

# Opinion: Healthy life requires balance

By Melinda Choy

Does it just seem like we need more than 24 hours in a day? I often think if I had eight more hours in a day that I could get so much more done. I realize this is an illusion and, in reality, the items on my list are never-ending. But for some reason the cultural message is that we are superhumans. We can do it all, get everything done, and look good while doing it.



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I see this illusion in my patients. Many deal with chronic stress. Initially, the stress is addicting. It feels good to have adrenaline coursing through our bodies. Many of us find identity and identify accomplishments by how busy we are.

Unfortunately, there's a downside to this behavior. Chronic stress taxes the endocrine system and creates a constant stream of cortisol, a stress hormone excreted by the adrenal glands. This initially provides strength to get through an emergency situation, but frequent signals to the system can cause a cortisol imbalance leading to weight gain, reproductive issues, insomnia, chronic inflammation, and digestive disorders. This can eventually manifest into chronic illnesses such as heart disease, metabolic syndrome, depression, autoimmunity, and chronic fatigue.

Carving out time in the day for relaxation to nourish the endocrine system is a difficult task. However, creating some intentional lifestyle habits can teach our physiology to work in our favor. Through years of practice, I have come up with basic tools to promote greater balance. Here are three of my eight lifestyle tips for promoting balance.

1) **Breathe.** We can't live without breathing, but how we breathe can change the nervous system's response. Deep breathing is the physiological response to trigger a switch from the sympathetic ("fight or flight") to parasympathetic ("rest and digest") autonomic nervous system. Instead of taking a smoking or cell phone break, take a breathing break. Breathe as you do dishes and other daily chores so you can be productive and relaxed at the same time.

2) **Nourish.** Eat and drink with consciousness. Slow down and do not multi-task while you eat. A prayer or blessing before your meal sets your nervous system into a parasympathetic, "rest and digest" state.

3) **Reset.** Ultradian rhythm, also called circadian rhythm in Western medicine, is an awareness of listening to the body's needs. It occurs in physiological cycles every 90 to 120 minutes. Productivity improves when you take a break or support your body's needs every 90 to 120 minutes. No one can be productive for more than 120 minutes without a break. Get up, move, and reset your body.

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