: 325 | Protein: 29g | Carbohydrates: 4g | Dietary Fiber: 1g | Fat: 20g | Saturated Fat: 8g | Calcium: 28mg | Magnesium: 13mg | Potassium: 286mg | Sodium: 329mg

Source: [*Creamy Chicken and Mushrooms*](#)

Mastering Family Get-together Stress

Don't let family get-togethers plunge into stressful discussions. Try these three artful conversational skills. First, plainly decide your comfort zone for specific topics. Decide they will be off limits for you and avoid initiating comments or conversations regarding them. Second, communicate your boundaries and do so with assertiveness and respect, and while maintaining a harmonious atmosphere, simply saying: "I'd appreciate steering our conversation away from [topic] for a more pleasant interaction for all." And finally, use the "redirect." Gently guide discussions away from sensitive subjects, shifting the focus toward neutral or positive topics. This tactful redirection effectively diffuses tension, fostering a more harmonious and enjoyable gathering for all participants. Hint: Before your next get-together, hone these skills. See if they help create more joyful memories.

Slips and Falls in White-collar Workplaces

In 2020, 42,114 people died from falls at home and at work. That's more than the average number of fatalities from motor vehicle crashes, which is about 38,000 per year. The most common contributing factors to slips and falls in the workplace, especially white-collar workplaces, include slippery floors, uneven surfaces like mats and loose rugs, poor lighting, cluttered walkways, open drawers, loose cords, and footwear. Regarding footwear, the most common fall accidents involve high heels, clogs, and sandals, so use caution with these types of shoes. One of the most common causes of falling has nothing to do with your feet—it's rushing to get something done. Learn more from the National Floor Safety Institute at nfsi.org.

Build Your Personal Brand in the Workplace

Entrepreneur Elon Musk is known for taking risks, having big ideas, and visionary leadership. This describes his "brand." A personal brand in the workplace reflects your unique strengths and values, but this image shouldn't be accidental. Decide how you want to be viewed by your organization. Identify the values that underlie the vision you hold for yourself, and then remain consistent with your vision in everything you do. Your visibility, recognition, career opportunities, stronger relationships, and ability to be a positive influence will likely follow, and along with them will come more doors open to more opportunities.

Volunteerism: The Perfect Pick-me-up

The positive effects of volunteering to help others have been demonstrated in many research studies. These include improved feelings of well-being and positive effects on a person's mood and general happiness. Along with helping others, these personal benefits are powerful motivators for some people affected by sadness, depression, and stress during the holidays to reach out. Research has also shown that volunteering can have positive effects on physical health, including lowered blood pressure, reduced risk of heart disease, and increased longevity. Could you use some of the good things that flow from volunteering? To find thousands of opportunities, try www.idealist.org or www.volunteermatch.org and [click on "find opportunities"]. Source: psycnet.apa.org/record/2013-21685-006

Adult Child Independence and Failure to Launch

The term “failure to launch” describes young adults who are still living at home with their parents and are not taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. This can be distressing for parents, and it can create marital conflict over how to intervene and a cycle of enabling if they are fearful that the adult child cannot successfully grasp the responsibilities of adulthood. Although there are steps along with many parenting resources for helping resolve failure-to-launch syndrome, a professional counselor can be of enormous benefit if the crisis has existed long term without resolution after many intervention attempts. Although mental health issues like anxiety and depression can make it difficult to transition into adulthood, often parental overprotection (doing too much for too long) can make it difficult for some adult children to learn the skills they need in order to become independent. Your path to resolving failure-to-launch syndrome will include challenges like setting clear expectations and responsibilities, requiring that chores be managed, creating new rules regarding financial support that encourage independence, and working through the natural resistance to change that can be expected, all without returning to a cycle of enabling. You are not alone in this struggle, and with patience, understanding, and support, you can help your child overcome the challenge of becoming an independent adult.

Avoid Parental Frustration with HIPAA Laws

Most children at age 18 are still in the care of their parents or guardians to some degree, but they are adults in the eyes of the federal government’s Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the U.S. regulations that protect the privacy of health records. As a parent, you might be astonished by your inability to gain on-demand access to your child’s health information, including mental health information—such as their diagnosis, treatment regimen, and even medications—without your child’s prior consent. This is true even if you are physically present with your child at the health appointment, arranged the appointment, or are the sole parent. Communicate with your “adult” child in advance to complete HIPAA release forms to avoid being frustrated by providers’ obligation to protect patient information.

Could a Sleep Tracker App Help?

Many people have experimented with sleep-tracking tools—wearable devices or mobile apps—that can offer insights into the quality of sleep. A 2023 survey found that more than 75% of those who have tried these devices found them beneficial. Talk to your doctor about your sleep quality and follow what is recommended, but here are a few sleep app tips: 1) Don’t rely entirely on sleep trackers for assessing sleep quality. They might create undue stress or anxiety if the data suggests poor sleep. This could reduce sleep quality further. 2) Don’t check sleep data in the middle of the night, for those same reasons. 3) Don’t rely solely on the data—it could overlook other factors affecting your sleep, including stress, diet, or health issues. 4) Use a sleep tracker as a supportive tool, not the last word on diagnosing a condition. For a complete picture, talk with your doctor and/or a sleep medicine physician to whom you might be referred. Learn more at www.hopkinsmedicine.org [search: “do sleep trackers work” and aasm.org/ [search “sleep tracker”]

Holiday Foods to Target Alcohol’s Effects

Here are the foods you may want to consider serving because they best slow the rate of alcohol absorption at a holiday party. Fatty foods: cheese, avocados, nuts, and meats. These foods may help coat the stomach lining, slowing the passage of alcohol into the bloodstream. Foods high in protein: chicken, fish, eggs, and tofu. Protein takes longer to digest, potentially delaying alcohol’s entry into the bloodstream. Fiber-rich foods: fruits, vegetables, and legumes. Fiber can potentially delay the passage of alcohol into the bloodstream by slowing down digestion. Important! Drinking responsibly and having a designated driver or alternate transportation are still key to hosting a safe social event.

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, & legal issues.

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