



## Pick Your Path to Health

### Dancing Between Work and Family

Happiness does not necessarily come from more gains; however, it can result from the joy of nurturing what is already in your hands.

For centuries, the family has been deemed as a most valuable source of joy. A happy family life is what a lot of Asian American women, like you, treasure most. But achieving a balance between work and family roles is always a big challenge for working mothers, and like most women, the majority of Asian American women have dual responsibilities.

"Most Asian families keep their traditional family pattern. Mothers are always supposed to take care of the family," said Dr. Jyotsna Changrani, Assistant Director of the New York Task Force on Immigration Health. "Also, most Asian American women hold a job outside (the family)," Dr. Changrani added. Besides their jobs, they also have to help their spouse, participate in their children's education, and take care of the elders.

Love, wisdom, and confidence can lead you to a more balanced and joyful life, both at work and in family. A part of the joy is in the process of simplifying your life. Start by asking yourself questions: What is important to me? How well do my daily activities mirror my values? Do I neglect issues that matter to me because I'm busy spending time on things that matter less?

You can find ways to take care of yourself without neglecting your family. Learn to show love for your family in small ways—it's the everyday things you do to take care of and support your family that matters. Like women, sometimes men are vulnerable. There are times when your husband is beset with difficulty, worry, and anxiety. Listen to him. Show your understanding and encouragement. Even if you cannot really help, your support matters.

When it comes to taking care of your children, giving praise and setting limitations work in some circumstances, but heart-to-heart communication is still the best way to stay connected. Their healthy growth and development depend heavily on family education, especially education from mothers. For example, you may find it difficult, or embarrassing, to talk about sex with your children. Yet basic knowledge on safe sex and STDs' protection can dispel the myths of sex, and help them go through

that precarious time of adolescents and young adulthood. Asian American youth are likely to stay with parents for a longer time. According to Dr. Changrani, more than 80% of Asian American children live with parents even in their twenties. By listening and being open with your children, you have a great affect on their lives and promote continuity and harmony within the family.

Try these suggestions for developing communication and sharing between you and your children:

- **Explore your heritage.** In examining your shared past, you and your children may connect with values of earlier times and places. Your children may also gain a sense of family history.
- **Recall the emotions you had at the birth of your child.** Try to get back to that moment in your mind, remembering the hopes and dreams you had. Share it with your family members.
- **Learn to understand your child's feelings and points of view.** Have discussions your thoughts with your child and listen to their ideas and thoughts.
- **Take a nature walk with your family.** A walk will relax you and reduce stress.
- **Read books with your children** and share your thoughts about what you're reading.

Job responsibility is another heavy burden on most Asian American women. Keep up your confidence by valuing what you have already achieved. Frustrations are unavoidable, so share them with family members to help you find solace and support. Also, proper self-esteem comes from realistic goals; having a positive attitude and setting achievable goals can make life easier. "A mother's mood always plays an important role in the quality of family life," said Dr. Changrani. Thus coping with the demands of each role and nurturing each family member becomes a necessity for you. If you are a working mother, try small changes in the most stressful times of the day. Capture the "flash points" for tension and conflict that tend to occur at the same time each day and work to reduce them.

- Eat a healthy diet and strive to maintain proper nutrition.
- Plan ahead. Arrange for the children's pick-up time.
- Share household chores with a spouse and other family members. Allow your children to choose and help prepare meals.
- Make dinner time also a time to listen about a child's day.
- Develop routines for bedtime.

- Stick with an agreed TV cutoff time.
- Arrange items "to go" in familiar places.
- Work together with family members. Encourage cooperation, promote self-reliance, try to forgive and forget.

A family can be like a well-choreographed dance. It is predictable because of the parents, and is joyful because of the child. Most of all, a happy home appears effortless because of Mom's multitalents. To find a path to better health, discover a rhythm between your family and work life.

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*