

For moms, finding time to exercise means letting something else slide

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Counting out my push-ups (it's my goal to do at least 30 in a row), I jam my headphones into my ears a little harder so I drown out the sound of my kids crying.

(Goal. Please keep in mind I said goal.)

Hi, my name is Chaunie and I'm overweight.

It's pretty much the same story of girl meets boy, girl gets pregnant by boy, girl has four babies in six years with boy, girl isn't dainty pregnant woman who only gains weight in her belly. So, yeah. Here I am, seven years of marriage, four kids and thirty pounds more than what I started with and I find myself at a really weird place.

I've finally, finally made some peace with this body of mine — but I've also finally accepted that carving out time in my day to exercise just makes me better all-around as a wife, person and mother. Which is a good thing, right? I know what I need and thankfully, it's not cupcakes or more wine.

But, of course, there's just one teensy problem: I can never find the time to actually exercise.

I work from home with the kids here, which means it's an action-packed day already and even if I had time to haul us all to the gym, our gym's child care is a bit on the suspicious side and doesn't accept babies anyway. So after my fourth baby was born and I knew I needed to at least pretend to exercise or I would spiral down into depression, I tried something new — and started skipping bedtime to get my workout done.

After cleaning up dinner while my husband handles the baths, I would quickly change into my workout clothes, kiss the big kids goodnight and head down into the basement, where I would indulge in a blissful hour of catching up with *How I Met Your Mother* on my elliptical and then begrudgingly forcing myself to do those darn push-ups, sit-ups and, if I was feeling fancy, a couple planks and wall-sits. The routine worked so well for me — I didn't have to try to beat the baby up in the morning and contend with leaky boobs, it wasn't late enough that exercising at night kept me awake for the 2-1/2 hours of sleep I would get and it felt so nice to have that break to look forward to all day.

But then came the mom guilt.

Oh, the mom guilt. What kind of mother was I? Being so selfish as to dump the kids on my husband so I could exercise in the loosest sense of the word? Missing those late-night snuggles and little arms clasped tightly around my neck? Skipping out on the bedtime stories that could very well be shaping the future of our daughter's educational foundations?

On the nights they would act up or the baby would cry, I felt doubly guilty, even though my husband was glad to "give" me that time that he knew was so important to me. Honestly, the kids didn't even seem to bat an eye at the fact that I was skipping their bedtimes. Like kids do, they took it all in stride and happily snuggled down while Daddy read them a story.

So I tried to focus on the positive aspects of it — that this solution wouldn't be forever, that I was a better mom for them because of this time-out and that taking care of myself is a form of taking care of them.

These days, my daughter is an infant and while the gym is still not my idea of a good time, I'm back to squeezing out time during the day — this time usually before dinner — because that's the system that works better for us now. But what I've learned is that when it comes to making time for myself as a mom, there's just never a good solution. Something with my kids or my husband will have to go and I can either spend time wringing my hands and wondering how on earth everyone will survive without me for thirty blasted minutes or I can make taking care of myself a no-apologies-necessary priority.

In fact, I think the only downside into my experiment of skipping bedtime to exercise was the fact that I tore through all the seasons of *How I Met Your Mother* so quickly. And I may be the only one on the planet, but damn, I didn't see that ending coming.