

Tips on Maintaining Balance in Your Life

You owe it to your patients to take good care of yourself so you can provide excellent care. Medical school is mentally, physically and emotionally challenging and now is the time to establish good self-care skills. These skills will also serve you well in residency and future hectic years in practice.

- **Eat frequent, healthy snacks.** You'll need all the energy you can get, and eating right will help sustain you through the long hours of rotations. An apple or a banana is just as easy to grab in the cafeteria as a candy bar.
- **Find time for exercise.** Add yoga to your daily routine. Go for a walk. Ride a bike. Get involved in recreational sports. Exercise is good for the body, mind and spirit.
- **Stay connected to friends and family members.** Make time for relationships that you care about. Be sure to cultivate some friendships outside medicine. You may feel somewhat alone on rotations and your support system will help you deal with daily challenges. Make a priority to e-mail on a regular basis.
- **If you don't have a mentor, find one.** A mentor will provide guidance and counsel when you need it most. How do you find such a person? Look for people who share your interests and experiences. Your professors, teachers, clinical preceptors, upper-level students and guest lecturers are prime candidates. For example, if a special lecturer impresses you, find out from the dean's office how to contact him or her. If you are excited by a journal article or research project, track down the author. If you have a favorite preceptor, tell this individual how much you enjoy working with him or her.
- **Maintain a sense of humor.** It can carry you through stressful times, break the tension, help you to retain information, and even build better relationships with your patients and colleagues.

Subscribe to an e-mail "joke of the day" newsletter to remind yourself that humor is important. Rent your favorite comedy and watch it with a friend. Think about your most embarrassing medical school moment and laugh at yourself. Use a funny mnemonic to remember a clinical pearl.

- **Write down the factors that went into your decision to become a doctor.** When you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed out, go back and look at all the great reasons you have for wanting to be a physician.
- **Don't allow your nonmedical talents to become past interests.** Make time to do what you love. Pursuing interests unrelated to your medical career will expand your perspective, give you added enthusiasm, and provide a mental break.
- **Whether you have to work or not, enjoy major holidays.** Make plans with friends or family to celebrate on a different day or after work. If you are away from home and friends are busy, do something that makes you happy.
- **Meditate.** When things get too hectic, take a mental break. Sit with your eyes closed and imagine the sights, smells and sounds of a favorite place or special time in your life.
- **Give back to the community.** Helping others will allow you to feel more fulfilled and will help you remember why you went into medicine.
- **Take time to journal important events and occurrences.** Consider carefully the best place to record this information. More people are turning to the Web to journal personal thoughts, share information and chronicle daily events. While blogging is gaining in popularity, this mode of communication does have drawbacks. While some sites are more secure than others, blogging is a public act. You need to be cautious about what you share. Given the fact that you are training in a health care environment, you also need to be extremely careful when it comes to patients' privacy rights.