

Have a Happy Body!

How to Read Your Body's Cues for Optimal Health and Energy

By Alyssa Schottland-Bauman

Being a mother is non-stop. As women and mothers, we are so busy taking care of our families and our own daily goals that we often forget, or rather neglect, to take care of ourselves. Ignoring our bodies' cues seems easier and doesn't take time away from what we are already doing. But just as we know the signals of hunger, exhaustion and overstimulation in our children's bodies, it is equally important to pay attention to the signals in our own. Of course ours may present a bit differently from an exhaustion-induced tantrum, but the key is learning to read the cues before our body reacts. 'Cause if we don't take care of ourselves, who will take care of them?

Fatigue

This is by far the most basic, yet it is the most commonly overlooked in self-care regimes. A large proportion of fatigue is due to our high-paced lifestyle. We simply are too busy. Lack of time interferes in the sleep we absolutely need. And for many mothers, sleep deprivation is self-induced as we try to do "one last thing" before bed.

How it May Present: Sleep deprivation impairs our immune system, ability to think, handle stress and moderate our emotions. We are frazzled, anxious and irritable, and our nerves are fried. Depression, heart disease, hypertension and slower reaction times are also common symptoms.

Prevention: Try to get six to eight hours of sleep each night. If you have a baby, nap when he naps. Yes, you've heard it before, but do you do it? Take a Vitamin D supplement in winter months and add a probiotic to strengthen the immune system along with a multivitamin.

Hunger and Diet

Everything we eat affects us deeply on a cellular level. We try to instill healthy eating habits in our children, but how many of us actually walk our talk and eat for health and energy?

How it May Present: When we are hungry and suffer from a nutrient-void diet, we become irritable, less likely to cope with stress, more likely to make poor decisions, anxious, depressed, frazzled and could have weight issues. We often reach for a coffee and muffin or pre-packaged junk food laden with refined carbohydrates, sugar, preservatives and dyes. This leads to instant sugar highs, followed by a crash. It is a cyclical effect.

Prevention: Eating a protein-packed breakfast incorporating complex carbohydrates is essential for a productive day. Research shows that brain function improves up to 80% when protein is consumed first thing in the morning. Breakfast eaters are



more focused with higher concentration and more adaptable to deal with daily stress than breakfast skippers who tend to be moody, inattentive and lethargic. Keep hormone levels in check by regularly eating only whole grain foods, as many fruits and vegetables as possible, as well as lean meats, fish and legumes, and avoiding refined sugars and processed food as much as possible. Arm yourself with healthy-snacks on-the-go, just like you do for your children. Take a multivitamin complete with omega-3.

Mental Overload

Cramming too much in one day, rushing here and there without a second in between, have too many deadlines to meet, things to do, pickups to make. Sound familiar?

How it May Present: This wreaks havoc on our adrenal glands, causing the heart to race, a shortness of breath, anxiety, inability to deal, tightening of the stomach and migraines and headaches. Moments are often missed and life seems like one big chore. What about the joy?

Prevention: Learn to say no. There is no harm in not doing, organizing or going to it all. Know your limits. Stop the back-to-back scheduling. Relax and lighten up on "what needs to get done." Let the dishes wait. It's more important to slow down and take time to relax, breathe and just be.

Kid-Overload

Modern mothering is taxing and even a simple trip to the grocery store can become a monster chore with tot in tow, but if you find yourself chronically snapping at your children and the night time ritual is more of a rushed process, then you are definitely in need of some child-free time.

How it May Present: Short, irritable, annoyed and careless with your children and family. This could also become dangerous for your children. Fun times become frustrating times and the little things become huge burdens.

Prevention: Research proves that when women connect with other women they are happier and healthier. Try a new exercise class, take a walk without the stroller, get your hair done, laugh, shut off the computer and put down the phone, lose yourself in a bookstore. It doesn't have to be for a long time. You will be amazed what an hour of uninterrupted "you" time will do for yourself and your entire family. ■

Alyssa Bauman is founder of Nourished {from within} (nourished.ca), a health consulting firm. She instills long-lasting lifestyle tools in women who are starved for time and hungry for balance. She believes the modern woman can do it all, and she shows them how, from nutrition to self-expression.

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Do you manage to take time-out for yourself?

Running has become my "time-out" outlet in the past couple of years. My youngest son, Austin was colicky and quite demanding the first five months of his life. Over this time, I certainly needed time-outs, and found long walks outside to be an amazing stress relief. These walks eventually developed into running. I have since participated in several 10 km runs and last year finished my first half marathon.

Any must-haves?

Although not something tangible, the one must-have my husband and I

feel strongly about is taking time for just "us!" Whenever the grandparents are visiting from the Island, we are eager to head out the door and excited for our dinner date! If babysitters are unavailable, we designate certain days for "dinner dates" at home once a week, after the children have gone to bed!

Tell us one or two of the most important life lessons you have learned through being a mom/teacher.

Patience is a virtue! Marriage, parenting and teaching have definitely taught me to be a more patient person and patience is one precious gift I, in turn, can offer a child. ■