



How Taking Care of Yourself Makes You a Better Mom

By: Kelly Ross, MD, FAAP

Mothering is hard work. It is constant work. It is so easy to stop caring for yourself or to get overwhelmed (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Feeling-Overwhelmed-with-Parenting-Demands.aspx). But, when you stop caring for yourself, your ability to care for your child is impacted and your ability to enjoy motherhood is impacted.



My Best Advice: Take Care of Yourself

As a pediatric hospitalist (/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-a-Pediatric-Hospitalist.aspx), a good part of my career involves caring for new babies in two very different hospital settings. I have been sending moms and babies home for 15 years now. Having watched them, and having gone through motherhood myself, what would my *"best advice for new moms ever"* include?

It's something many women work hard to do throughout their pregnancy but stop once they hear that first baby cry. It's something that has a rippling effect for decades. It costs nothing, but saves society millions. It is something that is so hard to do at times and yet so vital.

So, what is my *"best advice for new moms ever"*? Take care of yourself. That's it, four little words.

When you are pregnant, it is easy to see why this one idea is so very important.

The little baby growing inside of you is directly affected by what you eat, drink and do.

- If you smoke (/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Smoking-During-Pregnancy.aspx), the baby gets exposed and doesn't grow as well.
- If you are chronically stressed or depressed (/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/When-Things-Arent-Perfect-Caring-for-Yourself-Your-Children.aspx), your body's responsive hormones cause a cascade of negative effects on your baby.
- If you eat poorly (/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Nutrition-and-Exercise-During-Pregnancy.aspx), the baby is at risk for poor growth.

But once the baby is no longer a part of your body, it is easy to forget that tight association between how you care for yourself and how you care for your child's health.

It Isn't Selfish to Take Time to Exercise!

A mom who is well rested, eats a healthy diet, gets plenty of exercise, maintains close relationships with friends and gets help when she realizes she isn't coping well, is far more equipped to be the best mother she can be than one who doesn't do those things. It isn't selfish to take time to exercise or to get an adequate sleep each night.

I can remember when I was in middle school waking up to my mom returning from a training run with stories of *"the nice police man"* who followed her while she was running to make sure she was safe. My mom is a trusting soul, she often ran at 4:00 AM. Looking back, now that I am a mom, three things about that memory are clear:

1. I no longer think she was crazy for running at 4:00 AM. It was the only down time she had as a mom, and she took advantage of it rather than choosing not to exercise.

For example and those memories are deeply ingrained in me as "what moms do."

3. That police man really was nice! Thank you officer for keeping her safe, so she could grow up to be a grandma!

When I first became a mom, I didn't exercise. I felt it was selfish to take time away from the kids to do something for myself. I "didn't have time to exercise (/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Overcoming-Obstacles-to-Physical-Activity.aspx) and be a good mom" with three little children. Honestly, some days it seemed to take an act of God to get 10 minutes to shower. [Back to Top](#)

When my triplets turned 2, I realized I wasn't strong enough to pull the wagon with all three of them, so I started going to the gym. Going to the gym not to take care of myself mind you, but to be able to take care of them.

Your Children Are Watching You...*And Want to Be Like You!*

It wasn't until the kids were school aged that I truly realized that by being a "good mom" and not caring for myself, I was actually falling short of my goal. Like the little boy in the Rodney Atkins song, *Watching You*, (<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/atkins-rodney/watching-you-17224.html>) one day I realized "*they were watching me.*"

If I never drank water, how could I ask them to drink 8 glasses a day? If I never exercised, how could I tell them it was important to exercise in order to be healthy (/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Encouraging-Your-Child-to-be-Physically-Active.aspx)? And so, like my mother had, I began to figure out how to find time to exercise even when I didn't feel like I had time.

I also realized, like the spokes on my bike wheels, that one effort can branch into so much goodness. Biking (/English/healthy-living/sports/Pages/Biking.aspx) has made me feel healthier and have more energy. My clothes fit better, and what woman doesn't like that? I have a whole new group of friends to ride with, or as my one bike friend's husband says "*to get out on the road and solve the world's problems*" together. And through charity rides (/English/family-life/Community/Pages/Creating-Opportunities-for-Children-Teens-to-Contribute.aspx) and the kindness of others, I have raised a great deal of money for multiple sclerosis (MS) and cancer (/English/health-issues/conditions/cancer/Pages/Childhood-Cancer-Coping-With-the-Diagnosis.aspx) research.

If you look at all of that through the eyes of your little buckaroo who is "*watching you*" and "*wants to be just like you*," know you truly are being a good mom by being a good example.

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- Nutrition and Exercise During Pregnancy (/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Nutrition-and-Exercise-During-Pregnancy.aspx)
- Importance of Self-Care: Why Parents Need Time Out to Recharge (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Importance-of-Self-Care.aspx)
- Overcoming Obstacles to Physical Activity (/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Overcoming-Obstacles-to-Physical-Activity.aspx)
- Working Mothers (/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Working-Mothers.aspx)
- The Greatest Gift You Can Give Your Child (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/The-Greatest-Gift-You-Can-Give-Your-Child-Video.aspx>)(Video)

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