



Me time for mum

Time takes on a whole new meaning when a new baby arrives in the home - suddenly there doesn't seem to be enough of it and your own needs take lowest priority.

Chances are you'll look back at your life before children and wonder what you did all day. How did you fill your time without the endless round of feeds, nappies and songs?

It's easy to get so immersed in motherhood in those first few months that you forget about your own needs. But caring for your precious baby properly means caring for yourself as well. Continually denying yourself and your needs is not the sign of a devoted parent, it's the sign of a budding martyr complex. If you want to raise a child who is assertive about what she needs, start by setting the best of examples.

To get the most out of parenthood you may need to learn some new ways of thinking about self-care. Your new life requires high levels of energy and optimism. Maintaining them means looking after your body, mind and soul - not just your baby.

It's worth taking a few moments to understand how your brain and body work together to influence your mood and ability to cope as a new parent. The following facts may not be new, but they take on an added significance when sleep deprivation leaves your body in need of some serious maintenance.

Looking after yourself

- Skipping breakfast and/or lunch lowers your blood glucose level, causing your adrenal gland to release adrenalin and cortisol. Your brain function will decrease, you will feel tense and on edge.
- A protein-rich breakfast with some complex carbohydrates will set you up well for the day, boosting tyrosine levels and providing a sustained energy source.

- Caffeine and sugar on an empty stomach can leave your blood glucose lower than where you started, leaving you tired and irritable.
- Lack of exposure to sunshine is linked to low serotonin, dopamine, and vitamin D levels. This can lead to a low mood, lack of motivation and concentration.
- Exercise releases endorphins, and if taken regularly will lower your adrenalin and cortisol levels.
- The company of emotionally-secure adults activates natural opioids in the brain. Get around these people regularly - before you feel lonely and strung out.
- Calming activities cause your brain to release oxytocin, which inhibits the release of stress chemicals.
- What is your body trying to tell you? Feed it well, take it outside and exercise it regularly, do nice things with nice people as often as you can, and you shouldn't have too many problems.

And finally, it might help to think of your new role as an employment situation. There is no boss, only one very demanding client. Just as you would at work, it's important to take fuel breaks, and to have some time when you can completely switch off (when baby's asleep or you have a babysitter of course!). Not many people would apply for a job with no leave entitlements and a 24-hour working day.

It may feel as though parenting is going to be that way in the overwhelming rush of responsibility when you first bring your little one home, but if you are proactive about self-care, you will soon realise it's not quite that drastic.

Taking time in the morning to eat breakfast, read the paper, shower, get dressed, and put on some make-up, just as if you were going to work, can help you to feel more 'in control' of the chaos. There will always be the odd day when you just can't manage to get out of your pyjamas, and they can be incredibly therapeutic! For the most part, however, you'll feel better about yourself and baby's impact on your life if you make time to feel and look good.

Tried and tested tips

- Say yes to every offer of help, but if someone offers to vacuum when you'd rather they did your shopping - ask!
- Sleep when your baby sleeps. If you can't manage that then lie in bed, if you can't manage that then lie on the couch, if you can't manage that then sit on the couch, they're all better than having no rest at all.
- Encourage your partner to get confident with the daily routines; you don't need the pressure of knowing you're the only one who can bath/wind/change the baby.
- If you're going to the effort of cooking, make two or three times as much as you need and freeze it to take the pressure off another night.
- Be prepared to shake up your daily routine if it makes life easier. Chop the vegetables for dinner straight after breakfast, or whenever you have the time. Flexibility and multi-tasking will leave you a lot more relaxed than will a rigid timetable.
- Get to know people in your neighbourhood with babies. Your visiting Plunket Nurse may be able to let you know where they are. They will be a great support network.
- All sorts of activities can be nurturing. For some it will be having a massage, for others it will be going for a run. If it makes you feel good, then it's probably good for you!



Caring for your precious baby properly, means caring for yourself.

- Avoid comparisons with other new parents or babies. These can be poisonous to your sense of well-being.
- If the rosy expectations you had for yourself as a new parent have been shot to pieces, it doesn't mean that you have failed. Give yourself permission to reassess how you should look, feel and behave - now that you actually know what's involved with this job.

Time out

As a person you are much more than just a body, or just a mind, so acknowledge this by making an effort to nurture yourself in lots of different ways. Try to get some regular input in each of the following areas.

- Mental - reading, studying, hobbies
- Physical - daily exercise, fresh air, eating well, staying hydrated, moving to music, warm bath, sleep/rest
- Social - seeing friends, going to shops, seeing a movie, visiting loved ones
- Spiritual - praying, church, listening to music, reflective time

At The Parenting Place we believe **'family is everything'** so we've created a series of 45 Hot Tips brochures to help you make the most of your parenting journey. They're grouped into four categories - Early Years, Middle Years, Tweens and Teens, and General Parenting.

Early Years topics include -

- Baby-proofing your relationship
- Entertaining baby
- Fussy eaters
- Getting ready for school
- Getting ready for toilet training
- Raising a resilient child
- Me time for mum
- Preparing for a new sibling
- Sharing
- Tantrum taming
- Understanding behaviour
- Why won't she stop crying



Brochures are available from theparentingplace.com or The Parenting Place, 300 Great South Road, Greenlane in Auckland, 0800 53 56 59.

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