

Making Time for Yourself

Making time for yourself is probably the last thing on your list, and probably one that you rarely ever get to. There's always someone or something that needs your attention, and taking care of others is more important than taking care of yourself, right? You might feel like it's hard enough to get everything done as it is and that you'll never find the time. But there are some very compelling, and important, reasons to try.

Why should you make time for yourself?

With the nonstop demands of work and family, there's always something to do. Energy is expended on work projects, taking care of the home, maintaining relationships, managing child care arrangements, and playing with the kids. But where does that energy come from? How can you recharge your batteries, so to speak?

Spending time alone on a regular basis has been shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure. It can also play an important role in reducing stress, which can in turn enhance the immune system. Not to mention the spiritual rejuvenation that a few moments alone can spark.

Aside from the health and spiritual benefits, another good reason to take care of yourself is your children. Chances are you spent a great deal of time and energy trying to find a quality child care provider for your little ones. Recognizing that quality care has a positive effect, you wanted to make sure that your kids are well cared for. But who's taking care of you? And how much can you give your children if your own energy banks are depleted? Making time to take care of yourself will help ensure you can provide your children with the quality care they deserve.

What does it take?

Taking care of yourself doesn't have to be a big production, but it might require a shift in your mind set. Many working parents feel guilty if they don't spend every free moment with their kids. The first step is to recognize that you deserve the attention, that it doesn't make you a bad person, and that ultimately, it will allow

you to give back more to the people you love. Have some fun coming up with something that works for you—and then make sure you do it!

To get you started, here are a couple of suggestions for how to create some self-care time:

- **Take a bath.** Adding candles and soft music can make a half hour seem like a luxurious getaway.
- **Read a good book.** When was the last time you read something just for fun?
- **Go for a walk.** Visit a favorite park, or just stroll around the block.
- **Make a creative project.** Do you have a pile of photos and a photo album that needs to be completed? How about planting that herb garden? There's probably a project you've "put on hold" for some day when you have time. Make the time.
- **Get some exercise.** Not only is exercise good for you, but it helps relieve stress. Plus this feel-good activity is one that you can easily do by yourself.
- **Make an appointment at a salon.** Go ahead and pamper yourself!
- **Combine time alone with an enjoyable task.** Does cooking relax you? How about weeding or even mowing the lawn? You can always pick something that needs to be done and spend some time doing it alone.

By putting a little energy into caring for yourself, chances are you'll have more energy for everyone—and everything—else. That can only result in more quality time with your family.

Make yourself a
priority once in a
while. It's not selfish.

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Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Being older doesn't mean you have to feel tired all the time. There are many things you can do to help you get a good night's sleep.

Here are some ideas:

- Follow a regular sleep schedule. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Try to avoid napping in the late afternoon or evening, as it may keep you awake at night.
- Develop a bedtime routine. Take time to relax before bedtime each night. Some people watch television, read a book, listen to soothing music, or soak in a warm bath.
- Keep your bedroom dark, not too hot or too cold, and as quiet as possible.
- Have a comfortable mattress, a pillow you like, and enough blankets for the season.
- Exercise at regular times each day, but not within 3 hours of your bedtime.
- Make an effort to get outside in the sunlight each day.
- Be careful about when and how much you eat. Large meals close to bedtime may keep you awake, but a light snack in the evening can help you get a good night's sleep.
- Stay away from caffeine late in the day. Caffeine found in coffee, tea, soda, and hot chocolate can keep you awake.
- Drink fewer beverages in the evening. Waking up to go to the bathroom and turning on a bright light break up your sleep.
- Remember that alcohol won't help you sleep. Even small amounts make it harder to stay asleep.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping. After turning off the light, give yourself about 20 minutes to fall asleep. If you're still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

Sweet Dreams

There are some tricks to help you fall asleep. You don't really have to count sheep, but you could try counting slowly to 100. Some people find that playing mental games makes them sleepy. For example, tell yourself its 5 minutes before you have to get up, and you're just trying to get a few extra winks. Other people find that relaxing their body puts them to sleep. You might start by telling yourself that your toes feel light as feathers and then work your way up the rest of the body saying the same words. You may drift off to sleep before getting to the top of your head.

If you feel tired and unable to do your activities for more than 2 or 3 weeks, you may have a sleep problem. Talk to your doctor about changes you can make to get a better night's sleep.

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