

Finding Balance
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Finding balance between the demands of work, family, exercise, hobbies, and socializing is a task not many are successful at. Life's responsibilities and pleasures all take time and precious energy, in addition to dealing with high levels of stimulation and toxicity in our environments. When an area of life demands a lot of attention, resentment and stress can mount, causing emotional and physical discomfort, and if unchecked for long, burnout and disability. Ill family members requiring care, deadlines at work, children's activities or demands and surprise commitments tend to push self-care out of the picture. When we're tired, we're less focused and productive, more irritable and have more difficulty communicating. Here is a great way to assess your energy in order to maintain better balance, and to communicate about your capabilities with others in an assertive way. It is a philosophy I read about in a Lupus Society newsletter any years ago, and it is about spoons of energy.

- If you measure your energy units as spoons, it makes it easier to describe how you feel- if your energy reserve is full, half-full, running low, or empty. Every task or group of small tasks during your day will use spoons (units of energy), and only eating a healthy snack or meal, sleeping, meditating or resting will replenish spoons.
- Here are two examples:
 - If you are usually an energetic person and wake full of vigor, perhaps your energy tank holds 10 spoons. Getting ready for work and out the door might use up one spoon and working an 8 hour day might use up 4 spoons, leaving you with 5 spoons for the evening. Exercise might use up 2 spoons, and you might tidy up your home after cooking dinner (-1), then relax (+1), then bathe & put kids to bed (-1), leaving you with two spoons. Likely you'll feel well the next day in the morning.
 - If you are experiencing low energy, high stress or have an illness, perhaps you only wake with 7 spoons each morning, and regular tasks such as getting ready for work and out the door might use up 2 spoons, while working an 8 hour day uses up 6 spoons. Wait! You've just used up more energy than you had in your tank- your energy tank is at -1. In order to function well and feel good (i.e. not irritable, or increasing physical symptoms), you'll need to replenish with food, rest, or meditation. If you have plans for the evening, you it will benefit you to assess how many spoons it takes to socialize and finish your day, and then moderate your activity levels accordingly in order to complete those tasks successfully. This might mean postponing or cancelling activities if remaining healthy and balanced is your priority.

Assessing and talking about your energy in spoons can help you to achieve balance, because when your energy is low, you can explain to others how low you might be feeling rather than just telling them, "I'm tired". Letting a partner or friend know you've

only got one spoon left on an evening you intended to go out might help them understand that in the long run you'd be better off staying in. You'll be in a better mood and feel more loving and communicative if your needs are met. It might also help you to prioritize activities, or reschedule commitments for when you are feeling better.

We tend to push ourselves beyond our limits when we are feeling well and when we are stressed, we expect our bodies to function at that same high level. Finding balance is about getting to know our bodies and how we use and replenish energy over the course of a day, and a year. Maintaining balance includes the ability to communicate our needs in an assertive way in order to perform service for others as well as self care. The spoons analogy, plus a spoonful of self-awareness and another of self confidence, should help get you started on the road to a balanced life.