

HEALTH

Are you a workaholic?

Do you work over 50 hours a week or more? Are you constantly staying busy? Do you have difficulty relaxing and having fun? Are you a perfectionist? Are you unable to delegate work to others? Are you so preoccupied with "to do" lists that you have trouble being emotionally available to others? Do your partner, spouse or children complain about how much you work? Do you forget conversations or events because you are so preoccupied with planning and work?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you might be a workaholic.

Workaholism is often a family disease passed down from parent to child. Workaholics use work to cope with feelings of emotional pain and inadequacy. They get adrenaline highs from work binges and then crash from exhaustion, leading to feelings of irritability, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

To cope with these feelings, workaholics then begin another cycle of excessive devotion to work. Workaholics are so immersed in work they have little time to invest in family life and child-rearing. What time they do spend with their children they spend passing down their unrealistic and unattainable perfectionistic standards.

"A 'B' is okay, but you really should be getting 'As.'"

As a result, their children feel like failures. They grow-up convinced they are inadequate, and

may attempt to compensate for these feelings by losing themselves in work or some other type of addictive substance or behavior.

Workaholism is one of the few addictions that society values and people are quick to claim.

"You think you work a lot, I spent 12 hours at the office yesterday!"

While your boss may love your workaholic ways, in the end, your

boss might be the only one around to love you. Understandably, children of workaholics become resentful of their parent's emotional and physical unavailability. Promises are broken and important activities like teacher conferences, sporting events, and music recitals are missed.

The workaholic's primary relationship also suffers. Research shows that husbands and wives of workaholics report less positive feelings towards their spouse and a greater sense of marital estrangement. In the end, workaholics experience more marital discord, anxiety, depression, job stress, job dissatisfaction, and health problems than non-workaholics.

A common drive behind workaholics' obsession with work is the belief that more money is going to make them and their family happier. This belief sets someone on an endless treadmill of working harder and harder to make more

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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and more money to achieve happiness.

However, this is a fool's errand. Decades of social science research has demonstrated beyond a doubt that for most of us, this is just not the case. Above household incomes of \$50,000 a year, there is absolutely no correlation between money and happiness. So, those

families who make \$5,000,000 a year are no happier than those who make \$50,000 a year. However, if you sacrifice your relationships, your emotional well-being, and your health by working obsessively, you will not achieve happiness but might succeed in becoming lonely and miserable.

If you are a workaholic, consider the following suggestions for achieving a healthy work-life balance:

1. Take the rocking chair test. Picture yourself at retirement age sitting on your front porch rocking in your chair. Looking back on your life, where do you wish you had spent more time?

2. Challenge your automatic

thinking around work. The fact is, as important as we think our work is, when we are dead and gone the world will keep rotating around the sun. When you are feeling anxious about a "to do" list, take some time to root out and correct some errors in thinking. What would be the worst thing that would happen if you gave yourself a day off of work? Could you live with that? Would the world survive?

3. Check in with others regarding your work-life balance. Ask your friends and family if they think you work too much. Workaholics are often unaware of how immersed they are in work and are not necessarily conscious of the negative emotional and physical consequences of workaholism. Opening our hearts and minds to the feedback of those around us is an important step in getting honest with ourselves.

4. Examine your family history around work. When I heard my 100-hour a week working father talk about how lazy he felt compared to his father, my feelings of guilt for only putting in a 70-hour work week suddenly made a heck of a lot of sense. Seeing this family pattern around work and becoming conscious of the emotional consequences opened my eyes and

helped me change my relationship with work.

In his popular 1970s folk song, "Cat's in the Cradle," Harry Chapin sang about a conversation between a workaholic father and son: "When you comin' home dad?" "I don't know when, but we'll get together then son, you know we'll have a good time then."

If you are a workaholic, turn off the computer and the Blackberry this weekend, leave the office, and spend some quality time with those you love. It might be difficult at first to disengage from work, but it will get easier with practice. When you are rocking on the porch and looking back on your life someday, you won't regret you did.

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