

# Hurry Up and Relax!



**T**oday's mom has a lot on her plate, and it's usually not pasta from a fancy Italian restaurant! Work schedules, child-rearing, and home maintenance can leave even the most cool-headed woman feeling hot under the collar. When you juggle all these things you will have to drop a ball sometime, and unfortunately that ball is generally marked "serenity". Coping with day-to-day life will inevitably cause some form of stress in the body. However, when we allow this stress to build without release it can actually become physically and mentally dangerous. Studies have shown that heightened stress levels can cause hypertension, coronary disease, congestive heart failure or strokes. According to the Ameri-

## Quick Stress Relief Strategies for Frazzled Moms

*By Rebecca Ash*

can Institute of Stress ([www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)), stress is the number one health problem in America due to the ravaging effects it can have on the human body and mind...

**But who has time to pamper themselves and try to decompress?** Believe it or not, you do! Relieving stress doesn't have to be a time-consuming or even expensive activity. There are a number of things you can do, many right in your own home, that can help you release some of the pressures in your life. All you need to do is stop for a moment, focus on yourself, and grant yourself permission to take care of your body, guilt-free. Here are just a few fun examples:

#### ❖ **PET YOUR PET:**

According to WebMD's Jeanie Lerche Davis (<http://my.webmd.com/content/article/81/97060.htm>), it has been proven that pets help reduce the body's reaction to psychological stress and aid in lowering blood pressure. The simple act of stroking a cat or dog helps to calm nerves, lower your heart rate, and brighten your mood. Even those with pet allergies can benefit from observing tropical fish in an aquarium. Your pet affords you the healing power of touch on a completely unselfish and unconditional level. Accompany your pet to a quiet place such as your bedroom and spend fifteen minutes stroking his or her fur and face. You can even use your pet as a way to express yourself verbally (they'll never repeat what you say!). If you need to get some fresh air, take your dog for a calming walk in the park or around your neighborhood. Bonus: the exercise is also a great stress-reliever!

#### ❖ **QUICK CHANGE:**

Give yourself an inexpensive manicure or pedicure. This simple act of focusing on polishing your nails can help air out your brain (just don't forget to crack a window to air out the fumes!). There are plenty of quick-drying formulas available if you're really pressed for time. Try Avon's Speed Dry Enamel (\$4.00), Chanel's Le Vernis (\$18.00), or Rimmel London's 60 Seconds (\$2.29). Besides, changing diapers or writing checks looks so much better with sassy nails!

#### ❖ **FEED YOUR MIND:**

Allow yourself the time to read a chapter of a book you're interested in. Pick up your favorite magazine and take the time to pour over articles and photographs instead of flipping through it distractedly. You'll be sure to learn something new and boost your creativity. Check out *Life's Work: Confessions of an Unbalanced Mom* by

Lisa Belkin, *I Don't Know How She Does It* by Allison Pearson, or *Confessions of a Slacker Mom* by Muffy Mead-Ferro. Whether it's a novel, magazine or how-to book, you'll be giving your mind an opportunity to think of something other than getting the kids to karate class!



### ❖ SNOOZE TO LOSE (stress):

Remember back in kindergarten, when you could grab a mat and take a nice nap? Well, naps aren't just beneficial for kids! Taking a quick "power nap" aids in productivity, mental alertness and clarity. This does not mean an afternoon snooze-fest like those you may have had in college. The most effective naps do not allow for REM (rapid eye movement) sleep to occur. Therefore, productive naps are actually only twenty to forty minutes long. The more we learn about the benefits, the more acceptable this healthy activity becomes.

### ❖ DANCE:

A sure-fire way to boost your endorphins while having a great time is to cut a rug...and I'm not talking about re-carpeting the den! Any exercise will heighten the endorphin levels in your body, which elicits a feeling of euphoria, but combining it with therapeutic music can maximize the benefits and fun! Take a dance class (these usually run forty-five minutes to an hour) with a friend at a local studio or gym. Or, just grab your old Madonna CD and crank up the stereo for a free "Holiday". You can do this privately or get your kids bouncing along. You don't have to be a

"good" dancer: just groove out, act silly and reap the benefits of shaking your tail feather!

### ❖ GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INNER CHILD:

A great way to relieve stress while still keeping an eye on the kids is to join in on some of their fun! Watch some favorite cartoons you enjoyed as a child (old Looney Toons, Hannah-Barbara, and Disney

“Stress is the number one health problem in America.”

classics for example) with your kids. Grab a crayon or some finger paint. Turn on the hose for some outdoor fun. When you take yourself less seriously, you'll remember that life is fun after all. Messes can be cleaned up, clothes can be washed, and bills will get paid but life can't be re-lived. And your kids will be amazed at just how cool you are!

### ❖ FLOWER POWER:

Plants have long had health benefits. They release oxygen into the air, provide medicinal balms and cures, and elevate mood

with their bright colors. Pick up some cheerful buds or bulbs and arrange them for your home. They don't need to look like they belong in a home and garden magazine to calm the senses.

### ❖ TAKE A STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE:

Remember that stack of photos shoved under the bed? Why not dust them off and organize them? Start scrapbooking, or even just date them and file them in attractive photo boxes. Photos always depict good times: birthdays, graduations, weddings, or new babies. It can even be a personal history lesson for the kids. You'll reencounter smiles and silly faces that will touch your heart, lift your spirits, and drive your stress level down. Rejoicing at how great your family is will help you forget how stressed they can make you!

There are lots of fun ways to clear your mind and reduce your stress level. Just taking the time to read this article has provided you with some beneficial down time! So what are you waiting for? Hurry up and relax! ★

*Writer Rebecca Ash specializes in relaxing with her cat and two minidachshunds*