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Healthy Habits: Juggling Life and Health

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As twenty-first century women, we are used to doing it all. Today, most American women juggle some combination of work and family. According to the Cleveland Clinic, less than 12 percent of families these days are "typical" — i.e., where the father is the sole breadwinner and the mother is home with children. In fact, the Cleveland Clinic reports that 70 percent of married women with children under the age of majority are in the workforce. For women, juggling traditional roles at home along with ever-increasing responsibility at work can be empowering, irritating and distressing. Keeping all the balls flying ultimately can result in role strain, stress, burnout and failing to take care of our own health.

In addition to conditions that only affect women, such as pregnancy, menopause, and ovarian and cervical cancers, other medical conditions play a large role in women's health. Women may have greater concerns than men over aging, caregiving, emotional health issues and skin care. For those of us "doing it all," we need to be aware of threats to our health, especially those that are preventable, and seek knowledge on how to avoid those threats. According to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the top causes of death among adult women in the U.S. include heart disease, stroke, cancer and chronic lower respiratory disease.

In order to protect ourselves we need to know our risk factors, manage chronic conditions and take steps to reduce our risks. While we cannot eliminate some risk factors such as family history, we can control risk factors for heart disease, stroke and cancer by doing things such as: quitting smoking, eating healthy, watching our weight, increasing physical activity and managing stress. To avoid respiratory disease, we can avoid exposure to pollutants, and to prevent respiratory infections, wash hands regularly and get yearly flu vaccines.

The bottom line, according to the Mayo Clinic, is that women need to recognize the stresses and risk factors that we face and make conscious decisions that lead to a healthier, longer life. Such decisions will allow us to continue to juggle our multiple and varied roles for years to come. We owe it to ourselves and our families and co-workers to be cognizant of our health. The truth is that neither our families nor our workplaces would be the same without us.