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The Tao of Now: 10 Ways to Live in the Moment

By jrjde

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By Denise Schipani

No one has to remind us that these are challenging times. I know it, for sure: until last spring, when my husband found a job after 18 months of searching, I was our sole provider. I spent that whole time firing on every available cylinder, with a knot of worry permanently fixed in my stomach.

But even without our familial financial worries, I suspect I'd be overtaxing myself, moving fast, multitasking—it's just what we do, particularly women. It's ironic: in times when it's probably wise to pull back and do less (in an effort to chill out as well as to save cash), we often end up doing more. Turns out, it has a name: A 2009 study at the Women's College Research Institute in Toronto called this do-it-all-and-do-it-now syndrome "role overload." And it's not doing pretty things to our mental or emotional health. The American Psychological Association's (APA) Stress in America survey last year reported that nearly half of Americans are fearful about their ability to meet their families' basic needs.

So what do we do about it? Reverse your instinct, and instead of speeding up, try slowing down. Instead of trying to outrun reality, take a breather and try enjoying some of life's purer pleasures. Here are ten ways to embrace the Tao of Now.

- 1. Reconnect with community.** It's instinctual to circle the wagons when you're overstressed and busy. But when times are tough financially? It's becomes even easier. But breaking out of your own world of worry is a terrific balm for what ails us. Investigate volunteer opportunities, organize a block party or a neighborhood coffee hour to discuss community concerns; join a committee at your church or synagogue.
- 2. Develop a skill you've let languish,** like watercolor painting, gardening, knitting, crafting. Or, take a class or get a group together to practice a still or talent you already have.
- 3. Avoid hurrying** (because you get to the same place in the end, anyway). Park far away at the market or mall; leave the close-in spots for people who feel they are in a hurry—you're not! By the same token, drive in the slower lane (saves gas, too!).
- 4. Eat mindfully.** Fast food can be literal—the greasy grub from the drive-thru—but it also defines our tendency to grab and eat without really thinking about what we enjoy eating, or what's really good for us, says Christine Louise Hohlbaum, author of *The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World* [1] (St. Martin's Press). Simply eating at the table (rather than at your desk, in the car, or in front of the TV) helps us to center and be in the moment.
- 5. Experiment with not multitasking.** A 2006 UCLA study says that doing several things at once not only doesn't make us more productive, it also messes with our heads, literally. Do one thing at a time, such as help your kids with homework with the BlackBerry turned off.

6. Learn to meditate. You don't need a special retreat or personal guru. Just try to sit quietly—say, for five minutes in the morning and/or five minutes at night—and breathe, practicing banishing the random thoughts that drift into your mind.

7. Say no. Sometimes, you just have to, such as when you've got calls from the PTA president, the coordinator of the local blood drive, and your mother all asking for help on the same day. Take a breath, decide what you can do and what's impossible, and say no to the rest. Politely, but firmly.

8. Disconnect. Not all the time, but sometimes (such as the dinner hour at home, or weekend afternoons). Shut off everything that buzzes, blips, and beeps for your attention (cell phone, BlackBerry, Facebook, email...).

9. Breathe sloooooowly. If you think about it, you may realize that you've been breathing quickly and shallowly, which increases anxiety. Instead, says Hohlbaum, practice deliberate breathing: Inhale deeply, filling your belly, and exhale completely. Do this 10 times.

10. Take a vacation. Can't afford 10 days in the Caribbean? How about three days at home? Getting off the treadmill is surprisingly hard for many of us—but resting body and mind is essential, and fear of doing so is “uniquely American,” says Hohlbaum. Buck the trend and book time off, now.

A freelance writer and mother of two, Denise Schipani is currently experimenting with uni-tasking. She blogs at [Confessions of a Mean Mommy](#). [2]

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