

Self-Care: The Luxury You Can't Afford to Skip

—by Allyn Mitchell Evans, Tau/University of Mississippi

But I Have To . . .

Are you overestimating how much others need you? Here are some ways to extract yourself from being overcommitted.

- Habitually monitor your schedule.
- Eliminate duties and commitments that don't serve your or your family's greater purpose.
- To qualify to be on your must-do list, your commitment needs to fit one of these four categories:
 - Benefit yourself, e.g., fun and relaxing self-care
 - Required for pursuing your personal mission and values
 - Benefit or required by your family
 - Benefit or required for your work and professional life
- Be ruthless.
- Delegate tasks to your children and spouse.
- Ask for help.
- Learn to say no without guilt.

A balanced life begins by putting yourself first.

Sounds selfish in light of all the necessary duties you juggle as a spouse, mother, daughter, employee or employer, friend, volunteer. And if a woman actually finds time for self-care, she's bound to hear "Should," "Can't," "When will it all get done?" either from herself or someone whose load she's been carrying.

Self-care daydreams for women typically translate into wishes for spa treatments, uninterrupted naps, or short getaways. But self-care is much, much more. It includes things like healthy lifestyle choices: what to eat, how much to sleep, whether or not to exercise. Self-care also includes self-compassion, setting boundaries, and having a good grasp of what is truly valued.

Self-correction is never more needed than in the area of how hard and fast women now live their lives. Being overly committed is like being the conductor of a runaway train. Too much going, doing, and giving makes us feel out of control. If we are not emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted, then we are likely swamped with guilt about what we are not doing and whom we have let down.

What are we to do?

The solution is not easy. It takes focus and requires developing a backbone, but it works. First, pledge to be responsible for your life. Get tough, take charge. Remember you are the conductor, and you get to determine how fast your train runs.

Start with commitments and daily tasks. Evaluate every chore. If the obligation doesn't meet the "but, I have to" criterion (at left), stop doing it. Consider instead something that brings you joy, pleasure or relaxation—things like yoga, a nap, a short walk, gardening, reading. Exchanging over-doing with fun or restful activities will refresh you, help you control your stress and make you feel better. More importantly, making self-care a priority means you become a better care-giver for yourself and all those you love.

Remember, you didn't get hyper-committed overnight, so it may take some time to extract yourself from some commitments. Once the job is done, vow never to return to your former out-of-balance ways. **E**



About the author, Allyn Evans

Author and speaker Allyn Evans wrote *Living Happily Ever After Today, How Ordinary People Can Perform Unthinkable Acts* (Amazon Short) and *Living Happily Ever After with your Daughter Today* (2010). She is a contributor to *Be the Star That You Are! Teens* (11/2009) and writes a weekly column (www.thealertparent.com) for newspapers and magazines.

