

[IMAGE]

## Portrait of a Healthy Mom

It may sound impossible, but many women actually find the time and clarity to eat right, exercise consistently and maintain a balanced, healthy lifestyle even with children, a job, a spouse and myriad other responsibilities. How do they do it? By learning simple, effective ways to prioritize their own health and wellness.

We've said it before and we'll say it again: Being a mom is *tough*, especially when it comes to finding time to exercise, eat right and just plain relax while doing all the other things moms do every day. In short, moms are continuously challenged to treat themselves with the same care and concern they selflessly dedicate to their children, their spouse and countless others. Finding the time is one of the biggest challenges, but it's an absolute necessity for your sake and the sake of your loved ones. Here are four ways to stay healthy - physically and emotionally - in the midst of the chaos:

**1. Make the world your gym.** This might sound strange, but it's great advice, especially when you're running around with your head cut off and can't possibly see yourself making it the gym for an hour a day, three or four days a week. "I don't have the time" is no excuse for not exercising, not when there are so many ways to get a great workout with limited equipment and time. At home, you can increase your metabolism (which promotes weight loss) and tone your muscles with simple body-resistance exercises (push-ups, pull-ups, lunges, squats, etc.) in as little as 10-15 minutes a day. If you're with the kids at a park, bring a few cones and set up a sprint course for you (and them) to run. Even riding the swings can be a heart-pumping, muscle-toning activity. Commit yourself to exercise and you'll find a million easy, enjoyable ways to do it, no matter where you are or how little time you seemingly have.

Photos of Mom - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **2. Plan ahead - way ahead.** This is a great suggestion in general, but with respect to ensuring proper nutrition for you and your family, it's essential. Why wait until the last minute and end up rushing to prepare breakfast, get lunches ready or whip up dinner after work? In the end, not only do your kids likely suffer from a higher percentage of prepackaged, processed, microwaved foods, but so will you. To combat this all-too-common trend, plan weekly meals. On the weekends, shop for the week, paying particular attention to purchasing a variety of healthy, easy-to-prepare foods you can turn into quick meals. Anything that can be prepared beforehand and/or in large quantities is perfect - leftovers are a great way to ensure good meals during the hectic week. And

involve your children in the process; it will take some of the work off your shoulders while teaching them the value of good nutrition.

**3. Give yourself a break.** Sometimes finding time to do nothing is just as important as finding time to exercise, eat right or do something. Just because you've finally found an "extra" 20 minutes in your day doesn't necessarily mean you've got to fill it with an activity. Taking a few moments to unwind, de-stress and get away from it all can do wonders. If the kids are asleep or otherwise occupied, kick off your shoes and relax in your favorite chair with soft music and aromatherapy (or complete silence, if that's possible); if the house is still bustling, a casual walk around the block can be just as freeing. This can also be a great time to review your day and work through any negative emotions or stresses in a calm, relaxed atmosphere.

**4. Put yourself on your list of priorities.** This is a no-brainer, but it's the key to accomplishing all of the above. One of the very qualities that makes moms so special - selflessness - can also be their downfall. To avoid this, make sure you're on your priority list (and not at the bottom); this doesn't mean being selfish or putting yourself ahead of your children or your other responsibilities; it's really about identifying when you need *your* time - and then taking it without feeling guilty. If you're convinced that sacrificing your own health and wellness to ensure the same for your children is acceptable, think of it this way: By giving to yourself, you'll be giving to them, too. By exercising, eating right and maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle, you'll be in an infinitely better position to provide for them in every way. And isn't that what being a mom is all about?

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