



# Chiropractic Newsletter

## Well-Being

### Real Self-Care for Mothers

I talk a lot about self-care for mothers in my work. And I find it so interesting that when I read articles for women about self-care, the recommendations are often things like, “Pamper yourself! Go get a manicure! Take a bubble bath!”

Do I really even need to explain the futility of this advice? When I read these articles, my reaction goes something like this: When do I have the time to go get a manicure? That’s so not even in the budget for this month! And even if I did get a manicure, my nails would chip about two hours later when I try to separate two Lego pieces that have somehow fused together! And a bubble bath? Really? My tub is filthy and I would just spend the time cleaning it and then I would smell like bleach for the rest of the day....

I’m certainly not knocking the value of pampering and alone time, but I think there’s a problem when we assume that self-care means a spa treatment. Or, more generally, that self-care means we need to escape.

Because even if a frazzled mama does manage to find the time and money to get away, she’ll quickly return to the same place where the frazzling began. And while her nails may look lovely, and she may even have purchased a cute new emery board, she hasn’t acquired any practical tools to manage the full catastrophe of motherhood.

I think we need a true understanding of what self-care is. Psychologist Christine Meinecke



defines self-care as: *...choosing behaviors that balance the effects of emotional and physical stressors: exercising, eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, practicing yoga or meditation or relaxation techniques, abstaining from substance abuse, pursuing creative outlets, engaging in psychotherapy. Also essential to self-care is learning to self-soothe or calm our physical and emotional distress.*

And those things don’t usually come wrapped in a pretty box with chocolates! Self-care is a practice. It is a commitment we make to ourselves so that we may do the important work we are here to do. Self-care for mothers means we have a tool kit for daily living, not a “break glass in case of emergency” escape plan.

As Clarissa Pinkola-Estes writes in *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, “vacation is not the same as refuge.” She continues, “It is ironic that we have made wildlife refuges for ibis, pelican, egret, wolf, crane, deer, mouse, moose, and bear, but not for ourselves in the places where we live day after day.”

Meaningful self-care for mothers, I would argue, means that we feel truly nurtured and whole where we live day after day...in the crazy zoo of raising little children!

It means we engage in sustainable and doable practices that promote well-being and act as antidotes to the frazzling created by the day-to-day work of parenting.

It means we find ways to be present. It means we find ways to cultivate compassion—for our children and ourselves.

It means we take time for silence—for prayer, meditation, or just three deep breaths—so that we have a stillness and peace that sustains us during the crazy-busy-noisy moments of our day.

For me, the fundamental thing missing from all this talk of self-care for mothers is mindfulness. When we are intentionally present, with curiosity and without judgment, our experience of motherhood is completely transformed.

I distinctly remember a moment, many years ago, when my youngest was about 4 months old. My husband had been out of town for a few days, and I desperately needed a haircut. My mom came over in the evening for a few hours so I could get out of the house alone. I got a scalp massage, a sassy haircut with funky bright blonde color, and conversation with an adult! It felt wonderful.

And then I remember walking in the dark on the path from my garage to my house, fighting back my tears, because I knew as soon as I entered the door, the crazy and the chaos and the

overwhelm would be right there waiting for me. I had gone on a “vacation,” but I had not found refuge.

Mindfulness is what ultimately gave me that refuge. Mindfulness allowed me to see things as they were, instead of the way my anxious, stressed-out mind interpreted them. Mindfulness gave me the precious space to breathe and find a skillful response, instead operating on autopilot (which often meant yelling and/or crying).

Mindfulness isn’t a cure-all, and it’s not going to make us happy mamas all the time...but it is a powerful practice that helps us feel at home in our own skin, and in our own crazy homes!

Practicing mindfulness allows us to get to the root of the things that are making us suffer, rather than simply ripping up the weeds that will inevitably grow back. It creates the clarity that helps us see the things we can change, and helps us soften into the things we cannot change.

And the practice itself is so nourishing, and so restorative, that it can become our go-to form of self-care. Our breath and body become our refuge.

So please, take care of yourself, mama. You can always find your way home.

—Sarah Rudell Beach, M.Ed.

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