

Balancing Priorities

You've decided to make your health a priority in your life. You're going to work out regularly, eat right, manage your stress. There's only one problem—what about all the *other* priorities in your life?

The problem is a realistic one that most people face, says Minneapolis lifestyle coach Kate Larsen. "Our lives are so busy with various commitments that, sadly, healthy habits often get lost in the shuffle. When we decide to make our health a priority, we usually have to change our whole way of life, including our priorities and our attitudes."

The first step toward changing your priorities is to assess your existing ones. (See the "Priority Planner.") If you have no personal time to begin with, you may resent your fitness program before you even start. If your family and friends are currently feeling neglected, your adding a new commitment is bound to cause resentment.

After you have assessed your out-of-balance areas and determined ways to correct them, your healthy new habits will have a much better chance of surviving.

Surfing the Waves

Perfectionism is a common pitfall for people making behavior changes. They believe if they only work hard enough, they can strike a "perfect balance" in their new lifestyle. "Sometimes I don't even like to use the word 'balance,'" says Larsen, "because people think it's a permanent, achievable state of being. It isn't. Living a balanced life is like surfing. You ride the waves of circumstance and try to stay balanced, but sometimes you get knocked off your board and go under. That's part of life. You just get back up and try again."

How can you balance your new healthy habits with the rest of your life and make sure they remain a top priority?

Larsen offers the following tips.

- **Write Things Down.** Write your daily, weekly and monthly goals in your journal, daytimer or computer organizer. Schedule all your priorities: fitness time, grocery shopping and meal preparation time, relaxation and family time.

- **Think "No Matter What . . ."** For each day, week and month, put some priorities in a "no matter what" category: "I will exercise no less than four times this week, no matter what" or "I will take at least 20 minutes of quiet personal time each day, no matter what."

- **Set Rules.** Set the number of nights you will allow yourself to be away on business travel, how many overtime hours you will work, when you will and will not answer the phone and e-mail, etc. Of course, some circumstances may create exceptions, and you need to be flexible. But guidelines will give you a standard for making decisions that align with your values and goals.

- **Create "Sacred Time."** Create pockets of time that cannot be compromised by any other obligations. For example, "Every Friday night is family activity night." •

PRIORITY PLANNER

Rate how balanced your life is in each of these priority areas, then answer the two questions that follow:

	Good	Great	Needs Improvement
nutrition			
fitness			
spiritual life			
relaxation/quiet time			
family			
friends			
fun/pleasure			
personal growth			
professional life			
finances			

1. What specific things can I do to correct the areas that are out of balance (i.e., call my brother once a week, work with a nutritionist, revive a neglected hobby)? _____

2. How will I integrate my planned changes with the other priorities in my life (i.e., include family in my fitness plans, plan new activities into my budget)? _____

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