Balancing Work and Family

DEB GEBEKE, family science specialist

Do you come home from work physically or emotionally drained, with little energy left for your family? Do you find it difficult to get out of bed every day knowing that you face an overwhelming workload?

Do you feel like you're always behind schedule or wish you could just quit your job? Have major changes, such as layoffs and reorganization, taken place where you work?

If so, you may be among tens of millions of people who suffer from job and family-related stress, a problem that's far more common than either workers or employers have previously realised.

After the rampant materialism of the '80s, many people are realising that what matters is having time for family and friends, rest and recreation, good deeds and spirituality. For some people that means a radical step: changing one's career, living on less, or packing up and moving. For others it can mean something as subtle as choosing a cheaper brand of running shoes or leaving work a little earlier to watch the kids in a soccer game.

Most people must consider the financial consequences of work and family trade-offs. But even if there is no choice about whether or not to work, we can choose to select an employer who is sensitive to issues important in balancing work and family. We can also help educate the workplace and move toward family-friendly policies.

The following tips can help you take control of the homefront and reduce as much tension as possible during stressful times.

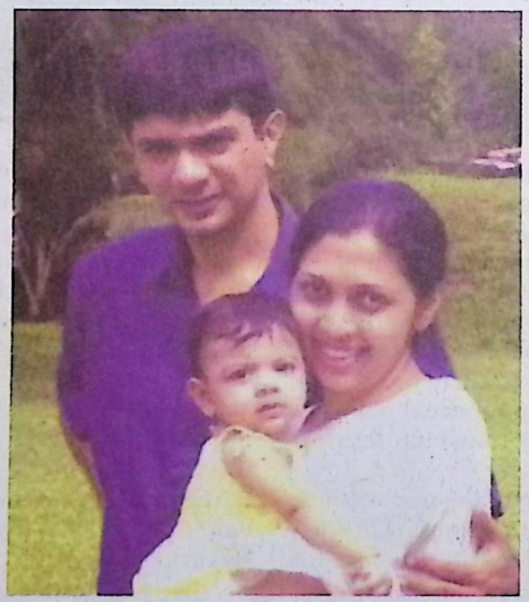
If you find yourself frazzled with the balancing act, most likely your children will sense that and react strongly to your frustrations. Keep in mind that balancing work and family touches individuals without children too. Elder care, family crises and individual special needs are also demanding.

Start going to bed and getting up earlier.

Move bedtime up by 15 minutes at a time until you adjust to the schedule you want. It may take your body a few weeks to adapt to retiring earlier, but in the long run, it will be easier for you to rise at an earlier time.

Make clothing choices for the next day.

Laying clothes out the night before helps make morning dressing easier and hassle free.



Pull yourself from your pillow at least 1-1/2 hours prior to leaving for work.

A few more minutes added to your morning preparation time can prevent frantic dressing, no breakfast and forgotten tasks that need to be done before leaving for work.

Rise first and dress before waking others.

Time alone in the morning can be just what you need to get yourself together without bumping into others or being interrupted.

Have children make their tiffins.

If old enough, have children prepare their tiffins the night before to save you time and get them involved in food preparation.

Take time for breakfast.

Set the breakfast table the night before -- a good task for a younger child. Sit down for 15 minutes and eat a light, wholesome breakfast. If you're on the run, grab a piece of fruit, cheese and crackers, a muffin or a small sandwich to eat while commuting or during a morning break.

Set your clocks ahead.

It may be psychological, but having your clocks and watches set 5 to 10 minutes ahead can keep you on schedule.

Reward yourself for arriving at work on time.

You'll be surprised how good you feel when you arrive at work on time and relaxed! Later, treat yourself to something you would not normally do: a relaxing bath, a visit with friends or reading a new novel.

Remember:

- Allow family members to have some choices about the tasks that need to be done.

- Examine your standards. Avoid becoming a perfectionist.