



The Art of Balance

by ANGIE MIZZELL

photos by TOM DALY

Do you often feel like an entire month has gone by, and you have no idea where it went? Overwhelmed by all the things to do? **You're not alone.** We could use more balance in our lives, but does it really exist?

It is 8:30 on Friday morning, and the kids are ready to go. Backpack. Check. Diaper bag. Check. Mommy's showered and dressed. Check. Then, as I gloat about how well the morning is going, an emergency diaper change switches my status from "right on time" to "running behind." I load the children in the car, drop the four-year-old off at school and take the baby to his Mother's Morning Out class. I hop back in the car and send a quick text before pulling out of the parking lot. "I'm on my way."

I drive and stare at the clock, making an effort to stay as calm as possible. I am, after all, writing a story about balance and am scheduled to interview a stress management coach. I don't want to bulldoze through the door of the coffee shop, acting like a frazzled mess. But juggling two parts of myself—the sane and the frantic—is my standard method of operation.

For the past few months, I've been working out with a personal trainer, and at first, I resisted how hard he pushes me. He takes me to my physical limit and then makes me do a few more reps. At the gym

is so obvious; my own grandmother has taken notice. "When I was your age, no one talked about balance," she said, during a recent phone conversation. "You just did what you had to do." So why all this talk about balance? Why now?

BALANCE FOR SALE?

Following my conversation with Dr. Zipp, I take that question to Atmah Ja, a yoga instructor, massage therapist and director of The Art of Core Consciousness Gallery in Charleston, SC. "We have to look at the time in which we're living," she explains. "Everything is moving at the speed of our mind. And if it's not moving that fast, we want it to."

Atmah Ja sits comfortably on the couch across from me. Her hair is pulled back, in a way that looks casual and put together at the same time. Her outfit appears comfortable but is quite stylish. Being in her presence makes me aware of the jacked-up energy I'm giving off. I still can't shake the feeling of being in a rush, and I had walked

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and in our daily lives, women have the amazing ability to do more than we think we can do. I surprise myself every day. But where is the line? How do we find a realistic middle ground, somewhere between bliss and burnout?

This is what I'm thinking about when I arrive at my meeting and shake hands with Dr. John Zipp, founder of iStress.org. He hasn't been waiting long, he reassures, because he'd gotten stuck in traffic. "If I would've left 30 minutes earlier, I wouldn't have been stressed at all," he says. "So I'm sitting in traffic thinking, 'Oh my gosh. I might be late.'" Hmm. The stress management coach gets stressed, too. Feeling validated, I realize this is the perfect segue for what I really want to know: Can a person achieve true balance? "No," says Dr. Zipp, without even blinking. "The challenge is you can't be stress-free."

Yet, balance is the buzzword of our generation. Business owners use it as a marketing tool to sell coaching sessions, yoga classes, spa treatments and an assortment of scented candles. The trend

right past the gallery while checking the time on my phone. But Atmah Ja's relaxed persona seems to magically counteract my own stress. Soft music hums through speakers. I'm surrounded by beautiful artwork, and the room even smells good. If she's selling balance, I'm pulling out my wallet. I'll have what she's having.

"Everyone wants to sell you everything," AJ says. "You want to believe because everything's moving so fast you need to find balance. But you can't buy it. It doesn't just come in a yoga class, in a tea room or all these places you can go to and get it. I can't give you balance."

"I can give you a massage," she continues, "and rewrite your entire energy system, so that you find balance for that moment. And then, you can choose to start altering your patterns so you don't get into those places anymore." And there's the rub, I think. If I could hang out with AJ all day in her beautiful art gallery, I would most certainly restore my balance. But what happens when I

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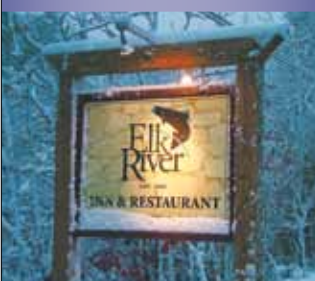
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walk out the door? How do I escape the noise?

Apparently, you can't. At least, not for long.

"We're always grasping for what we want," says Dr. Zipp, "and then we're stressed because we don't get it. And if we get it we want more. And we push away what we don't want. This constant pushing and pulling in life is what we call stress." However, he says we can equalize the stress and move closer to balance by accepting "what is." Realizing he couldn't control the morning traffic, Dr. Zipp says he turned his focus to the 80s music playing in his car, and his perception and outlook improved immediately. "You get what you focus on," he says.

JUST BREATHE.

One of the simplest things we can focus on, in any given moment, is our breath. Atmah Ja says it's so easy to breathe, it's often overlooked. "Take three long deep breaths and the whole physiology and chemistry of your body is wired to change."

stressed?

TIPS TO BRING YOU
BACK TO CENTER

Don't take life personally.

Create habits that
empower you.

Create an environment
that supports you, and if
it doesn't, leave it.

Realize you're not perfect.

(Source: istress.org)

Once I'm back in the car, I check the time. I'm still running behind schedule. It's funny how one unexpected diaper change can alter the course of the day. Then, I notice a bright yellow parking ticket, flapping under the windshield wiper. If only I had fed the meter a few more quarters. So, I decide to heed the advice of the experts I was fortunate to spend the morning with. I take responsibility, inhale, exhale and shift my focus to the beautiful Charleston marina on my left. I'm beginning to understand that true balance is not about

dividing my "life plate" into perfectly measured portions. And "achieve balance" is not another chore to check off my to-do list. The equilibrium I'm seeking is a state of mind. And AJ's right. You can't buy it. Turns out, it's free. •

Angie Mizzell is a freelance writer and mom to two young boys. She writes a monthly column for Lowcountry Parent magazine and is a regular contributor to HybridMom.com. More at AngieMizzell.com.