



Find the perfect

BALANCE

Life as a mum can feel like a bit of a circus... take our fun quiz to see if you're a juggler, tightrope walker or acrobat!

1 When you wake up in the morning, do you:

- A** Leap out of bed with a sense of purpose, ready to start the day!
- B** Stumble around, bleary eyed, in urgent need of a cup of coffee.
- C** Roll over, put the pillow over your head and wonder how you're going to get through the day with so much to do.

2 You have a ton of chores to get through. Do you:

- A** Write a list prioritising things, then tick them off with a satisfied flourish!
- B** Manage (just) to quell a rising sense of panic and vow to just do what you can.
- C** Feel paralysed with fear – you'll never manage to do everything, so why even try?

3 You unexpectedly have a spare half an hour. Do you:

- A** Get out the nail polish – you've

been meaning to give yourself a quick manicure for ages.

- B** Slump on the sofa, before realising there's wet washing in the machine.
- C** Run around like a headless chicken, frantically trying to finish off all those half-done jobs.

4 Your toddler wants you to play, but there's a mountain of ironing to be done. Do you:

- A** Get out the Lego anyway – what are a few creases between friends?
- B** Find yourself using that well-worn mummy phrase, 'In a minute...'
- C** Feel fed-up, frazzled and guilty as you set up the ironing board.

5 On an average day, lunch consists of:

- A** Something homemade and healthy, and you like to give yourself at

least half an hour whenever possible.

- B** You tend to grab what you can, usually flying out the door in a mad rush.
- C** What lunch?

6 Your partner volunteers to do the week's supermarket shop. Do you:

- A** Enthusiastically accept his offer and suggest he takes the baby with him.
- B** Agree, if he promises to go armed with a shopping list that's been written by you.
- C** Say thanks but no thanks. You know he'd only come home with a load of useless BOGOFs and no proper meals.

7 You receive a work-related call while with your child in the playground. Do you:

- A** Not answer. They'll leave a message if it's that important and you'll call back later.
- B** Answer, but explain where you are and



try to keep the call as short as possible, with the phone tucked in the crook of your neck as you push the swing.

C Take the call and frantically pretend to be in full business mode – despite the screams of your toddler, who’s just got into a fight in the sandpit.

8 The children are finally tucked up in bed. Do you:

A Enjoy a glass of wine and a chat with your partner.

B Flop in front of the TV, practically comatose from the day’s activities.

C Start tackling those (still) half-finished jobs... sigh!

9 You find yourself wide-awake at 4am. Do you:

A Take the opportunity to read your book until you start to feel drowsy.

B Start making mental lists of all the things you need to do tomorrow.

C Stare fretfully into the early morning light, remembering all the things you planned to do and haven’t.

10 When was the last time that you took a couple of hours off to do something fun, just for you?

A You regularly schedule in me-time. After all, the better you feel, the better you can look after your family!

B It’s rarely planned, but at the weekends your partner sometimes takes over childcare duty to give you a few hours off.

C Does going to the hairdressers a couple of times a year count?

HOW DID YOU DO?

Mostly As THE PERFECT JUGGLER

Congratulations – you’re a great juggler. But as life coach Amanda Alexander of Coaching Mums (www.coachingmums.com) points out, ‘The perfect juggler mum prides herself on keeping all the balls in the air, but it only takes one to be thrown too high for her to drop all of them! That’s why it’s useful to build in a “plan B”. Ask yourself what reserves you have in terms of time, energy and support. The more reserves you can build up, the less you’ll need to worry about taking your eye off the ball – even if you do, you’ve got a safety net sorted!’

TOP TIP ‘You may be happy juggling your work and home life, but remember, you don’t have to do everything,’ advises time-management specialist Clare Evans (www.clareevans.co.uk). ‘Children can help with simple tasks, such as laying the table and putting away their toys. By instilling these habits early, you will reap rewards in the long run.’

Mostly Bs THE TIGHTROPE WALKER

You have a work/life balance of sorts, but it’s precarious. ‘All it takes is a slight wobble to throw your routine,’ warns Clare Evans. To help anchor you, Clare suggests the following: ‘Write things down so you don’t forget

them, and put everything on one calendar – both work and home commitments. This way, you’ll be clearer about what needs to be done.’

TOP TIP ‘Don’t agonise about ticking off everything on your list,’ says Clare. ‘Instead, prioritise the tasks that make the biggest difference to the smooth running of your life.’

Mostly Cs THE ACCIDENTAL ACROBAT

Oh dear! Your work/life balance is so off-kilter that you tie yourself in knots just trying to get through the day. ‘You’ve probably got no real structure to your day, and often just react to whoever shouts loudest at the time,’ says Clare Evans. To regain some control, try the following tips:

- 1 Plan your time each day.
- 2 Identify the most important things that need to be done, and tackle those tasks first.
- 3 Learn to say ‘no’. Don’t always try to people-please.
- 4 Create clear boundaries to keep work and family time separate.
- 5 Combine tasks to save time.

TOP TIP ‘Get into the habit of deciding, “I’m done for the day”,’ says life coach Amanda Alexander. Cutting yourself some slack now and again means you’ll be much happier – and healthier – in the long run! **PB**