

10 simple ways to be a healthier mom

By Julie Revelant / Published January 09, 2013 / FoxNews.com



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Forget your New Year's resolutions. Most of the time, they don't work anyway. Instead, why not make small changes that are easy and attainable and will keep you a healthy and balanced mom all year long.

Cut the caffeine

Coffee might keep you going all day, but your caffeine addiction can dehydrate you and cause you to feel jittery or anxious – not a good thing when you're already stressed to the max. One or two cups are okay, but substitute the rest of your sips with decaf, herbal teas or water to stay hydrated and energized all day, according to Sarah Krieger, a registered dietitian and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Have more sex

Hormonal changes can cause depression, pain and weight gain, but sex might be the solution. An orgasm releases oxytocin, endorphins and DHEA, which create positive emotions, release tension and improve mood – and give your immune system a boost. Sex also does wonders for the post-pregnancy belly pooch, because it strengthens the pelvic floor muscles and the lower abs, according to Josette Puig, a mother of four, fitness expert and health coach.

Get more sleep

According to a recent report by BabyCenter, 60 percent of moms say sleep is the primary challenge in their family. Having trouble falling asleep? Krieger suggests exercising before 5 p.m., sipping chamomile tea instead of wine and cutting down on your evening tech habit. If you find it impossible to shut off your brain at night,

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keep a journal on your nightstand and jot down your to-do list for the next day, your worries, and anything else that's keeping you up.

Eat breakfast

Mornings can get hectic, but the first meal sets the tone for the rest of the day. "Eating breakfast within 30 minutes of waking up can not only rev up your metabolism, but it can get your brain energy going," Puig said. Aim for a mix of protein and fiber: Greek yogurt topped with fresh fruit or oatmeal with berries and almonds.

Take baby steps

Instead of setting unrealistic goals that you'll probably never stick with, make one small change a week like adding ten minutes of exercise to your day or trying a new vegetable. If weight loss is your goal, focus on inches lost, increased endurance, how your clothes fit and how healthy you feel. "Those are also goals that are very realistic that you should be aiming for – just a number on a scale," Puig said.

Listen to music

According to a recent scientific review published in the journal *Nutrition*, listening to music strengthens immunity, digestion and pain perception, reduces the incidence of heart failure, and even improves recovery time after a strenuous workout. So, load up your iPod with the Top 40, dance, or new age music – anything that makes you feel good.

Nix fake food

Those whole-grain crackers might be organic, but anything processed can cause inflammation, depression, chronic disease, and also sap your energy. Foods that add ingredients for a longer shelf life, "probably means it's going to take away more of your life," Puig said. Instead of packaged picks, choose "clean," real foods that are free of antibiotics and hormones, are organic, and don't have added sugar.

Snack smart

"You can turn from happy to crazy in 30 seconds if you're hungry," Krieger said. Keep easy and versatile snacks like apples and nuts to avoid a dip in blood sugar.

Make your workouts work for you

Don't think you have time for a 30 minute sweat session? Break it up into 10 minute increments throughout the day or fit it in before the kids wake up or bring the kids along for a bike ride, walk, or



mommy and me yoga class. And don't beat yourself up if you can't manage a workout; running after a toddler counts too. "Sometimes 15 minutes is all you have, and that's okay," Krieger said.

Cut down on stress

According to the American Psychological Association's 2011 Stress in America study, 22 percent of Americans have high levels of stress. What's more, one in four women admit that they don't do enough to keep their stress levels at bay. Make time for exercise, meditation, and fun – and make 2013 the year to stress less.

Julie Revelant is a freelance writer specializing in parenting, health, food and women's issues and a mom. Learn more about Julie at revelantwriting.com.

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