



MANAGING, Mum?

These smart mum-tricks will help you cope with the chaos

Does your to-do list resemble a roll of wallpaper? And, the minute you *finally* turn your attention to that mountainous ironing pile, does your toddler need you *now*? If you're feeling frazzled with the pace of family life at the moment, you're not alone. 'Becoming a mum instantly changes your whole world,' says life coach Sam James, 'and I don't think you're ever really prepared for that – or quite get used to it! Suddenly, you've got a little human being who is completely dependent on you, on top of everything else you already do.' And juggling those baby-tasks alongside your usual line-up of chores, all on three hours sleep, can be tough. But get smart in the way you manage that mum-load, and you *can* control the chaos.

GET REAL

Your number-one priority will *always* be your baby. But whether you work full-time or part-time, you're on mat leave or you're a stay-at-home mum, the sheer volume of everything else you need to think about and remember can be overwhelming. 'A lot of mums tell me that there's just so much stuff whirring around their brain,' says Sam, 'that it leaves them feeling stuck. All that stuff is like a big scary monster lurking in the dark that they don't know how to take on. And if *you* feel like this, the very first thing you should do is unscramble your brain.'

Grab a notebook and get *all* the to-do tasks that are buzzing around your head down on paper. You don't need to write full sentences, key words will do – just as long as all that *stuff* is noted down. And be careful that you don't self-censor, and tell yourself that something

isn't important enough to be on your list – if it's a little nagging thought in your brain, write it down. 'This exercise clears some space in your mind,' says Sam. 'And it also means you can think about each of the things on your list separately, rather than being overwhelmed and distracted by one big lump of unmanageable mayhem.'

CATEGORISE

Once you've got everything written down, it's time to arrange it all into categories. You might find it easier to do this on several sheets of paper, with a separate list on each. First, make a note of your must-do tasks – these are the absolute necessities, which you'll plan your day around. Be strict – this should be a relatively short list. Next up is a list of the things you can do when your baby is with you, where you can still engage with your baby. Be creative here – what tasks could you turn into a game, and which could you do with your baby in a sling? This list will be stuffed with daily chores such as sorting the washing and tidying up. Next, make a list of things you *need* to be child-free for in order to not feel stressed, such as paying your bills online or sending emails. Group together all of the five-minute tasks that you can speed through in the moments when your baby is busy playing. And group together longer tasks, that you'll need to do during naps or when someone else is looking after your tot. Your final list should be all the stuff that can wait. And do put as many things as possible onto this list – it doesn't mean you're not going to tackle a task, it just means you're not going to do it *right now*.

'Use these lists as a menu to choose from, depending on what kind of day it is,' says Sam. 'Try not to plan tasks ahead or allocate them to days of the week, because you need ➔

'We have a huge chalkboard that we've turned into a monthly calendar. My husband and three children each have a different coloured chalk, so at a glance I can see who has what on, when.'
Marie Collins, from Wymondham, is mum to Florence, 18 months, Jack, four, and Annie-May, eight



'I've learnt to adjust my expectations when needed, and to be kind to myself. Sometimes, after a rough night, it's okay to cancel your plans, stick CBeebies on and eat biscuits together.'
Vicki Cockerill, from Dereham, is mum to Harlow, one, and Elijah, four



MEET THE EXPERT

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flexibility when you're a mum. That way, if you've had a poor night's sleep, you can recognise that you need to sleep when your youngster naps, rather than doing any chores.' And selecting jobs on this ad-hoc basis means you won't feel bad if you aren't able to complete a pre-allocated workload.

ACCEPT THE DISORDER

Of course, you'll still be thinking ahead to what needs to get done *today* or *this week* or *soon*. But life throws a fair few extra curveballs when you're a parent, and you need to factor this disorder into your mama-load organisation. So, when your toddler feels poorly and everything you thought you'd get done falls by the wayside, and you don't get anything ticked off your to-do list, don't feel deflated. Because while you might think you haven't achieved *anything* by the time you finally sink into the sofa in the evening, you've done the most important job of all, of being a mum. 'Part of being a mum is learning to accept that, while you might have strived to operate at 110 per cent efficiency pre-baby, you can function comfortably on 75 per cent, and that's still good enough,' says Sam. 'All that matters is that you and your baby are healthy and happy – the Hoovering can wait.'

STRUCTURE YOUR TIME

Thinking of your home life in a similar vein to a working environment helps create a structure to prevent you doing *too* much. Filling every moment of your time may feel productive and necessary in the short-term, but you'll soon feel burnt out, which will make you less effective at managing your mama-load. In the workplace, you'd have set working hours, with time for lunch plus five-minute catch-ups with colleagues at the kettle. So, try to incorporate this downtime into life with your tot. Now, we're not talking me-time here – but ask yourself what bits of your mum-day do *you* enjoy and find relaxing? Being a mum may be a 24/7 job, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have slots of time where your *only* concern is curling up on the sofa for cuddles with your baby. Be sure to give yourself time for lunch, too, and set a time to stop doing chores in the evening all being well, once your youngster is in bed.

'When you think about it, being a team manager is all about time management and teamwork, which is very similar to your role as a mum,' says Sam. 'And while being a manager might mean that you have a lot of responsibility, it also means that *you* get to set all the rules!'

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more ways to control the chaos

STOP BEING SUPERMUM

'When I had my first child, I remember feeling really frustrated, because nobody was noticing how much I was struggling,' says Sam. 'I had a moment where I lost it with my mum, and she explained that I looked like I had it altogether, and she didn't want to step on my toes. So, be honest about how you're managing, and be clear about what you need.'

TAKE SHORTCUTS

Wherever possible, take the short route: buy pre-cut veg, shake washing before you hang it up so it doesn't need ironing, and use a premium nappy at night that sucks up liquid rather than leaks.

DON'T EXPLAIN

'You need to manage your time and energy like a very precious commodity,' says Sam. So, if a friend invites you out but you could do with slobbering out on the sofa, just say no. '"No" can be a complete sentence,' says Sam. 'You don't need to justify anything to anyone! Just let them know you'd love to get together when things are less hectic: "No, I'm sorry I can't this time, but I'll let you know when is a better time." Job done!'

MAKE A DONE LIST

Instead of a to-do list, write down everything you achieve, even small tasks like putting in a load of washing or booking your baby's vaccinations. 'This activates the reward centre in your brain and releases neurochemicals and the hormones that give you a feel-good boost and pleasure in your success,' says Sam. 'And it counteracts that feeling of "I'm not getting anywhere".'

Stop The Flitter Diary, £15, samjamescoaching.co.uk

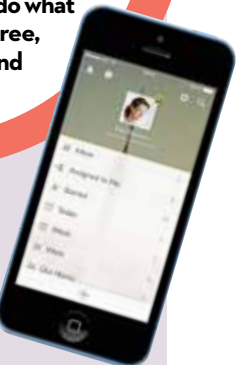
THINK POSITIVE

'How you speak to yourself can make a huge difference to how you feel day to day, too,' says Sam. 'We are quick to put ourselves down, when we wouldn't dare speak that way to our best friends.' So, be mindful of the words you're using to think to yourself, and consider how you might rephrase that thought if you were saying it to a friend. For example, instead of thinking about all the things you *didn't* get done today, focus instead on where you *did* spend your energy. Do all this, and we promise the mayhem of family life will be a little easier to navigate!



USE YOUR SMARTPHONE

Wunderlist is a really useful app where you can set reminders and deadlines, and make notes and lists. You can share lists, too: so send that shopping list to your other half and your to-do list to your mum, so they can help do what needs to be done! Free, available on iOS and Android.



RAMP UP ROUTINE

Bath, book and bed: you could probably do your baby's nighttime routine with your eyes closed, right? 'What else could you make into a daily or weekly routine?' asks Sam. 'Ingraining a task into a routine helps reduce the brainpower needed to complete it, as eventually you'll do it on autopilot.' Keep a basket in the living room to throw all those annoying bits and bobs into, and sort it out on Saturdays. Turn coats the right way out before you hang them up. And pack stuff into your changing bag in the same order daily.

WORK OUT YOUR CAPACITY

Chances are, you're being over-optimistic about how much time you have to manage your mum-load. 'Sit down with your diary and block out all the time when you're doing an activity that demands your full attention,' suggests Sam. 'This could be when you're at work, or at a baby class. Then look at what time you've got left, and allocate it between daily tasks – and you'll see how unrealistic you are about what can be achieved in the time you have. 'This exercise can be really empowering, as it gives you the guilt-free confidence to say: "I don't have the time to do that. If it isn't a priority, it has to wait."'

