

Life in #BALANCE

→ What is it really, and how do you find it? We've asked experts from the world of wellbeing what it means to them

WORDS SALLY BROWN

This word has become the Holy Grail of modern life – we're sure that if only we can find a 'balanced' way of eating, exercising, working and relaxing, we will be effortlessly slim, have endless energy, and feel calm and contented. But knowing what it actually means, and when we've found it, isn't always easy. To make things more confusing, there's a world of inspiration and advice now available at the click of a mouse. Should we be getting up at 5am to meditate or do a high-intensity exercise session? What about giving up gluten and sugar, or going alkaline? Or would we transform our wellbeing by juice-fasting once a week, or booking into a detox retreat?

It's human nature to be attracted to new ideas, but sustaining balance in the long term means avoiding highs and lows, says Dalton Wong, author of *The FeelGood Plan* (Ebury, £14.99). 'Being super "good" is just as unhealthy as being "bad". Quick fixes can seem appealing, but balance is a project for life – because the way you live now will impact on your wellbeing and quality of life in the future.'

And trying *too* hard to find a sense of equilibrium actually has the opposite effect, and begins to undermine it, says Charlotte Watts, yoga teacher and nutritional therapist: 'So many of us are conditioned from childhood that life is all about

achieving. But balance isn't a place you get to, it's something you have to find.'

For many, it remains elusive because we feel like we don't have enough time to get it right. One third of us are unhappy about the time we devote to work, according to a survey by the Mental Health Foundation, and 40 per cent say other aspects of their life are neglected due to their careers. We know lifetime happiness follows a U-shaped curve, according to Royal Economic Society research – it starts off high in childhood, then takes a downward turn from the age of 25. What's interesting is that it picks up again when we retire, which confirms what many of us have already worked out – we're happier when life is simpler and less busy. 'Feeling balanced

can come from appreciating what's already there, or from small changes, like making time to sit in the garden on a sunny day, or being kinder to ourselves and others,' Watts says. 'It's also about knowing when you need to say no, even if it's to something you'd enjoy doing.'

In the end, balance means different things to each of us, and it is something which changes throughout our lives. But to give you some food for thought, we've asked experts from the world of wellbeing how they view the subject.

"BALANCE ISN'T A PLACE YOU GET TO, BUT SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO FIND"

WHAT BALANCE MEANS TO ME



Dr Nigma Talib, naturopathic doctor and author of *Reverse The Signs Of Ageing* (Vermilion, £12.99) 'Living a balanced life influences how you age, because when you don't, your body produces more cortisol, the stress hormone that speeds up the ageing process. You can overdo a healthy lifestyle – spending your life on a yoga retreat isn't balanced! For me, balance means a daily walk in the park with my dog Mimi, getting eight hours sleep, and taking a daily supplement of ashwagandha and rhodiola to aid the adrenal glands. I need those three key elements to feel at my best.'

– if a diet plan is complicated, it's unlikely to be balanced.'



Charlotte Watts, author of *The De-Stress Effect* (Hay House, £12.99) 'I'm an introvert and can feel overwhelmed quite easily, even doing something I enjoy, if there is too much of it. I feel fizzy and tight in my head when I'm over-stimulated and out of balance. But my 10-year yoga practice has given me an embodied awareness, so that I can "listen to the whispers before they become shouts". A walk is the simplest way to give myself the space I need.'

back. When I'm in balance, I feel very open to possibilities and relationships. I'm a better partner, friend and boss.'



Dalton Wong, A-list personal trainer 'Getting the balance right is simpler than we might think. What I tell my clients is what my mother used to tell me when I was a child – eat your greens, sit up straight, go and play outdoors and get to bed on time. Extremes aren't sustainable. It's important to have fun. We live in a world of uncertainty and that creates stress and anxiety. If starting your day with a piece of toast and a coffee is comforting to you, why is that wrong?'



Robert Hobson, nutritionist and co-author of *The Detox Kitchen Bible* (Bloomsbury, £25) 'From a nutritional perspective, balance is about having a good relationship with food, which means not fearing it or seeing it as the enemy. Mindful eating, thinking of what your body needs before you eat, is at the heart of balance. It can be as simple as asking yourself, why am I eating? It's also about being in touch with when you are hungry and when you're full. Eating well is very simple



Lucy Sherwood, meditation teacher to Ellie Goulding, and founder of Rock & Raw ethical jewellery* 'Meditation is the cornerstone of balance in my life. It's completely non-negotiable for me. When I start the day with a five-minute session, it gives me the awareness that allows me to stay balanced all day. I know I'm becoming out of balance when I feel like I don't have the capacity to give, to be there for my family and friends. I start to retreat into myself; that's my sign I'm feeling overwhelmed and need to take a step



Dr Jessamy Hibberd, clinical psychologist and co-author of *This Book Will Make You Happy* (Quercus, £7.99) 'Balance is having time for things that are important to you, being able to focus on them and give them the attention they need. I don't need 'me-time'; I am sustained by my work and by spending time with my children. Being organised helps me feel balanced, which is a relatively new development in my life! I know I've got it right when I feel alert and have the energy to do the things I want to.' **B**