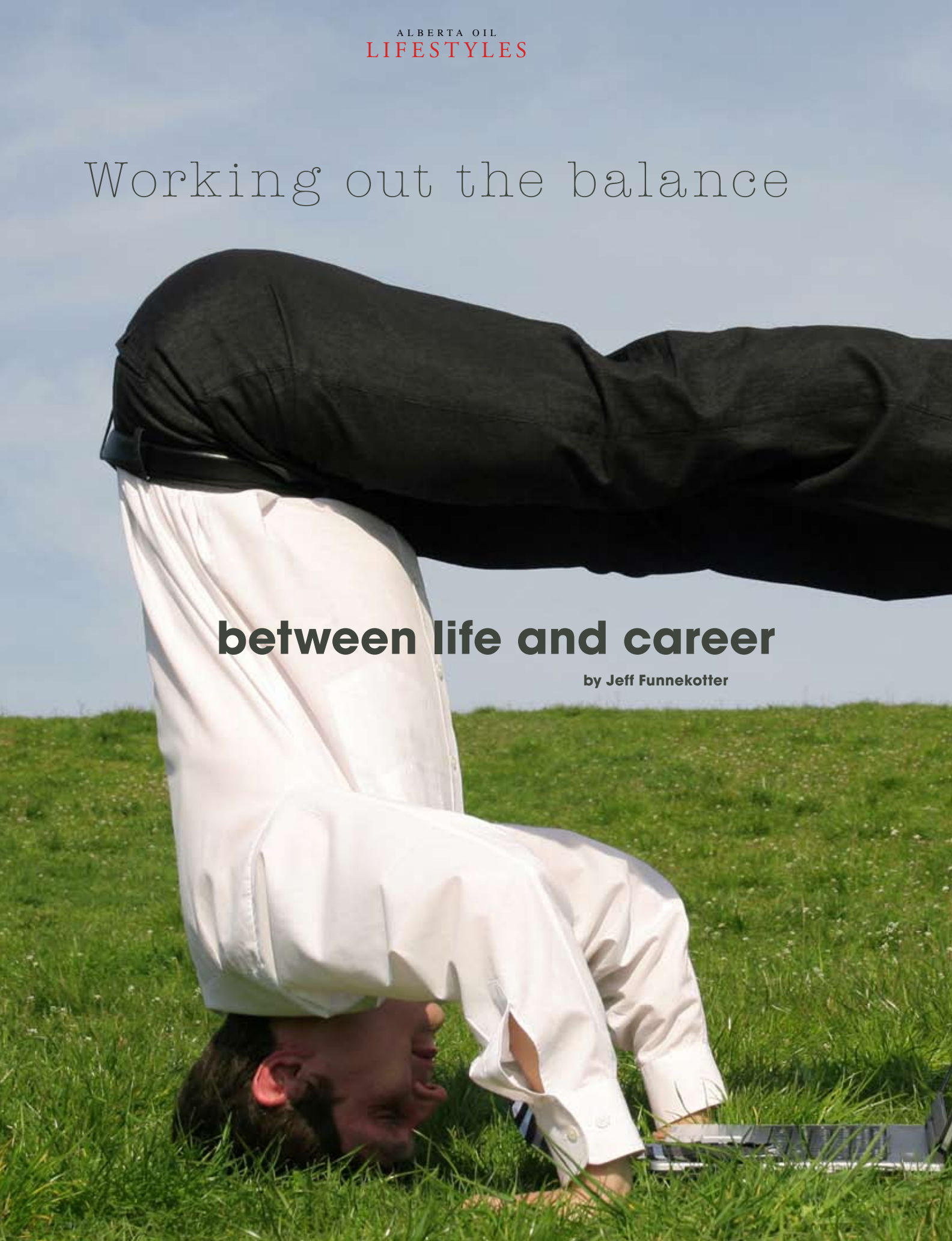


Working out the balance

**between life and career**

by Jeff Funnekotter





According to the 2002 Alberta Physical Activity Monitor (APAM) survey, Canadians spend on average 60 per cent of their waking hours at work. This tells us two things:

1) Whoa.

2) We'd do well to incorporate exercise into the workday.

The other 40 per cent of Canadian waking hours are consumed between the kids, cooking, doing laundry, fighting traffic, some inane reality TV show we can't seem to get enough of, that blind date who was allergic to everything, and all other manner of non-exercise-related activities – all in all, there seems to be precious little time to exercise enough, if at all.

The benefits of exercise are numerous, and we can likely list off some of them just by relating our own experience (however brief) with a regular physical activity routine: weight loss, more energy, a better mood. What we may not be able as readily to identify are the more serious benefits of regular exercise: reduced risk of developing osteoporosis; more significantly, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease (the #1 cause of death in North America, incidentally); and a growing body of evidence suggests it may even reduce the risk of developing some forms of cancer <sup>1</sup>.

Need more reasons to get moving during your workday – or, employers, to promote more fitness within the company? Exercise can significantly reduce stress, which, according to Statistics Canada, ravaged Canadian business in 2000 to the tune of \$12 billion from employee turnover, disability management, 'presenteeism' (i.e. an inability to perform one's job), substance use and abuse, and, costliest, absenteeism. These numbers are likely significantly higher even today, as the Canadian economy continues to chug along.

The 2002 APAM survey also shows that 52 per cent of Canadians don't exercise enough to derive the benefits of exercise. All manner of guidelines as to what constitutes "enough" exercise are available. Depending on what you read or what info you've gleaned from Google recently to justify a bare minimum of movement, this baseline can be anywhere from 3 times per week for 30 minutes at a time, to 5 times per week for an hour minimum.

In the interest of encouraging more than the bare minimum of active living, let's go with the recently released Canada Food Guide, which for the first time in its existence actually recommends exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. It suggests adults get moderate physical activity for 30-60 minutes per day, every day. The guide also notes that these minutes do not necessarily need to be incorporated all at once – taking it in 10-minute chunks is also acceptable.

For the desk-ridden corporate worker, this is good news. While it may seem daunting to take 30-60 minutes over lunch to hit the gym – what with eating, meetings, and (hopefully) taking a post-workout shower before returning to a full afternoon of work – incorporating a few 10- or 20-minute physical activity breaks into your day suddenly seems much more doable.


Here are a few easy ways to accumulate those brief moments of activity:

- **Miss your stop:** If you take public transit to work, get off at a stop prior to or just after your usual one. This will force you to walk (and if it's a Canadian winter, walk quickly) to your office or whatever immediate destination. Similarly, if you drive, park in a lot that is further away from your office than normal. This means 10-20 minutes of exercise added on to your morning and your late afternoon, with an added bonus of varying the routine that likely has you always passing the same people and buildings.

- **Use the lunch hour wisely:** You are typically the master of your lunch hour domain, free from the waking hour distractions of work. You can grab a workout at a nearby gym or park, head for a walk, or do the stairs in your building (hint: throw on the iPod and your favorite tunes to take the monotony out of the stairs).

- **Do an office circuit:** a number of exercises to get the blood pumping can be done right at your desk and are really beneficial when you start to feel that 2:30pm post-lunch lull coming. While a few stretches are great for easing tension, they don't necessarily

qualify as "moderate exercise". Push-ups on the desk, squats where you just barely touch your chair, and some resistance bands kept in a drawer for bicep curls and tricep extensions are all ideal. Ask any trainer at a local gym or where you purchase those bands and they'll show you the right technique. Additionally, head to the following website for more ideas and images of proper form to keep your office workout from working against you: <http://exercise.about.com/cs/exerciseworkouts/l/bofficeworkout.htm>

Studies have indicated that it takes between 20 and 30 days to successfully incorporate a new habit into our lifestyle. All too often, the initial attempt at integrating more (or any) exercise into our lives is cut short because long-unused muscles will scream at us for days. So stick with it beyond the 20-day mark, and you'll provide yourself a benefits package that's just as rewarding as the one your company provides. 

<sup>1</sup> Liz Applegate. *Encyclopedia of Sports & Fitness Nutrition*. (Three Rivers Press, New York, New York, 2002)

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