

One of the great things about getting older is knowing a bit more: more about life; about the world and most importantly more about you. You know what makes you happy or frustrates you and you know your body. In short, after the years of worrying you probably feel that you've finally arrived! It's at this time that many women start to think about their options. After spending a lot of time raising a family and looking after a husband or partner, it's time to focus on yourself and what you want. If you're thinking about making some changes, here's a good place to start.

## RETURNING TO WORK<sup>1</sup>

Heading back to work can be a tough decision after you have raised a family. Whether for financial, emotional or practical reasons, it is important that you consider all the options available to you and what you have to offer to the working world. Of course, that may mean having to re-train, learn new skills or try something completely new. Being open to these options will boost your confidence levels, give you something to focus on and lessen that overwhelming feeling that comes with venturing into new territory. The world is your oyster and having a family doesn't hinder you getting the job you want and deserve. It is all about a 'work life balance'

### Flexible Working

Working full time will no doubt be impossible now as you try to juggle the demands of family life. Instead you could look for a more flexible job, or ask your employer for a flexible working arrangement. That could mean working part-time - either working shorter hours each day, or fewer days per week. Or it could involve having flexi-time, working from home or job sharing with another employee.

### Find a Working Pattern – That Suits You!

It is worth asking your employer if you can work certain days of the weeks. Some people even choose to work longer hours for fewer days each week, or to work from home during school holidays. It entirely depends what's workable for both you and your employer. This may mean taking a pay cut, but for the health and happiness of you and your family, it may be worth it.

### Who's Entitled to Request Flexible Working?

Your right to request flexible working is protected by law if you've worked for your employer for at least six months and you have a child under six, a disabled child under 18 or you are caring for an adult spouse, partner, relative or other person who lives at your address.

For more information about how to apply for flexible working arrangement, go to:

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Flexibleworking/index.htm>

## EATING IN YOUR 40'S<sup>2</sup>

If you're leading a full life it's important that your eating habits keep up with you: particularly if you're planning on returning to work. Changes in your lifestyle can impact on your diet, particularly if you are in a stressful situation like starting a new job or being away from your family for the first time. At times like this it's tempting to comfort eat, but by knowing what foods your body needs you can make sure that you maintain energy and perform your best, not matter what the situation.

As we get older our nutritional needs change. It's a sad fact that the metabolism slows slightly, so keeping the extra pounds off becomes a little more difficult. Also, as you approach the menopause your cholesterol levels and blood pressure can go up, meaning that you're at a greater risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes. So you really do need to pay attention to what you eat.

**Calcium** is really important to help maintain bone-density, so make sure you get as much as you can. For women in their 40's it's even more important as they are more at risk from osteoporosis (bone thinning). You can get calcium from all sorts of sources such as: cheese, broccoli, cabbage, kale (a leafy green vegetable), dried fruit, soya beans, nuts, and fish containing edible bones (for example, sardines or pilchards).

**Fibre.** By eating whole grains, fruits and vegetables you'll be filling up on foods that help you feel full with fewer calories and which will also decrease your risk of high blood cholesterol. Fibre can reduce the risk of bowel cancer as well as easing constipation.

### Checklist

- *Enjoy your food:* Diets are normally unappetising which leads us to give in to temptation. Find a healthy balance without having to give in to the latest diet craze
- *Think about the food you want:* How will it make you feel? Will it make you feel light and energised or heavy and sluggish? Is it cold outside and you feel like you need some warming food to sustain you? Or are you really not hungry?
- *Eat the food that you really want:* Not just the food you think you should want. For example, if you want chocolate simply because you've had a hard day, stop and think. Is it chocolate you need, or a rest? If you do want the chocolate, savour it and don't guzzle the whole bar in one sitting. The same applies to healthy foods. If you really want a filling meal but opt for a 'healthy salad' you won't be satisfied, and you'll soon be on the lookout for more to snack on
- *Exercise:* Not just to lose weight, but as part of a healthy lifestyle. You may initially shift those stubborn pounds but once you stop, you won't stay at your target weight very long! It's not just a weight loss thing, exercise and staying fit has a multitude of benefits, such as prevention of heart disease, strengthening bones and improving cardiovascular function.

## REVIEWING YOUR CONTRACEPTION

Although sex may now be a lower priority than it once used to be, it's important that you still think about what contraception is right for you. As our bodies change we may find that what suited us in our 20's and 30's is no longer appropriate to us now. There are lots of different types of contraceptive methods and many don't just protect you from unwanted pregnancies, they can help you with periods, particularly if you have lengthy and frequent bleeding. There are also pills that contain hormones which are exactly the same as the hormones that mimic the hormones that occur naturally in the body.

It is worth talking to your doctor or your healthcare professional about your contraceptive options to get the solution that's most in tune with you. For more information about your contraception choices visit the "your choices" section of [www.contraception.co.uk](http://www.contraception.co.uk).

1. <http://www.healthywomen.org.uk/life/work-life-balance/achieving-a-work-life-balance-2.htm>; accessed on 01/02/2010 at 10:59

2. Based on <http://snagwiremedia.com/eating-in-your-30s/> accessed on 16/02/2010 at 18:29