



# Health is Cool!

Volume **3**

2008  
Survey on  
Canadian Attitudes  
Towards Physical  
and Mental Health

**Size up how your work/life**

balancing act is affecting your health

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# A self-health check for Canadians

Your life/work balancing act means keeping lots of elements in play:

earning a living; paying the bills; keeping up with family duties; maintaining your physical fitness; and keeping in tune with your mental health and how you feel day to day.

By sharing these results of the fifth edition of the **Desjardins Financial Security Survey on Canadian Attitudes Towards Physical and Mental Health, at Work and Home**, we encourage you to take time out to think about how these aspects of your own life can become better balance.

In these pages, you'll also meet a few of the experts on the Desjardins Financial Security Research Survey Advisory Board. Their voices represent the leading organizations in the field of mental health and workplace issues in Canada. Through their insights and our ongoing research, we hope to better understand how we as Canadians deal with the pressures we face in our roles as workers, caregivers, and role models for our children— and the steps we can take to better maintain our own physical and mental health.

Stay well!

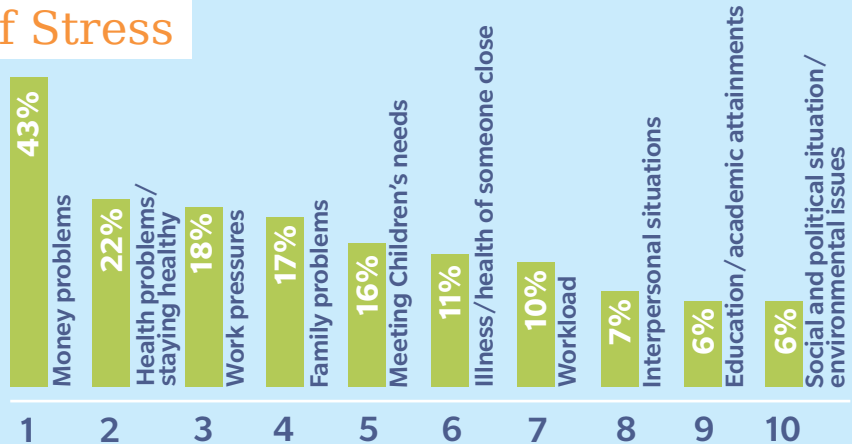
#### THE SURVEY

Researcher SOM conducted telephone interviews on behalf of Desjardins Financial Security with 1,594 Canadian adults between February 7 and March 10, 2008. The sampling is statistically weighted to represent the general population, and provides estimates with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6%, 19 times out of 20.

## Top Sources of Stress

When asked what aspects of life are most stressful, 23% of respondents rank money as number one—and money was cited among the top three sources of stress by 43%. Sound familiar?

Here are the top 10 greatest sources of stress Canadians cited in our survey:



### What it means

“The word ‘stress’ itself is a lay term, not a medical term. It’s a release of hormones. It’s healthy, it’s normal, and it protects you. If you encounter a lion in the jungle, you’d better be prepared to run. It keeps you alive,” says Dr. Tom Ungar, a Toronto-based psychiatrist and educator, representing the Canadian Psychiatric Association on our Advisory Board.

“When we encounter stress-related problems, it typically means lacking sufficient resources to meet the demands that are being placed on you,” adds Dr. Taylor Alexander, Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association. “The degree of our ability to deal with it is the key to managing stress and maintaining mental health.”

### How to deal with it?

Deep breathing and other stress-reduction strategies are familiar to most of us, but these findings may suggest a need to tap into a wider range of tools to cope with the realities of our day-to-day stresses.

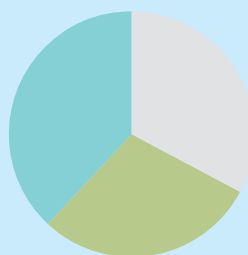
While many workplaces offer employees programs to better manage their stress, given that money is Canadians’ greatest concern, “you have to wonder if perhaps bringing in a financial planner or a debt organizer could be more important for maintaining mental health,” suggests Dr. Unger.

So, how about a little financial planning alongside your downward dog?

### How are you?

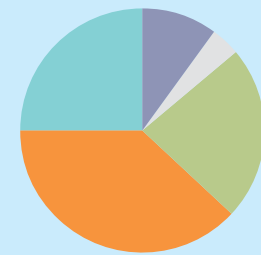
While a vast majority of Canadians report being near the top of their game in physical health, 71% say their stress level is the same, or higher, than it was a year earlier. For the remaining third: congratulations on getting life more in balance this year!

#### WHAT'S YOUR LEVEL OF STRESS?




Lower 29%  
Equal 38%  
Higher 33%

#### HOW'S YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH?



Excellent 23%  
Very good 38%  
Good 25%  
Fair 10%  
Poor 4%



FAMILY LIFE

# Healthy at home?

Family pressures fueled by desire to do 'best' for kids

More than three-quarters of Canadians surveyed (78%) agree that parents have to do everything possible so that children can be “the best” among children. Yet, in a seeming contradiction, 71% also agree that today’s parents do “too much” for their children.


“It looks like parents are in a real state of conflict. On one hand, they do think they’re doing too much for their kids, but on the other hand, they know they have to offer their children opportunities. They’re on this high-pressure path, and they don’t know how to stop,” says Michele Nowski, Director, Group Disability Claims, at Desjardins Financial Security, and a contributor to our Advisory Board panel.

## Not a moment to spare?

Time spent outside of work is a valuable commodity, and Canadians are struggling with the hours left on the clock to spend at home with family, friends... or even just to relax.

- 88% of respondents say parents with full-time jobs have difficulty finding time just to relax.
- 56% of respondents say they spend less and less spare time with friends.
- 39% of respondents say they spend less and less spare time with family members.

“It seems to reflect something we often see, that many parents these days are giving things to their children instead of giving them time,” says Glenn Thompson, who served as interim CEO and President for the founding of the new Mental Health Commission of Canada in 2007.



## Stress relief: ‘good enough’ parenting

“It’s the parents who sometimes need permission to find that “good enough” parenting point, and achieve that sweet spot of not doing too much. It’s a constant negotiation with yourself to recognize that if you do more, it doesn’t necessarily achieve a better result,” says Dr. Tom Ungar.

WORK LIFE

# Healthy at work?

No surprise: we're stressed.

But just how much?

Our picture of life on the job seems to reflect a workforce on edge: **more than eight in ten workers surveyed (85%) agree that employees work in a very stressful environment. Plus, nearly three-quarters (74%) think employees are overworked.**

And, for any senior managers out there who are speaking the creed of workplace empowerment, here's a reality check; **nearly two-thirds of workers (65%) believe workers are participating less today in making decisions about their work, not more.**

Whatever the cause of it, Canadians are clearly seeing the effects of stress on the well-being of their colleagues: **a majority of workers (89%) think, as the years go by, more and more employees are suffering from burn-outs, major depression, anxiety or other mental health problems.**

This is not to suggest that the work itself is necessarily to blame for health-related problems, remind experts on our panel.

"In reality, just a small percentage of the mental health absences we see are solely related to workplace issues," says Michele Nowski.

**53%**  
of workers are prepared to earn less money to work fewer hours per week.

**74%**  
think employees are overworked.

**85%**  
agree that employees work in a very stressful environment.

**89%**  
think, as the years go by, more and more employees are suffering from burn-outs, major depression, anxiety or other mental health problems.





86%

of workers are prepared to take weeks or months off work to care for a family member with health problems.

## Promoting wellness in the workplace

Nearly 60% of workers agree to some degree that workers today have difficult relationships with their bosses. And just over half (55%) agree that workers have less human contact with either their co-workers or supervisors.

So, given these difficulties, what are the top factors that led employees to say that a company's senior management cares for the wellness of employees?

Access to attractive benefits packages like insurance, pensions or employee assistance programs	41%
They listen/are open to discussion	39%
Offer an employee recognition program	13%
Possibility of vacation/sick leave	8%
Offer flexible schedule	8%

By and large, while many workers may be stressed, employees do take responsibility for preserving their own mental health: **only 5% say this responsibility lies with their employer, while more than two thirds (67%) fully accept this as their individual duty.**

## Who's ready to lead?

We know that not everyone is a born leader, but could health issues and the pressures of the work/life divide be deterring potential managers from becoming more engaged in corporate life?

**A striking number of workers—67%—say they are prepared to decline a promotion or refuse to take on additional responsibilities. More than half (53%) are prepared to earn less money to work fewer hours per week.**

These responses prompted several Advisory Board members to recall familiar anecdotes of organizations facing difficulties filling positions of responsibility—people who won't accept promotions because they don't want more stress in their lives.

"What we haven't seen is the job descriptions adapt to these demands," says Dr. Tom Ungar. "There can be a cultural resistance within management."

# 75%

of workers agree that workers do not receive adequate recognition from their employer.

## Why do you go into work sick?

The word “epidemic” may be too strong, but how else to describe the proportion of people who say they drag themselves into the workplace feeling “exhausted” or “ill”? More than eight in ten respondents (83%) say they head into the workplace when they feel that way. Why?

■ <b>Deadlines to meet</b>	<b>61%</b>
■ <b>Don't want work to pile up</b>	<b>55%</b>
■ <b>Don't want colleagues to be overloaded with work</b>	<b>49%</b>
■ <b>Think missing work would be frowned upon</b>	<b>41%</b>
■ <b>Can't afford to do without the income</b>	<b>40%</b>

For employers, the question this raises is, how productive can people be in this condition? Not to mention, what's the impact on co-workers, if colds and flus are spread?

A possible solution: more organizational flexibility, suggests Advisory Board member **Kathy Jurgens, Mental Health Works Program Coordinator at CMHA Ontario**. That could mean managers cultivating an environment in which it is acceptable for people to stay at home when they aren't feeling well, or to opt to work on assignments at home if it is practical. “You see people saving up their sick days for when their kids are home sick. After using up sick days, there's a mental calculation of ‘now I can't get sick again all year,’” she says.

## ■ Caring about co-workers

Mind is top-of-mind in the workplace for the majority of workers who have known someone who's taken a leave to deal with a mental health matter. More than half of workers (55%) say that at least one of their colleagues has been away from work for a period of time because of a mental health problem. Many say it made them:

■ <b>More sensitive to their own mental health</b>	<b>68%</b>
■ <b>More sensitive to the mental health of the people around them</b>	<b>81%</b>
■ <b>More careful about acting in a way that promotes good mental health in the workplace</b>	<b>82%</b>

“What struck me is the sense of compassion that workers have for their colleagues who are suffering from mental health problems,” says Dr. Taylor Alexander, Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, commenting on our survey findings. “Once they see someone affected by it, it sensitizes them.”



# For more ideas on striking a healthier work/life balance



[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Visit the online Support Centre on the Canadian Mental Health Association's Web site for links and people to contact for help.

[www.mentalhealthworks.ca](http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca)

A program of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, this resource helps address mental health issues in the workplace.

[www.psychologyfoundation.org](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org)

Helpful links to parenting sites and how to help your kids manage stress.

[www.mentalhealthminute.com](http://www.mentalhealthminute.com)

Insight and awareness into how mental health influences your day-to-day life and the decisions you make.

## About this publication

Health is Cool! is part of a series of educational publications and research by Desjardins Financial Security on the physical and mental health of Canadians and their work/life balance. For more details on Desjardins Financial Security's partnerships in mental health leadership, please visit [www.healthiscool.ca](http://www.healthiscool.ca).

## ABOUT DESJARDINS FINANCIAL SECURITY

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