

Taking Care of Mommy

Can Going to the Hair Salon
Help You Get Back to Your Roots?

By Amy Levine Clayton, PsyD

From the editors: Whether you're trying to get pregnant, well into your nine months, or already a new mom, your primary focus is probably your baby. Everything – the planning, the shopping, even what you eat – seems to be targeted toward that all-important new life. That's natural, but you can't afford to lose sight of yourself. Here's a piece from Encino psychotherapist Amy Levine Clayton about the importance of taking back at least a piece of your old life.

Why is it we seek out the experience of going to a hair salon? Is it the thrill of taking a moment in this fast-paced world to pay attention to ourselves before we merge back onto the expressway of “need to’s” and “should have’s”? As soon as you step out of that nail salon, that beauty parlor or day spa, you are slapped with a never-ending list of responsibilities. And if you are a new mother trying to cope with parenthood, that list can be your ticket to a host of perinatal mood disorders.

When was the last time you remember someone other than your hair stylist washing your hair for you, carefully grooming you and attending to your appearance? My daughters both have a personal shopper, their own chauffeur, a chef, a housekeeper (you see where I am headed with this, right?), an agent who has scheduled multiple appearances for them, and the list goes on ad infinitum.

It is no exaggeration to say that childcare is a full-time job, and it is arguably the best job around – if you are tending to yourself. The philosophy to



live by is “Happy Mother, Happy Baby.” Unfortunately, I see more and more “Spare the Mother, Spoil the Child.”

In the process of getting to know their infant's likes and dislikes and navigating the unknown terrain of parenting, many moms feel that they lose their identity. They have traded jeans for loose-fitting clothes, they shop at children's stores and gossip about the best diapers where they used to dish about fashion. Some trade in the cars of their youth for mini-vans, and they look around one day and ask, “Who am I?”

I see many new moms who tell me they don't have time to take showers, let

alone the time to go to the salon for a treat. Some explain that they simply feel too guilty to do anything for themselves. While I don't believe that a trip to the salon is the answer for all new moms who are feeling out of sorts, I am a big proponent of any activity that can help them center themselves and nourish their soul.

The prescription for that might be anything, including returning to their prenatal yoga class, a weekly dinner with friends, having someone watch their baby while they catch up on lost sleep, and even the chance to read a book. Of course, for more serious cases that include depressive thoughts and a sense of hopelessness, therapy may be indicated.

I once heard an airline flight attendant instruct parents to place their oxygen masks over their own faces before their children's in the event of an emergency landing. This made perfect sense. If a parent is not caring for herself, who will be there to care for her offspring?

So talk to the people you love and share your stress, anxiety or depressive thoughts. It takes a village to raise a child, so call on some of the village elders. Speak with your pediatrician, go to your local church or synagogue, find out if there are mommy-and-me classes offered in your area, pick up a publication such as *L.A. Parent* to peruse for local activities, shops for supplies, support and so much more. And ask other moms what they do to cope with these feelings. Above all else, be kind to yourself. Your children will thank you. ♥

Dr. Amy Levine Clayton is a licensed psychotherapist in Encino and member of Postpartum Support International. She conducts a New Mom's group at The Pump Connection in Woodland Hills. For more information, visit www.DrAmyClayton.com or www.postpartum.net.



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Pregnancy is a stressor and so is a new baby. The way you feel has everything to do with the way your child is going to feel. Now and for the rest of his or her life.

I used to be a California Nurse Midwife (License #1104)
but I'm not in practice anymore.

Now I'm a psychotherapist.

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