Setting aside time for meditation, yoga, exercise, restful sleep, and screen-free time.

Here are some additional strategies to put in your self-care toolbox to promote your own well-being:

1. **Carve out your TIME**. This is super hard to do with all the duties and priorities we have. But just as the announcement on airplanes goes, you need to "put on your own oxygen mask first, *before* you can help the person next to you." If we care for ourselves, then we can better care for others, and scheduling time for self-care is one of the best ways to make it happen. Whether it's putting aside 20 minutes before bed to read or relax, setting an alarm for a daily work break, or creating a plan to rotate responsibilities with a partner to give the other a break – try to set aside some time each day for yourself.
2. **Set priorities**. As parents, *we can't do everything.* Try to set priorities within obligations. Usually, priorities will involve the kids and other family members first, and then choose one or two that are important to you, whether it's planting your garden or getting out to see a show. If you have a partner at home, sharing similar priorities can be valuable, as you can share childcare obligations and make tough decisions together about what to do and when to do it. Try *not* to commit to tasks that will make you feel like you're not accomplishing things, or doing things poorly. And give yourself permission to let go of some of the things that aren't priorities.
3. **Choose fun things to do, *in advance*.** Most of us have a variety of things we want to do for fun and relaxation. But even going over this list can become stressful! In the little time you have, do you want to learn to bake bread, read a good book, take a yoga class, watch TV, or get out for a walk? Keep things simple and doable. In advance, choose a couple of things you consistently look forward to doing and can realistically build into your schedule.
4. **Spend time with family and friends**. Humans are not meant to be solo pilots, though many of us as parents find ourselves swamped with taking care of the kids, working, and

maintaining our homes. Yet we all need the pleasure of less structured time with loved ones and friends. Is there a certain day of the week that you can plan on family dinner? If you can't see your friends as much as you used to, what about checking in by text or a phone call? This too needs to be built into our schedules.

5. **Find folks to take care of you**. In our role as parents, we are the consummate caretakers. It's what we do. But, "we all need someone we can lean on." Separate from leisure time with family or friends, identify who in your life can be a shoulder for you to lean on when you need it. Who in your life cares for you? Who do you trust to nurture you – to give you advice, listen to you, or comfort you during a rough spell? This may be one person, or different people for different challenges. Then, find ways to allow these special people to nurture you. After all, "that's what friends are for."
6. **Get out of the house.** This doesn't mean going out to food shop or commute to work. We need to see more than our office cubicle and our kitchens. Going out for a walk, or even taking a scenic drive, can reduce the feeling of confinement and clear your head. Consider having a parent night out once a week, or every other week. If you schedule it, it becomes an expectation for everyone – especially for your kids, who will have a sitter or be on their own with homework – and give you something to look forward to.
7. **Pamper yourself.** From time to time, our kids expect that we go overboard to give them a treat – whether it's going out for ice cream or allowing them to stay up late for a movie. Shouldn't you also get a little something extra, every so often? This may be buying a new pair of boots, going out to a show or sporting event, or going out for ice cream yourself. Parents need treats, too!
8. **See your doctors regularly.** Everyone should have an annual visit with their primary care physician. Your doctor will help you maintain your health, prevent illness and, if needed, initiate early intervention for a newly detected condition. Meeting with your doctor is also an opportunity to discuss ways to improve your self-care. Beyond exercise and diet, there are things you might ask about to improve your strength and resilience, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, vision tests – even mindfulness classes! Visiting your dentist regularly

for cleaning and x-rays is also important, as dental problems are preventable through frequent assessments and daily management. And schedule appointments with any specialists who care for chronic or other medical concerns – many of these doctors have waiting times, so there's no time like the present to get it on the calendar.

9. **Stay organized.** Managing your finances, keeping your home clean and orderly, and setting up schedules isn't always included in conversations on self-care. But think about it. If our chores at home and work are in disarray, we get stressed. If it's a challenge to manage the necessities of everyday life, how will we manage to find the time to relax? Whether it involves spreadsheets, closet organizers, a rotating cleaning schedule, or prepping dinner in advance for the whole week – finding the most effective ways that work for you to keep your life in order is essential in caring for yourself.
10. **Plan for your future.** Too often in the hectic days of caring for our kids and working, we forget to think about how we want to live in the next five to 15 years. As kids grow older and more independent, parents have more time to themselves. This means thinking about your dreams, lifestyle, changes in career, and more. It's helpful to start young and consider ways to save your money and plan for desired transitions. In addition to making your future hopes more possible, planning ahead adds a positive aspect to those years ahead when your children have left the nest.

There are surely even more ways to practice self-care, and we hope these ideas help you to think about what they are, for you. If you come up with additional ideas to share, please e-mail us. We will add them to future posts.