

Work-Life Balance for Postdocs

FEBRUARY 2022 | WWW.NATIONALPOSTDOC.ORG/RESOURCELIBRARY



— NATIONAL —
POSTDOCTORAL
— ASSOCIATION —

Table of Contents



WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR POSTDOCS PAGE 3
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF PAGE 3
POSTDOCS PARTICULARLY AT RISK PAGE 3
BUILD WORK-LIFE BALANCE INTO YOUR TRAINING PLAN WITH THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PAGE 4
SEEK HELP FROM FINANCIAL ADVISERS PAGE 4
POSTDOC PARENTS PAGE 4
DON'T DO THIS ALONE! PAGE 5
OTHER RESOURCES PAGE 6

BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF AN ACADEMIC CAREER WITH THOSE OF PERSONAL LIFE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH, BUT THE COSTS OF NOT ACHIEVING THAT BALANCE ARE IMMENSE, WITH THE OBVIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF **INCREASED BURNOUT, LOSS OF PRODUCTIVITY, THREATS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING,** AND THE POTENTIAL **LOSS OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY.** POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS OFTEN HAVE TO MASTER A JUGGLING ACT WHEREBY THEY ARE CONDUCTING CHALLENGING RESEARCH PROJECTS WHILE THEY MAY ALSO BE RAISING FAMILIES, PROVIDING CARE FOR A FAMILY MEMBER, ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN A NEW COUNTRY AS A NON-NATIVE SPEAKER, LIVING WITH A MENTAL OR PHYSICAL ILLNESS, AND/OR MANAGING STUDENT LOANS. MANY OF THESE CHALLENGES BECAME EXACERBATED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OF 2020-2022. LISTED BELOW, WE'VE LISTED A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER IN BALANCING WORK AND LIFE.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Eating right, getting enough sleep and exercise, and making time for self-care is essential to maintaining physical and mental health. Your institution may provide wellness programs, benefits, and policies to promote self-care and wellness of its employees, students, and trainees. Seek out wellness programs, recreation facilities, counseling programs, or university health and mental health services that are offered through your institution. Should you need time away from the workplace, learn about all paid or unpaid leave policies that apply to postdoctoral fellows at your institution.

POSTDOCS PARTICULARLY AT RISK

Postdocs live high-stress, often isolated lives. Many are underpaid or lack benefits or other resources available to others. For those pursuing academic paths, the way forward is long and far from assured. These are only a few factors that can make postdocs higher at risk for mental health and wellness issues or other risks. An article in Nature published in 2020 pointed out in detail some of the extreme difficulties that can come with a postdoc position, specifically calling out the long hours at work, discrimination issues, and the difficulty of advancement. This makes work-life balance issues more important for postdocs than others under less stress or facing fewer barriers.

Build Work-Life Balance into Your Training Plan with the Individual Development Plan

Career satisfaction is fundamental to a sense of work-life balance. Using your postdoctoral research time to pursue and train for the right career for you is crucial. One tool that can help you do this is the individual development plan (IDP). The IDP is a career and professional development tool that helps professionals to structure their own individualized training program to pursue and obtain their career of choice. Effective IDPs include self-assessments of the trainees values, skills, and interests and help provide insight on what careers fit those parameters--and set goals specifically targeted to achieve those careers. The [myIDP](#) is a great platform to assist in writing an IDP. Seeking career counseling, exploration, and training through your institution's career office can also help you achieve the goals in your plan.

Seek Help from Financial Advisers

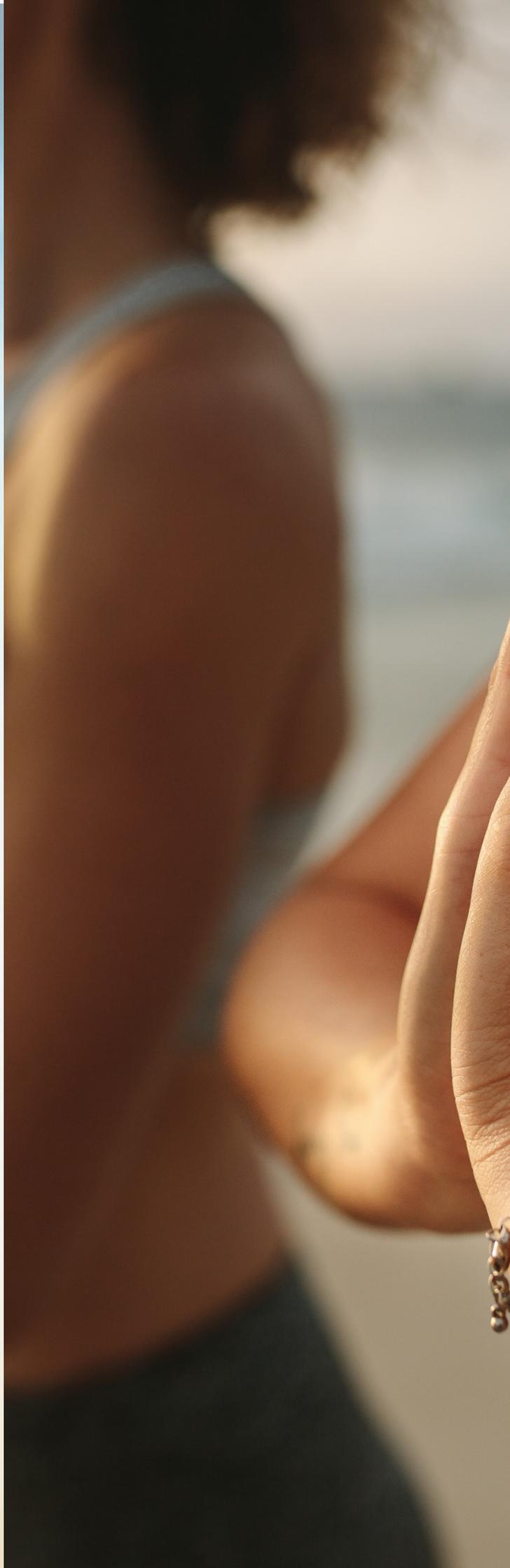
Managing student loans and/or the costs of living on postdoc pay can be stressful. Seek the advice of professionals and start planning early. Your institution may even provide these services.

Postdoc Parents

A 2019 [report published in Nature](#) indicated that nearly half of female scientists in the United States quit full-time science after having their first child. Furthermore, 23 percent of new fathers also reported leaving full-time positions or cutting hours--suggesting that the demands of family life are difficult to reconcile with those of academic life. In 2017, the NPA worked with [The Center for WorkLife Law](#) and [The Pregnant Scholar](#) to publish [Parents in the Pipeline: Retaining Postdoctoral Researchers with Families](#). This report explores both the experiences of mothers and fathers, while identifying and analyzing concerns including workplace attitudes and practices toward parents, administrative processes for family leave, and family-responsive policies and benefits. The NPA has also published the [Advancing Postdoc Women Guidebook](#), which contains information on work-life balance and child care resources.

Don't Do This Alone!

Seek support when you need it. Some options include social or professional communities within your town or institution that share common interests. Does your institution have a postdoctoral association? Join a book club or a scientific interest group of your choice. Aside from your faculty mentor, find additional mentors that can help you reach your goals. If you find yourself overwhelmed and having difficulties coping with the stresses of academic life, seek counseling. If you're unsure of your available options, reach out to your university administrators or postdoc office who can point you to counseling and mental health resources that can help. Don't wait too long!



Other Resources

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF TED TALKS, LISTED BELOW, DEALING SPECIFICALLY WITH ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE THAT MAY BE OF ASSISTANCE TO POSTDOCS.

- 4 lessons the pandemic taught us about work, life, and balance
https://www.ted.com/talks/patty_mccord_4_lessons_the_pandemic_t_aught_us_about_work_life_and_balance
- How to make work-life balance work
https://www.ted.com/talks/nigel_marshall_how_to_make_work_life_balance_work
- 3 rules of better work-life balance
https://www.ted.com/talks/ashley_whillans_3_rules_for_better_work_life_balance
- (playlist) How to protect your passion from burnout
https://www.ted.com/playlists/689/how_to_protect_your_passions_from_burnout
- How working couples can best support each other
https://www.ted.com/talks/jennifer_petriglieri_how_working_couples_can_best_support_each_other
- 5 tips for dealing with meeting overload
https://www.ted.com/talks/cindy_solomon_5_tips_for_dealing_with_meeting_overload
- (playlist) How to get into a work-from-home mindset
https://www.ted.com/playlists/736/how_to_get_into_a_work_from_home_mindset





— NATIONAL —
POSTDOCTORAL
— ASSOCIATION —

FEBRUARY 2022 | WWW.NATIONALPOSTDOC.ORG/RESOURCELIBRARY