

It's the middle of August, and after a wonderful, relaxing, enjoyable summer holiday, school begins to creep back into your mind. The transition from no school to full steam ahead can be challenging. Whether you have been teaching one year or 30 years, September is always a busy, hectic and usually stressful time of year. The change of pace often wreaks havoc on your system—physically, mentally and emotionally. How do you hang on to that rested, relaxed feeling and positive state of mind you had during the summer? How do you make it through September, not just by the skin of your teeth, but with flying colours?

To start, keep up with your healthy, well-balanced routines. Try not to let school run your life. Instead, find time for those activities you enjoy, whether it be reading, walking, or keeping in touch with friends. The summer leaves extra time to include such leisure activities, but they are just as important, if not more so, when you add school and heavy workloads to the mix. It is essential to find ways to renew your energy throughout the school day, week and year to keep up the pace, and stay healthy. It doesn't have to take a lot of time. So be creative and find something that is meaningful and enjoyable for you:

... *Take a micropause: think of something funny, stretch your muscles or take a deep breath;*

... *Take a mini-vacation: read a chapter in a book, call a friend or have a cup of tea;*

... *Schedule an activity: go for a walk, visit with friends, or take a hot bath.*

Balance is an ideal you can strive for at any time of year, but do you really know what it looks like when you achieve it—if you achieve it? Instead consider your personal values and strengths. Take time to think about your strengths, what is important to you, what you value. Strive to align your life with these same values, so your life holds meaning and equilibrium. That is when you will find the greatest satisfaction in your life, whether or not the scale is balanced.

When the demands on your body go from zero to 60 in a matter of hours, it becomes even more important to care for it by feeding it well, maintaining a healthy routine of activity, and getting enough rest.

Nutrition: Remember eating breakfast improves mood, memory, energy and overall daytime performance. Make your energy last by eating complex carbohydrates including whole grains and go easy on simple sugars and caffeine which provide short term energy blasts. Drink two litres or eight cups of water daily and eat small frequent meals to keep your energy going. Aim for at least two of the four food groups when choosing snacks. Making time to eat healthily can help you through your busy day.

Physical activity: Exercise is not only good for your body, but your brain also benefits. Even during busy times of year, incorporate activities you enjoy into your daily routine. Physical activity and exercise does not necessarily mean going to the gym. If you find an activity you enjoy, you will feel motivated to do it and it may not even feel like exercise. Ensure you participate in activity that is appropriate to your fitness level and current level of health. If it has been years since you exercised, participate in a graduated exercise program, and consult your doctor if you have any specific health concerns.

Sleep and rest: Sleep nights are individualistic. Although eight hours is considered the norm, some people require more and others less. The right amount can be judged based on your daytime performance—that is, how much you need to be alert and active throughout the day. Rest throughout the day is also important. If you feel your energy draining, try taking a few minutes to sit at your desk, or just be in the moment. This may be enough to refocus your attention and reclaim your energy to proceed with the rest of your day.

When school begins, the physical demands on your body also increase. You must set up your classroom, stand for hours, and sit at a desk with less freedom to move around. How will your body adjust? The implications of lifting, reaching, moving for set-up and sustaining prolonged postures during the rest of the year will be fewer if you have proper posture and use good body mechanics.

Proper sitting posture: Your head should be directly over shoulders which should be over your hips. Your neck is relaxed and your shoulders down, back and relaxed. Sit with your back upright and supported at the lower back curve. When typing, your keyboard should

be at about elbow height, and slightly higher for any handwritten work on your desk. Your knees are best positioned with a 90 degree angle, at the same level as your hips and your feet firmly planted on the ground or a footrest. Take periodic breaks from sitting to stretch your muscles and get your blood flowing.

Proper standing posture: In standing, you want to maintain the natural “S” curve of spine. Straighten your shoulders, pull in your chin, tighten your abdominals—and tuck in your buttocks. Keep your knees soft and avoid locking your joints. Try not to stand in one spot—instead move around or alternate between standing, walking and sitting whenever possible.

Proper lifting technique: You should first size up the load. Test it to see if you can lift it safely. Can you grasp it securely? Good handholds (cut-outs, handles) will make the load easier to lift. Make sure the load is balanced in your hands. Get as close to the load as possible before lifting it. If possible, slide the load towards you before picking it up. Do not twist while lifting! Instead, move your feet so that they point in the direction of the lift as you turn. Lift smoothly and do not jerk the load. Organize the work so as to avoid lifting from the floor or above shoulder level. Items to be handled should be between knee and shoulder height to allow you to keep your spine straight. Keep the



load as close to your body as possible. Carrying a heavy object at arm's length makes it *ten times* heavier than the actual weight. If necessary, ask another person to help you. If you have a lot of lifting to do during the day, try not to do it all at once. Alternate lifting tasks with lighter work to give your body a chance to recover.

All in all, the success of your September and your fitness—mentally, physically and emotionally—for the rest of the school year rests in your hands. You have the power to make choices that will improve your health and help you deal with the stressors and demands which are inherent in your teaching career. If you have difficulty finding what works for you, in your routine, or with your values and strengths, seek support. Contact the Early Intervention Program at the NSTU for more information.

did you KNOW?

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The Be_Well@nstu.ca list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

