



## Small Ways to Take Care of Yourself

Carving out time for yourself isn't just relaxing, it's also good for your health. Use these strategies to make it happen.

Ah, “me time.” You may think of it as a luxury, but it can actually be a necessity. Taking a break from your daily demands can keep your immune system ticking and ward off the effects of aging, says M.J. Ryan, a life coach and author of *How to Survive Change You Didn't Ask For*. Besides, you'll also

be doing your family a favor. “When you replenish yourself in whatever way works for you, you have physical stamina and emotional resilience—and that is key to good parenting,” Ryan says. “Self-care is never selfish.” Here are our favorite strategies for squeezing in your own break from the grind.



## 1 *Go shopping, solo.*

Even if you're just heading to the market for groceries, there's something so pleasurable about doing it alone that it can be a getaway in disguise. Plus, there's that achievement buzz that comes with knocking another item off your to-do list. Win-win.

## 2 *Move your body.*

"Start small, and be creative," says Katrin Schumann, co-author of *Mothers Need Time-Outs, Too*. "Take a walk during your lunch break. Or get up half an hour earlier on the weekend and do an exercise video." Feeling extra ambitious? Train for a running race or endurance event.

## 3 *Connect online.*

Social media apps get a bad rap for being a time suck, but let's face it: when a busy (and exhausted) person is looking for a cheap (and fast) escape, these tools can help with anything from combating isolation to brainstorming project ideas, says Ryan.

## 4 *Talk to a faraway friend.*

Even if your to-do list is lengthy, you likely have time to chat with a friend on the phone. Just multitask! It sounds contradictory, but it can work—if you pick the right tasks to tackle while chatting (think mindless and repetitive—things that have to get done but that you can do without your full attention). Dial up a friend or family member and put them on speakerphone while you fold laundry or prep dinner. You'll enjoy catching up with someone you care about while getting things done.

## 5 *Learn something new.*

Many parents find they're able to carve out time to pursue a passion or explore an interest—from scuba diving to salsa dancing—once their kids are in school full-time. "That's when many parents begin to ask themselves, Where am I? What do I want?" says Schumann. But if you still have little ones at home, don't write off the possibility of taking a one-night workshop or an online class (colleges, high schools and community centers often offer great options). It could be just the inspiring pick-me-up you need. "Living a life of curiosity, in which we challenge ourselves to think and connect, is immensely satisfying," Schumann says.

## 6 *Get some fresh air.*

Many studies have confirmed the mood-boosting effects of spending time in nature (maybe it's that dose of vitamin D). No wonder many people say they love to retreat to the great outdoors—whether that's a park, the beach or their own backyard.

## 7 *Curl up with a good read.*

Settling down with a book is "very gratifying, yet chronically undervalued and overlooked," says Schumann. "If you have time to watch mindless television, you have time to read for a few minutes. And it may make you feel energized rather than euthanized." If you feel strapped for reading time, try saving online articles via your smartphone. When you do find three or five minutes, you'll have a mini-library of quick reads at your fingertips.

## 8 *Make a date with the yoga mat.*

You've probably heard about the increasing number of studies backing yoga as a powerful antidote to stress. You'll get the most out of yoga if you practice regularly, but if a weekly class is a challenging fit for your schedule, don't give up, says Schumann. "All it takes to begin the journey back to yourself is a small daily commitment. Figure out what makes you tick and take just a few minutes to indulge in this activity."