

# A guide to being a [happy] single mom

Dina Cramer, executive coach and single mom of four sons, explores how working mothers can be more fulfilled and less stressed

**T**he 2011 Women of Tomorrow study by Nielsen states that South Africa ranks seventh among 21 nations surveyed for the most stressed women in the world, noting that women in developing nations often face far greater pressures in managing their various roles.

Renowned author and speaker John Demartini says that the stress of being a "supermom" often leads to physical symptoms such as:

- Depression from unmet unrealistic expectations
- Difficulty in maintaining weight
- Compromised exercise results
- Compromised thyroid from hypothyroidism
- Fibromyalgia, muscle aches, and painful joints (injured emotional)
- Dryer, rougher skin, hair fraying, and increased hair loss (stress)
- Wrinkles (stress frayed)
- Chronic fatigue and low drive
- Unfulfilled hopes/wishes

- Diminishing libido (revertment to spouse)
- Hair loss (anger)
- Induced vertigo/dizziness
- Anxiety/turbulent expectations
- Breaking nails
- Weakened immune system
- Frequent headaches
- Internal conflict
- Water retention
- Constipation
- PMS instability

### Why are working moms so stressed?

There is no doubt that being a working mom is challenging. If you know this from the experience of being a business owner, single parent and sole provider for four sons. However, there had to be early models with whom we grew up. Most of the time, we are not our own models. We are the pressure on ourselves to be everything to everyone. We tend to see ourselves

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Renowned author and speaker John Demartini says that the stress of being a “supermom” often leads to physical symptoms such as:

- Depression (from unmet, unrealistic expectations)
- Difficulty in maintaining weight
- Diminished exercise results (suppressed thyroid from repressed feelings)
- Fibromyalgia, muscle aches and painful joints (inflamed emotions)
- Drier, rougher skin tone (anger-induced testosterone)
- Wrinkles (tensed muscles)
- Chronic fatigue and low drive (unfulfilled highest values)

- Diminishing libido (resentment to spouse)
- Hair loss (anger-induced testosterone)
- Anxiety (unrealistic expectations)
- Breaking nails
- Weakened immune system
- Frequent headaches (internal conflict)
- Water retention
- Constipation
- PMS irritability.

## *Why are working moms so stressed?*

There is no doubt that being a working mom is challenging. I know this from the experience of being a business owner, single parent and sole provider for four sons. However, if we had to get really honest with ourselves, we would realise that we are our own worst enemies. We put pressure on ourselves to be everything to everyone. We tend to put ourselves

and our needs last – after the kids, after the boss, after the clients, after the family and friends, after the housework, after the cooking, after everything ... There is never enough time for yourself! As women, we are programmed to be nurturers, to take care of everybody's needs.

## *The first step is to put yourself first!*

Become self-centred! Some people may regard this as selfish, but it's not. Being self-centred is actually a necessity. We need to be in the centre of our lives. That is the position of true empowerment – in the centre controlling, influencing and managing all the various aspects of our lives, like a conductor in an orchestra.

Being self-centred is actually the opposite of being selfish. We cannot give of ourselves freely if there is nothing left to give and we have exhausted ourselves trying to be everything to everyone else, not taking the time to nurture ourselves and fill ourselves up.

It is quite simple: you would never drive a car without putting petrol in it. In the same vein, you cannot keep giving and giving, without stopping to take time to fill up your reservoir.

When we are full, we can give of ourselves easily, joyfully and freely. When we give from a depleted space we give from a place of martyrdom and then we wonder why the people in our lives don't appreciate all that we do for them. The truth is, nobody appreciates a martyr. Martyrs are sacrificed! It is a thankless and self-sacrificing job.

How many times have you thought or said: "... After all I do for you!" or

the classic mom statement: "I was in labour for 38 hours with you and this is the thanks I get!" We can laugh. We have all said this, or at least had the thought. I certainly have, many times. It is a painful place to be – you doing everything you can for the people in your life and them just taking it for granted, and not appreciating or thanking you for what you do.

Take your power back. Put yourself first. That is how you become fulfilled.

## *What can you do to "fill yourself up"?*

- **Create an inspiring goal or vision for your life** If you haven't connected with your passion and don't have a sense of purpose, life is difficult. Having an inspiring goal or vision pulls us through difficult times and guides us to a more fulfilling life. Once you have a clear vision of where you want your life to go, you need to ask yourself regularly: "Is what I am doing right now taking me closer to or further away from my vision?"
- **Look after your health** As a mother you can't afford to fall prey to the list of physical ailments associated with stress. It is important to keep yourself healthy. Make sure you get enough sleep, eat well and exercise.
- **Stay positive** You've heard the saying "healthy mind, healthy body", and there is no doubt that having a positive mindset reduces stress. Make sure you're doing away with negativity. Stop complaining and focusing on what is going wrong. Instead, try focusing on what is going right. Start a gratitude journal. Journaling is a great way to get rid of all your worries and stresses –

empty your mind onto paper. Place inspiring pictures and words on a vision board that you look at every day. I find meditation a particularly powerful way to destress and focus my mind on positivity.

- **Take time out** It's important to do things that relax you. Take a bubble bath, meditate, read a book, draw, paint, write, go for a walk, spend time in nature ... Often moms say they don't have the time. Everyone can find 15 minutes a day.
- **Learn to say NO** It is not a swear word! It is all about prioritising. A great coaching question to use for this is: "If I say YES to this request, what am I saying NO to?" For example, if you say yes to working late, you may be saying no to your health or time with your child. What is the priority?
- **Check your reservoir daily** Make sure you give to yourself so that when you give to others you are giving from a place of abundance, ease, love and generosity rather than a place of lack, stress, guilt and feeling overwhelmed. That's how you can become truly fulfilled. **HE**

➔ **Dina Cramer** is an executive coach specialising in the area of leadership development. As a single mom and sole provider for her four sons she is passionate about helping working moms become super-successful with ease and grace rather than stress and struggle. That is why she created Single Mom Superwoman. To find out more about coaching and public or corporate workshops visit [www.singlemom-superwoman.com](http://www.singlemom-superwoman.com)