

Are you a workaholic? Here's how to get your life back

BY: NICOLE FALLON BUSINESS NEWS DAILY

FROM: NEWS.COM.AU

6 HOURS AGO OCTOBER 07, 2014 8:54AM



Make it a priority to take breaks, even if it's just for 10 minutes. *Source: Getty Images*

DO YOU find yourself spending more and more time in the office? Have you given up on hobbies and leisure activities you once enjoyed because you're constantly working? Do you throw yourself into your job to avoid issues in your personal life? If you answered "yes" to these questions, you've just confirmed what you probably already knew to be true: You're a workaholic.

In 2012, researchers from Norway's University of Bergen (UiB) and the United Kingdom's Nottingham Trent University developed the Bergen Work Addiction Scale, a simple test to determine an employee's level of work addiction. The test asks workers to rate the following seven work habits on a scale of 1 ("never") to 5 ("always").

- You think of how you can free up more time to work.
- You spend much more time working than initially intended.
- You work in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness and depression.
- You have been told by others to cut down on work but haven't listened to them.
- You become stressed if you are prohibited from working.

- You deprioritise hobbies, leisure activities and exercise because of your work.
- You work so much that it has negatively influenced your health.

Answering “often” (4) or “always” (5) to four or more of the seven criteria may indicate “workaholism,” a problem that’s growing among employees around the world.

“In the wake of globalisation, new technology and blurred boundaries between work and private life, we are witnessing an increase in work addiction,” lead researcher and UiB faculty member Cecilie Schou Andreassen said in a statement.

Past research has shown that workaholism is associated with insomnia, health problems, burnout and stress, as well as conflict between work and family life. Some workaholics will ignore these signs, and argue that they constantly work because it makes them feel satisfied and fulfilled. But there’s a difference between feeling fulfilled by your job and being consumed by it.

“Many people who derive great satisfaction from their work — and spend a lot of time on their work — still make time for themselves, their family and friends,” said Joyce Maroney, director of the Workforce Institute at workforce management solutions provider Kronos. “They define boundaries between their work and personal lives. It’s when the job always takes precedence that people suffer negative consequences of workaholism.”



Workaholism is associated with insomnia, health problems, burnout and stress. *Source:* Getty Images

Shaelyn Pham, a psychologist and founder of Psychological Services and Holistic Health, noted that people who are perfectionists and people-pleasers, or people who feel the need to be in control, are often predisposed to be workaholics.

“To [workaholics], work provides control and stability in life,” Pham told *Business News Daily*. “On the other side of the coin, he or she gets to avoid what is uncontrollable in life, such as personal relationships.”

Many workaholics use work as an excuse to avoid problems in their families and relationships, but it’s often a workaholic’s personal relationships that suffer the most due to his or her work addiction. Lou Solomon, founder and CEO of leadership communication consultancy Interact, said that a key sign of damaging workaholism is when your family starts expressing that they feel they never see you, and are hurt that you aren’t able to be a part of any of their activities because of work. Aside from hurting your family members (or friends), you could also be unknowingly imposing your workaholic habits on your employees, if you’re a manager.

“As a leader, you want to set a good example to your colleagues and those that work under you,” Solomon said. “You want to demonstrate that you care about your own family and friends, and take time to be with them, and enjoy other hobbies outside of work, and [encourage] those under you to do the same. If you don’t do this, it can make your subordinates feel remorse for spending time on their own hobbies, or with friends and family.”

If your commitment to your job is hurting your relationships and work-life balance, follow these expert tips to help you cut back on the negative impacts of workaholism.

Create a schedule that includes downtime — and stick to it. The ability to stay connected 24-7 has turned many employees into workaholics. Instead of using that connectedness to constantly work, you can use it to schedule your time wisely and give yourself a chance for a break.

“Create a flexible schedule for yourself so that you’re working at your optimal times, rather than all the time,” said Sara Sutton Fell, founder and CEO of job listing website FlexJobs. “Or, work from home so that you can spend the time you’d normally be commuting doing other [nonwork] activities. By having the flexibility to walk away from the computer, and work how and where you want, you’ll feel empowered to work smarter, not longer or harder.”



Create a schedule that includes downtime — and stick to it. *Source:* Getty Images

“Discipline and structure are tools that a workaholic can use to create a more balanced life,” added April Masini, a relationship expert and author of the advice column “Ask April.” “Structuring personal or downtime into a calendar, and having the discipline to stick to that calendar, means that there may be a date night, a yoga class and a family day calendared into a schedule that was once only business meetings, eating and sleeping.”

Take short breaks. On days when you simply can’t avoid working long hours, make it a priority to take breaks, even if it’s just for 10 minutes. Being able to step away from your desk or leave your smartphone behind for a short period of time can help keep you focused on your tasks and get them done more efficiently.

“Regularly working 10- or 12-hour days can lead to burnout, [and] even the busiest professionals need time to recharge,” said Diane Domeyer, executive director of The Creative Group staffing agency. “Research [from Stanford] shows walking boosts creative inspiration. If possible, take a stroll around the block during your lunch break. You’ll come back energised and ready to tackle your work with a fresh perspective.”

Focus on your nonwork priorities. When you’re a workaholic, everything else takes a back seat to your job. But are you making work your top priority to avoid areas of your personal life where you don’t feel as confident? Executive coach and human resources

expert Dennis O'Neill said that workaholics are often so good at what they do professionally that they may increasingly avoid roles and situations where they are not as successful, such as their families and other aspects of their personal lives.

"Identify four specific targets for incremental improvement interpersonally in your non-professional life," O'Neill said. "Make them attainable, and schedule them as you would any professional activity. Get better and better doing these things."

Similarly, Solomon noted that considering your future regrets about missing present opportunities to be with family and friends can help you reprioritise.

"Ask yourself, do you think if you miss every one of your child's baseball games you'll regret that in 10 years?" Solomon said. "The answer will most likely be yes. The internal motivation that tugs at your heartstrings and mind will be the key to change."

[This article originally appeared on *Business News Daily* and was republished with permission.](#)

SOURCE: <http://www.news.com.au/finance/work/are-you-a-workaholic-heres-how-to-get-your-life-back/story-fnkqbb6w-1227082061116>