



# take back *your weekends*

**DON'T YOU JUST LOVE FRIDAY NIGHT?** You may be wiped out from the week, but on the horizon are 48 golden, glorious hours to do the things you've wanted to do. Then Saturday morning kicks in and it's déjà vu all over again: You're wrapping birthday presents, driving to dance lessons and racing to the grocery store (or else it's takeout for dinner again). The things most working moms *don't* get around to are the very ones that replenish the spirit and make memories: romping through the leaves, flipping flapjacks, flirting with your husband.

Working mothers of America, it's time to take back your weekends! To help you sift through your commitments and make more room for fun and romance, we've called in a team of life-coach consultants. Even if you use only a handful of their ideas, you'll be surprised what a difference they'll make—to your weekend *and* your outlook come Monday morning.

---

B Y C L A I R E W H I T C O M B



***Put on the brakes.*** Just because you're on overdrive all week doesn't mean you have to maintain that pace on the weekends. "Slowing down is even more important for working mothers," says Peggy Duncan, an Atlanta-based productivity trainer. "You're exhausted by definition, so this is your chance to plan downtime." If you have trouble decompressing—like so many of us in our speed-addicted society—start small. Declare a pajama day when the kids don't get dressed till noon. Then give yourself permission to slip back into bed with a cup of tea and the newspaper. Or take the gang out for breakfast—it's more economical than going out to dinner, and you still get to skip the cooking and cleaning.

***Limit family activities.*** "People feel that they have no control over their lives," says Ann Sullivan, a New York City-based professional organizer. "But when they start saying no and weeding out nonessential activities, their stress level goes down and their happiness quotient goes up." If your daughter is bent on playing soccer this season, maybe she can wait until spring for those Saturday afternoon tai chi lessons. Take a rain check if your mother-in-law suggests dinner for the second Sunday in a row. And don't be afraid to choose among the never-ending birthday

invitations. Ask your children to pick special parties, or, if they're under the age of 10, make this decision for them by saying, "You can have a playdate with Chloe later, but this Saturday, we're having family time." Chances are, your kids won't be missed in the glow of the bowling-alley disco light.

***Streamline your shopping.*** Don't let Saturday become Schlep Day. Instead, hit the supermarkets and malls on weeknights when they're less crowded. Skip the lines altogether by shopping online for everything from deodorant to stamps. "Share errands with friends," suggests Sullivan. "If you or your spouse is running to the library, offer to return your neighbors' books. If they're off to Costco, ask if they'll pick up a case of paper towels for you." Cut down on birthday-present shopping by stockpiling creative gift certificates. For example, groups like [www.friendsoftheocean.org](http://www.friendsoftheocean.org) provide educational kits for "adopting" endangered dolphins or whales. Or let a child choose his own toy with a gift card from [www.etoys.com](http://www.etoys.com) or [www.nick.com/shop](http://www.nick.com/shop).

***Cut down on clutter.*** If a family of four—kids included—spends ten minutes each weekday sorting socks, returning DVDs to the shelves and putting toys away, you'll save

200 minutes (or over three hours) of cleaning time that would otherwise drain the life out of your weekend. Another bonus: It takes only five minutes to vacuum and dust a clutter-free room. "Pair younger kids with older ones," advises Peter Walsh, part of The Learning Channel's *Clean Sweep* team. "Explain that when they pitch in, they'll have more mom-and-dad time on the weekend."



***Make a mini date.*** If you can't arrange a proper night out—and a lot of working parents can't—schedule small slivers of couple time. Send the kids across the street to play so you can head out, hand in hand, for a walk. If the baby's asleep, don't check your email. Curl up in bed and talk. Give each other foot massages. Share a shower or a slow dance to a CD you never have time to play. "A steady diet of small but real connections is what keeps love alive," says Mira Kirshenbaum, author of *The Weekend Marriage: Abundant Love in a Time-Starved World*.

### ***Build in some time just for you.***

Meeting a friend for coffee or tennis (once a week, once a month) doesn't take a lot of time, but it's shockingly difficult to arrange. You'll have better luck if you make a standing date that's as regular as your kids' piano lessons. And while you're at it, why not schedule solo time? Maybe your mate can watch the kids while you meditate first thing in the morning, then you can be on kid duty while he plays basketball. Or vice versa!

***Stop feeling that more is better.*** Sure, sometimes it's fun to cram in lots of weekend activities, from apple picking to pie baking to a Marx Brothers film festival. But when you limit your family's activities, you create still, serene spaces. From the calm oasis of an afternoon, life happens. "I have clients who say they played a board game for the first time," says Sullivan, "or got up on a Saturday morning and took a road trip." What a pleasure it is to have time to choose your own rhythms. Isn't that what balance is all about? ■