



# Complex Child E-Magazine

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## Taking Care of You, Part II: Keeping Yourself Healthy, Physically and Emotionally by Shannon Gonsalves

Last month we presented some general strategies for taking care of you, focusing specifically on the benefits of massage therapy. This month we turn to your physical and emotional health. Remember the analogy from Part I: when the oxygen masks drop on the airplane, put yours on first before assisting others. You need to keep yourself physically and emotionally healthy in order to care for your family.

### **Visit Your Doctor**

I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping up on your preventative care. Parents, especially moms, tend to put off regular dental and medical appointments, because there isn't time or money. However, it could be a deadly decision.

This has become a passion of mine after a casual friend passed away at 34 years old from not listening to her body. She had been telling her friends about her back pain, but claimed she was too busy to get it checked out. By the time she got it checked out, it was a trip to the ER and she died within hours of arriving. It turned out that by not going in for her exams and ignoring pain, breast cancer had spread throughout her entire body.

Make the time! My friend's two young children and husband sure wished she had taken the time. You cannot be the best parent possible if you aren't healthy. Many diseases and cancers can be beat if they are caught early enough.

Think about what you haven't kept up on and make the appointment now. Don't delay!

After twelve years, I finally just had my annual eye exam and scheduled a sleep study to see why I'm always tired. My husband has been telling me for years that it sounds like I have apnea. Imagine my surprise when I found out that I was having 160 apnea episodes in six hours of sleep. I also found out that part of my low energy was due to Psoriatic Arthritis.

Imagine what I could have been doing with my children if I hadn't been so tired and achy all the time. I have been working to improve my health problems, so I can be healthier

and be a better mom. We have actually been getting out and playing more, because I am treating my issues and taking better care of me.

### **Talk to Someone**

If you are feeling depressed, anxious, or stressed, talk to someone! Go to your doctor and be honest about what you are feeling. Seek out a friend or support group to share your worries.

Check your insurance. You might be surprised to learn that you have mental health benefits. There is nothing wrong with seeking out professional counseling services. If you don't have insurance, check with your local churches. Many churches offer free counseling and some even have paid professional counselors.

Ask your significant other to support you in this and go with you. This isn't marital counseling, but odds are if you are stressed that your loved one is too. Many times, men won't go to counseling for themselves. If they think they are going for your benefit--to support you--it can be mutually beneficial.

Check into online or local support groups that fit with your child's complex needs. I found an online support group for parents ([www.parent-2-parent.com](http://www.parent-2-parent.com)). I can go there to give and receive support in return. There are also forums where I can just talk about non-medical issues with other adults. That adult interaction is really important. Online support has been important for me, because I can do it at odd hours when my kids are in bed.

### **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff**

Give yourself permission to not be perfect! Your children won't care or even remember if dinner is a can of soup or frozen macaroni and cheese. They don't go to school and share stories about how clean mom keeps the house or what they had for dinner.

I teach elementary school children and can personally vouch for this one. Kids go to school and share with each other the things they have done with their parents. I learned this when I asked kids to write about their parents for Mother's and Father's Day gifts. They talked about the time together and rarely mentioned how clean the toilet was or how magnificent the food was.

Let some of the mundane chores go sometimes. You might even need to schedule family time into your day and follow a schedule at first. Obviously, I'm not suggesting you live in filth, but your bathroom will still need to be cleaned tomorrow if you want to go play with your kids today. Be spontaneous!

Try to shrug off less important conflicts. Sure, the cashier at the grocery store asked an insensitive question about your child. And, once again, your family member made a comment about your parenting that really irritated you. However, do you really have the time and energy to dedicate to ranting and raving about it? Pick your battles.

The more and more you let the small things go, you'll feel yourself becoming happier and less stressed. Your children will appreciate this shift, and you will be modeling to your children the importance of not letting small things get to you. Remember, they are learning how to handle conflict by your actions, and not as much by what you tell them.

### **Try to Laugh**

Many times in life, I have felt like things were crazy in our house. Too many appointments, therapies, work, cleaning, etc. It can get very overwhelming and drag you down very quickly. In times like these, search for humor. Find something that is so ridiculous that you just have to laugh. I have a very recent example.

My daughter had been scheduled for a surgery to remove her tonsils and adenoids and to have ear tubes placed. We had known about it a couple months in advance. A few weeks before her surgery, my son's doctors wanted to do a surgery on him. We agreed and then found out it was scheduled for two days after his sister's surgery. We thought about it and decided we were up for the challenge of two post-op kids in one week.

The day after my daughter's surgery, we found out that taking *my* tonsils out and doing a surgery on my nose might help with my apnea. They scheduled it for seven days later. We realized that in a nine-day time frame, all three of us would have surgery. When we told people, we were laughing about it.

It did shock some that we thought it was funny, but the alternative was to give in to the stress and let it take over. If you really think about it, what are the odds? It is funny, because we searched for the humor in it. Research has proven that laughter is healing, so choose laughter over anxiety.

### **Play With Your Children**

This goes along with not always putting cleaning, cooking, and appointments ahead of your children. Children need to play with you to learn how to play. Social skills must be modeled to children, and you are their best model. You want them to learn from you and not from other children or their parents.

Plus, when you are playing with your children, you'll feel some of the stress just melt away. Giggles, laughs, screams of delight and smiles can be the best therapy available! Find the time to make it happen.

Your house can be redecorated or cleaned later. You can even make cleaning the house a game and involve your children. In fact, a lot of what we do every day can be reprioritized to free up time for what really matters. You can go back later and redo a lot of things, but you can't go back and relive their childhood. Once it's gone, there is no going back. They grow up so quickly, so enjoy every moment you can.

### **Your Family Needs You**

Give your children the benefit of a healthy and happy parent. Personally speaking, I was giving my kids the short end of the stick. They were being ripped off by having a mom who was stressed, always tired, lacking in energy, and sore and crabby all the time.

Your children are watching everything you do. They are learning how to care for themselves and how to handle life's challenges by watching how you care for yourself. Do you want your daughter growing up to be a super mom who has an immaculate house and sacrifices herself for her family? Or, do you want her to be a balanced adult who is healthy, happy, and able to handle life's stresses?

Take care of yourself first.