

Working to Balance Your Life

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Stop and smell the roses.

This ancient advice has morphed into a popular trend as time-starved denizens of the 21st century try to get their lives back in balance. Movements such as slow food and simple living are hot, while the new Take Back Your Time Day, every Oct. 24, seeks to become to the 2000s what Earth Day was to the 1990s.

Timeday.org debuted last year, with a charming slogan ("there's no present like the time") and a mandate to challenge our current epidemic of overwork. Research shows that time-stress threatens everything from our health to our social lives, leading to everything from simple fatigue to greater reliance on fast foods to less time for community activity.

Nanaimo's Lisa Rickwood, author of *Escape the Pace* (RFA, \$21.95), a book with dozens of tips on how to minimize time stress, gives advice that includes the usual suspects: get enough sleep; exercise to reduce toxins in the body; strengthen the immune system; and don't sweat the small stuff. Also:

- Take time to focus on little things, the way kids do. Whether you go rock-collecting or tinker with a hobby, you are slowing down and relaxing.
- Stay in touch. Every day has pockets of time in which you can connect with friends, a vital stress release.
- Plan mini-holidays for even a few minutes at a time, whether it is a short walk on a sunny day or a tea break. Just do it.
- Be aware of transitions. When you get to work, don't jump out of the car and rush in. Sit, relax, breathe, prepare.
- Bring creativity to the workplace. Most work relies on logical, left-brain thought, but there's a reason you find solutions when you're in the shower -- the left brain is off-line. Right-brain thought is slower and more unpredictable -- the opposite of the rat-race. Try play or humour workshops, or "silly idea" boxes to which employees can anonymously contribute.
- Add art. Since we obtain more than 90 per cent of our information through our eyes, it makes sense to have beautiful things surround you. Hang a large image on the wall, put a framed photo on your desk, create computer wallpaper with a vacation shot. Next time you're anxious, study that picture and take a mental vacation.