



Celebrate Mother's Day

May 8



5 ways to support, relieve and remember moms on Mother's Day

By MICHEL MERSCHEL
AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION NEWS

Moms deserve a break

It's not news that parenting is stressful, but health experts say the pandemic made things worse.

"Even in the best of circumstances, it's really hard to be a mother," said Natalie Slopen, an assistant professor in the department of social and behavioral sciences at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston. Parenting comes with joys as well, but over the past two years, "the pandemic has presented a host of challenges that most people hadn't imagined they would experience while parents."

In 2019, before the pandemic started in March 2020, women reported they did more when it came to chores and managing children's schedules, according to a Pew Research Center survey. By October 2020, another Pew survey showed mothers were more likely than fathers to report difficulties handling child care. And in March 2021, a Kaiser Family Foundation survey found more than half of mothers with school-age children said stress and worry had affected their mental health.

The pandemic "completely changed the fabric of our lives," said Dr. Susan Cheng, a professor of cardiology at the Smidt Heart Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. It made clear that meeting children's needs and your own simultaneously is "just really tough."

So, for this Mother's Day, Cheng and Slopen offered this advice for supporting moms, whether you're a child, partner, neighbor or a mom yourself.

Acknowledge stress

Cheng, the mother of twin boys who are "6 going on 17," said stress has broad consequences.

"It impacts every part of how we live," she said, affecting everything from how people eat to how

family relationships develop.

Stress also affects people physically. "It puts stress on the heart," Cheng said. "It puts stress on the blood vessels. It puts stress on the whole cardiovascular

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CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY

Sunflowers: Popular, native and, for some, newly meaningful

By **JESSICA DAMIANO**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The annual sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) has a long history in North America, with evidence of its cultivation for food, ceremonial and medical use by Native Americans dating back

to at least 1,000 B.C.

Sunflower seeds are said to have been brought to Europe by Spanish explorers around the late 16th century, and eventually found their way to Eastern Europe. Ukraine is now the world's leading producer of the plants.

Grown commercially mostly for

snacks and oil, the pollinator-friendly plants — some of which can reach 10 feet tall — have enjoyed new popularity in recent years as farms and fields have opened to people seeking “sunflower selfies.” Photos of visitors standing shoulder-deep in flowers have become ubiquitous on Instagram and Facebook.

This year, sunflower images are all over social media for another reason too: as a symbol of support for embat-

tled Ukraine.

It's easy to grow your own sunflower field at home. Shorter varieties can even be grown in containers.

If starting from seeds, soak them in room-temperature water for 2-8 hours before sowing to improve germination. Plant directly into the garden, 1 inch deep and 6-12 inches apart, after the danger of frost has passed, or start

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system.”

Sloven, whose boys are 6 and 8, said the pandemic's effects on children indirectly added to mothers' stress. “Parents' well-being is very dependent on their children's well-being,” she said. “So, it creates tremendous stress for parents to see their children not doing well.”

Much stress comes from sources beyond an individual's control, Cheng said. A mom shouldn't be expected to cope with it entirely on her own. But awareness can help people seek ways to mitigate its effects.

Families can help

“A lot of what we do as moms is action-oriented,” Cheng said. The classic image of a busy mom is somebody who's always doing something — “it's go-go-go.”

Family members should look for ways to share the load, she said, especially as children grow. Cheng suggested making a family game of looking for ways to help by having everyone “observe what that busy mom is doing on a day-to-day basis, hour to hour, across the course of a day,” and note ways to improve things.

Family members also need to support a mom's personal time, Cheng said.

“Alone time cannot be emphasized enough,” she said. But in busy households, a grown-up who escapes for a while often is chastised. “I think that should actually be celebrated, protected, prioritized.”

Help yourself, too

Sloven knows firsthand it can be impossible to prioritize yourself when your children have needs. But it's also necessary.

“We need to attend to our own physical and mental health,” she said. A struggling mother can't be the best parent she can be. That means self-care is not selfish, “it's essential for the well-being of your family members.”

So put quiet time on your schedule,

Cheng suggested. It should be spent without screens — “just you and yourself in your mind and just in a quiet space.”

Nobody would say that's easy. But for moms whose lives are spent shuttling children, she suggested arriving at your next appointment 15 minutes early. Use the time in the car to meditate, reflect or pray.

Honor missing moms

Because of the pandemic, many children are in the care of people who are not their parents, Cheng said, and being sensitive to that is important.

As of February, more than 203,000 children in the U.S. had lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19, according to the COVID Collaborative, a consortium of health, education and economic leaders. “If you see a grown-up with a child, you might not want to assume it's a mom or dad,” Cheng said.

Many adults will be experiencing their first Mother's Day without a mother as well, Sloven said. “It's really hard, regardless of age,” Sloven said. People might want to look for ways to acknowledge those who can't celebrate with their own mothers and provide “company and companionship through this time.”

It takes everyone

Many challenges facing mothers go beyond what one person can do, Sloven said.

“For many people, the pandemic brought home this message that society doesn't care about women or families, and people felt incredibly abandoned,” she said. To really help moms, “we need to reimagine a future where we have policies set up to protect the well-being of parents and children” — for example, paid leave so women can go to medical appointments or economic programs to keep their families out of poverty.

“Becoming knowledgeable and engaged in policymaking that has the potential to improve the lives of parents and children is one way to show love and appreciation for women on this Mother's Day.”

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indoors three weeks before your last frost date. Keep the soil consistently moist but not soggy until the seedlings sprout.

Whether started from seed or bought at a nursery, sunflower plants should be moved outdoors when the danger of frost has passed in your region.

Select a location that will provide a minimum of 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily.

As the plants grow, they will develop long taproots

that work their way deep into the ground. Before planting, loosen the soil, digging at least a foot down, and remove any rocks.

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