

# The Power of Saying No

## A Two-Letter Word Can Lead to Happy

by tamara e. holmes

**I**f you're like most women, you wear a variety of hats when it comes to dealing with partners, children, family members and work obligations. But just because you can do it all, doesn't mean that you should. In fact, learning to say no is a skill that can help you live a healthier—and happier—life, experts say.

"Women tend to find it particularly challenging to say no because part of the feminine ideal is to be nice, loving, nurturing and definitely more other-focused," says Nicole Cutts, a psychologist and success coach in Washington, D.C. "But if you don't know how to say 'no,' you're most likely taking on too much, which contributes to stress, fatigue and burnout."

Shelley Huber, a 43-year-old health coach in New York, found that out the hard way when she took on a full plate of business projects, while still agreeing to do all the holiday preparations last December. "By the time Christmas rolled around I couldn't enjoy it because I was exhausted," she says.

Another reason saying yes too much can be harmful: "You're more likely to ignore your own needs and could end up becoming resentful toward those you're trying to help," says Karinn Glover, a New York psychiatrist.

Believe it or not, you may also be hurting the other person by being too helpful. By constantly bailing out a loved one you may be stifling his or her growth.



So how do you start saying no to things you don't want to do when everyone expects you to say yes?

**"'No' is a complete sentence."**

● **Ask for more time.** Though Huber admits her knee-jerk reaction is to agree to others' requests, she's found an effective way to stop herself from agreeing to things she really doesn't want to do. "I say, 'let me get back to you,'" she says. "Often when I sit down and really think about how this impacts my life, it's easier to say 'no.'"

● **Expect to feel bad (for a while).** If you're the person who's used to saving the day, you're probably going to feel guilty when you first start to say no. "People often think, 'I'm going to say no and feel free,'" Cutts says. "But what happens is the guilt jumps up in their face and

they feel selfish." However, in time you'll realize life goes on and the things you don't do get done.

● **Lose the explanations.** "'No' is a complete sentence," Cutts says. "When you find yourself explaining and trying to justify why you can't do something, you're sending the wrong message to the other person." Politely say, "I won't be able to do that," and move on.

When you learn to say no to things that aren't fulfilling or among your greatest priorities, you're showing yourself compassion, Glover says.

Huber agrees. "I had all these perceptions of perfection—trying to be a great mom, a great wife and a great entrepreneur. One of my most powerful no's was saying no to that image of perfection." ♥

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