



The good news is that workaholics can beat the habit.

Body+Soul Daily

What can workaholics do to get lives back?

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WHY is work constantly getting in the way of life? According to The Australia Institute, the average Aussie full-time employee works 42.8 hours a week, which is one of the highest in all the developed countries. Not only that, it seems only 52 per cent of us take all of our annual leave.

Workaholism is making us unwell – often leading to fractured personal relationships and risk of depression – but it's also a sign of the times, says Emma Seppala, author of *The Happiness Track*.

"Thanks to technology, we've entered an era where we can literally be productive 24/7 and certainly, within some industries, we're expected to be," Seppala says.



The cast of *The Workaholics* have been negotiating the lighter side of life in a telemarketing firm for seven years.

Does all this overtime help us achieve more? Not exactly. Studies show it was the Ford Motor company which first found the 40-hour-week productivity sweet spot. Any more work time than that and things head downhill quickly.

"The truth is, constantly striving toward productivity can backfire," Seppala adds. "If we do less, spend more time having fun and unplugging from work, we end up performing better and being happier."

It only takes a quick look around the globe to see how other cultures are addressing the overwork epidemic.

Brazil

WHAT THEY'RE DOING: With a 40- to 44-hour working week, the life of the average Brazilian looks pretty busy – until you consider this: a 30-day annual holiday is mandatory by law, and you must also enjoy an additional eight national public holidays a year, plus any local ones. Tough break.

STEAL IT: Use up all the leave you're entitled to. Check your employer's policy – some companies offer extra time off for moving and mental health.

Japan

WHAT THEY'RE DOING: Working oneself to death at a desk has become such an acute problem in Japan that they've since coined a term for it – "karoshi" – which means "death from overwork". The Japanese government is so concerned at the number of those who die by karoshi (reported to be 200-400 people annually, with 1456 legal claims for compensation for karoshi in the last financial year), they're proposing a law that will require local companies to force employees to take a minimum of five days off annually. According to a survey by the country's Labour ministry in 2013, while workers were entitled to take 18.5 days off a year, on average, most only took a maximum of nine.

STEAL IT: Take regular breaks from your desk – get up for 2-3 minutes every 30 minutes. Also do whole-body movements and/or stretches.

USA

WHAT THEY'RE DOING: American workers have it hard. Not only are they not legally entitled to paid leave, up to 21 per cent people work 50-59 hour weeks (the full-time average is 47 hours) and they're retiring much later. Fortunately, companies such as insurance giant Aetna are doing their part to ensure their staff are getting rest. They recently launched an initiative where employees are given sleep monitors and paid a bonus of \$32 a night if they get 20 consecutive evenings of at least seven hours' slumber. The reward is capped at \$656 a year.

STEAL IT: Monitor your sleep with an app. Encourage your colleagues to do the same, and have a prize each month for people who get five consecutive nights or more of seven hours' sleep.

Germany

WHAT THEY'RE DOING: Out-of-hours work restrictions are nothing new to German companies.

Volkswagen stops forwarding emails to staff 30 minutes after the end of each work day, while at Daimler, staff are encouraged to delete any unread work emails received while on holiday (they do, however, encourage you to put on an out-of-office notification for people to resend their emails once you're back). In 2013, the German Labour ministry also banned managers from contacting their staff after-hours.

STEAL IT: Schedule an out-of-office to indicate when you're on holidays. Request the person contact you on your return.

France

WHAT THEY'RE DOING: With up to 30 days of paid leave a year and a protected 35-hour work week, the French have it better than most, but the nation's government says more can be done. It is proposing an amendment to their labour reform bill which will allow it to "strongly suggest" companies who have 50 or more employees limit their work life spilling over into their personal lives – such as no work emails allowed after 6pm.

STEAL IT: Out-of-office to the rescue again: switch it on when you leave, declaring that, unless the matter is urgent, you'll respond in the morning.

3 TIPS FOR A HEALTHY OFFICE LIFE

Chained to your desk? Rawfit trainer Ricardo Riskalla has these tips:

1. Do 30 minutes of exercise when you first wake up. "Never leave exercise for after work because you'll be tired and more likely to find excuses to opt out," he says.
2. Bring healthy lunches and snacks to work for all-day energy.
3. Breathe slowly from the diaphragm for one minute between tasks throughout the day. "The oxygen will do wonders for both your stress levels and for your productivity."