

# M A T T E R Making Moms

*Women who place their own health as a priority  
have family's interest at heart*

Julie Costrakis



Laurie Hartman, M.Ed., Director of Compassion Care at Grace Church in Noblesville agrees. "We obey the flight attendant's instructions to don oxygen masks before helping children, so let's do the same with our emotional health; if we take care of ourselves first we can best help our families." Feeling drained from our everyday schedule doesn't give the fuel required to be present as a mom. "Our interests prior to motherhood may require more time than currently available, but don't cease them altogether," says Hartman. "If a two-hour women's study isn't possible, find a devotional to take short breaks with. If you can't run seven days a week, run four." She stresses the importance of human connections. "It is easy to become isolated with the tasks of parenting. Schedule date night once a week and regular commitments with friends." Moms who remember that being "good enough" is permissible can cast off the burdensome pursuit of perfection.

"Sadly the tendency is to immediately turn to mood stabilizers for stress relief," says Dr. Beckwith. "I advise first trying activities to blow off steam and find personal enjoyment. Doing so allows us to be better listeners and caregivers, as well as improves the coping skills we need to deal with the endless challenges life presents."

Many moms make caring for others their primary concern – with their own health last on the list. A woman can mistakenly believe that setting aside "mom time" is selfish, when in actuality, it is crucial for her physical and psychological health. Mary K. Beckwith, M.D., FAGOC has arrived at this conclusion from years of observing patients at Clearvista Women's Care in Indianapolis. "The single most important decision a woman can make for her health is to engage in stress management activities, such as exercise and self-nurturing endeavors. These generally lead a woman to make better choices about nutrition and fitness, as well as mental and spiritual health, allowing her to model positive habits to kids."

Even taking in the enormous amount of helpful health information from the media can be stressful. Dr. Beckwith suggests turning to the guidelines established by medical governing boards. "These recommendations are based on sound clinical research, and are a valuable resource." For example, the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force website ([www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/recommendations.htm](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/recommendations.htm)) offers screening timelines for every health concern. "Know the conditions you are at a high-risk for due to family history and their warning signs," says Dr. Beckwith. "Every young woman should be prevention-minded, such as taking calcium for bone health and using sunscreen, as well as being mindful of optimal nutrition and weight. Breast and gynecological exams are a must. Taking time for yourself every week will increase awareness of what your body is telling you."

Everyone agrees that family caregiving should be high on a mother's list of priorities. Yet when her own needs are rarely addressed, physical and psychological wellbeing suffers. Optimal health begins by establishing regular times to nurture your physical, emotional and spiritual self.

And now is the perfect time to begin!