

A photograph of a man, a woman, and a young child. The man is on the left, wearing a dark red sweater, and is kissing the child on the cheek. The woman is on the right, wearing a light orange sweater, and is also kissing the child on the cheek. The child is in the center, wearing a yellow sweater and blue jeans, and is smiling. The background is a plain, light blue-grey color.

TIPS of the Month

JANUARY 2023

MENTAL LOAD

by Annie Leclerc, Coordinator, Prevention, Support and Intervention



**Military Family
Resource Centre**
Montreal Region

WELCOME • SUPPORT • UNITE

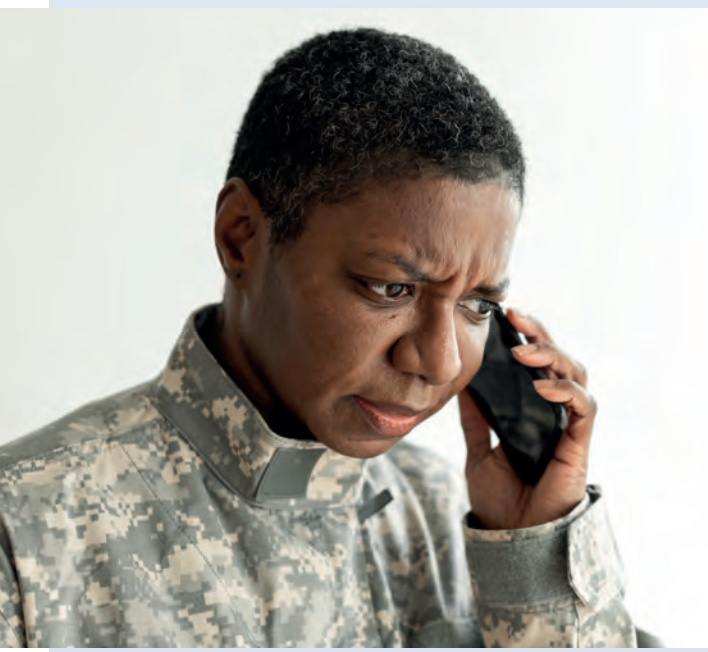


Canada

Yvette is a member in the Regular Force. She has two sons, 6 and 15. She says she is exhausted and frustrated with “having to do more than her husband does.” Her husband is a police officer with the SPVM and has a constantly shifting schedule. Yvette says that her husband takes care of car and house repairs and the snow clearing. However, she explains that these are things that happen only every so often, and that she is responsible every day for household tasks, dinner and the children’s homework, not to mention the tasks and duties required by her full-time job. Yvette has to keep in mind the dates of her eldest son’s soccer games and remind her husband to go pick up the youngest son at the swimming pool on Saturday afternoons. Add in the holiday period to all these responsibilities and Yvette was completely wiped out. She was the host for New Year’s Eve, and so was responsible for Christmas gifts, invitations, decorations, the New Year’s Eve meal and even the clothes that her husband and two children would wear. Yvette is out of energy and feels overwhelmed by everything that there is to do on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. She is impatient and upset and feels that her family relationships are being affected.

What is mental load?

Mental load encompasses the mental concerns and the planning that go along with household tasks (housework, meals, laundry), taking care of children (hygiene, clothes, homework) and work. For instance, mental load includes scheduling medical appointments, planning meals, making sure that nothing is left off of the grocery list, registering children for school or activities, reminding a spouse or children so they don’t forget something, and packing bags and snacks for travel or family outings. This work is often done by women. “Over half of Canadian women are largely overwhelmed by their work-life balance. They feel rushed, drained and overloaded by the pressure of multiple roles” (Chevier and Tremblay, 2003).



How can we balance the load?

- Together, make a list of tasks and plans to be carried out for the whole year (e.g. school supplies, the holiday season, Halloween, birthdays, outings, vacation...).
- Specify when the tasks must be done. For example, take out the garbage after dinner on Wednesday evenings, have the laundry done by 7:00 p.m. on Sundays. Make the list as specific as possible to avoid frustration.
- Include children and teenagers in the planning.
- People can take turns doing chores; for example, checking the grocery list before going shopping, making supper, clearing the snow, walking the dog, going to parent-teacher meetings...
- Use a big calendar and put it in a strategic location; on the fridge, for example.
- Don’t criticize the way others do their assigned tasks. The important thing is that the task is being done. The how no longer concerns you. For example, if one person is responsible for planning a vacation and another person is in charge of planning birthdays, each person is allowed to make the plans as they see fit.
- Thank other members of the family for their help. A “thank-you” encourages and motivates people.



DID YOU KNOW...

70% of household tasks (activities that need to be done in order for life at home to run smoothly: housework, dishes, laundry, meal preparation, etc.) are done by women. Women primarily take care of the children and hold full-time jobs. Sociologist Gilles Pronovost explains that over the years, while fathers have started spending more time taking care of the children, they have decreased their contribution to household tasks.



Bibliography:

- CHEVRIER, Catherine, et Diane-Gabrielle TREMBLAY (2003). *Portrait actuel du marché du travail au Canada et au Québec : une analyse statistique en fonction du genre*, Note 2003-02 de la Chaire de recherche du Canada sur les enjeux socio-organisationnels de l'économie du savoir, 52 p.
- Pronovost, Gilles. *Que faisons-nous de notre temps? Vingt-quatre heures dans la vie des Québécois*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2015
- Simard, Valérie. *Partager le poids de la charge mentale*. La Presse, 4 octobre 2019. <https://www.lapresse.ca/societe/famille/2019-10-04/partager-le-poids-de-la-charge-mentale> (French only)

Do you need help?

Psychosocial support at the Montreal region Military Family Resource Centre:
450-358-7099 ext. 2917 or SvcPersCRFMSoutienPsySt-Jean@forces.gc.ca