

FINDING BALANCE

New Year, New Mindset

*Jessica Wilson, DVM**Formerly at Lap of Love Veterinary Hospice and In Home Euthanasia
Huntington Beach, California*

Welcome to 2019!

It is a new year, and thanks to a long-standing tradition, it is also the time when most of us promise to make changes and stick to our resolutions throughout the year. As veterinarians, we often play many roles within our daily professional and personal lives. So many roles, in fact, that finding balance while we constantly multitask has become challenging. Over time, carrying the burden of “doing it all” can result in severe emotional, psychological, and physical stress. If not addressed, this stress may eventually trickle down to support staff and, eventually, your clientele and patient care.

This year, I would challenge my colleagues to shift focus onto something that you can control as long as

you remain consistent—your physical health. Whether you work in an office/hospital setting, on the road as a mobile practitioner, in a lab setting, or in an academic institution, your body takes a huge hit with the daily demands of the profession. This also is true for our support staff, but first, let’s focus on you—the doctor, the role model, the leader in the workplace. Let’s start with the basics.

PREPARE TO RISE AND SHINE!

No two mornings are exactly alike, and a person’s mood upon waking will vary, but your mindset upon waking sets the tone for the day—whether it is a positive or negative mindset. We all have the ability to create the flow of our day with a positive and successful mindset as long as we prepare to do so. Simple tasks that can save time in the morning include preparing all the meals for your shift and having your wardrobe ready to go the night before. If you have a family, the same applies. Get things ready before everyone is ready for bed.

If you are constantly fatigued when you wake up, then track how much sleep you get on a consistent basis. Getting enough good-quality sleep (the ideal duration is different for everyone) is a vital part of preparing or setting up your morning in a positive mindset. It is amazing to see how sleep can affect your mood, energy

Always keep in mind that as a leader in your workplace, shifts in your mood affect the mood of your entire team.

levels, patience, and problem-solving abilities. Always keep in mind that as a leader in your workplace, shifts in your mood affect the mood of your entire team.

MORNING RITUALS

Once your wake-up alarm has gone off, it's time to start the day. Establish a positive and energizing routine that will help you get through the day. The goal is to wake up and do something for yourself first—before anyone else in the household.

One very simple thing you can do from the moment you wake up: Drink at least one glass of water upon rising. Try to do this before reaching for that cup of coffee/tea or breakfast. Drinking a glass of water on an empty stomach helps your digestive system and starts you on the right track to stay hydrated throughout the day. (And speaking of hydration, keeping hydrated also staves off headaches.) Next, get your mindset going in a positive direction by journaling, meditating, or getting an endorphin release with physical activity. This can be a simple morning walk or stretching session for 10 to 15 minutes to warm up your muscles and joints. It can also be a morning gym session where you weight train and/or do some cardiovascular activity to start your day. Whichever activity you choose, be consistent about it. As your body gets used to being hydrated first thing in the morning, along with some endorphin release, your mood will eventually elevate and your mindset can become consistently positive over time. Think about building this habit of putting you first.

WORKFLOW

This is where things can get tricky and you can easily be thrown off track. Arriving at your workplace, you find a multitude of messages, inpatients that need care, lab results that need to be called back, emergencies waiting to be seen, or a support staff member calling out. This not only is overwhelming but can also cause physical manifestations of stress as your cortisol levels rise—tachycardia, sweating, gastrointestinal upset, and the urge to go hide! But remember, you are the doctor, you are the leader, and people and patients depend on you. Instead, assess your physical needs, set priorities, and remember that you are in control—even when your day starts off unpredictably.

Now let's think about how many times you have worked through a shift without remembering whether or not you went to the restroom or had anything to

drink other than the large coffee that has been sitting at your desk for hours and hours. Or even worse, did you neglect to eat in between handling appointments, making a laceration repair, and attending to the cluster of emergencies that walked in the door?

Remember, you can control some of these things. Being adequately hydrated and getting enough high-quality calories throughout the day will have a huge impact on your mood and mindset. Setting alert reminders on your phone will help keep you on track with nourishing your body throughout the day. Depending on your work environment (this can be more challenging in the emergency hospital setting), it can be very helpful to allocate specific time blocks in between appointments when you can take a few moments for yourself.

STAYING CONSISTENT

Finding balance is challenging, but making self-care a priority is an easy way to start. Whether you are a new graduate or a seasoned veteran, you are the role model in your workplace. You are in control of your mood and mindset, starting with how you treat your physical body. Get enough good-quality sleep, stay hydrated, consume enough calories from high-quality foods, and get a daily dose of endorphins with physical activity. It will make a huge impact in your everyday life.

This year, it's all about Y-O-U—the most important priority of the day, every day! **TVP**



Jessica Wilson

Dr. Jessica Wilson is a native New Yorker and a 2010 graduate of Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine in St. Kitts. She completed her clinical year of training at the University of Minnesota and completed a residency in dentistry and oral surgery at VCA Alameda East in Denver, Colorado. Shortly after completing her residency, Dr. Wilson moved to southern California, where her interest in physical health and wellness developed. She began competing in local bodybuilding competitions and eventually earned professional bodybuilding status with the International Federation of Bodybuilding in 2015. Her veterinary focus shifted from dentistry and oral surgery to end-of-life care in 2017. Until recently, Dr. Wilson served families in southern California through Lap of Love Veterinary Hospice. She is preparing to sit for examinations to become a certified personal trainer and fitness nutrition specialist with the National Academy of Sports Medicine.