

HI MOM

can we talk?

We may think we know it all, but, as it turns out, our mothers still have a lot to teach us – especially when it comes to our health. Here are *eight crucial questions* every woman needs to ask Mom.

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Q HOW DID YOU LEARN TO MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF?

"Many women in their 40s and 50s take a life's-too-short approach to going to events that don't really interest them or spending time with people who don't make them feel good," says Lisa Naylor, a Winnipeg-based counsellor and self-esteem expert. Younger women, on the other hand, are more focused on pleasing others. Talking to Mom about how she learned to prioritize her time will help you focus on what's most important in your own life.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Also ask your mother about her role models. "If younger women realized that the people they truly admire are not necessarily the most beautiful or the thinnest but instead the most interesting, most confident or most creative, it might inspire them to focus less on superficial qualities," says Naylor.

Q HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO GET PREGNANT?

"If your mom, your sister or even your grandmother had a hard time conceiving, you might be predisposed to fertility issues as well," says Dr. Clifford Librach, director of the Create Fertility Centre in Toronto. He notes that conditions like endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome – both of which affect fertility – tend to be genetic. It's also important to ask Mom if she experienced multiple miscarriages, especially if she has an autoimmune disease. "Many women don't know that conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, colitis and thyroid disease – all of which can run in families – may increase your risk of miscarriage or other pregnancy complications," says Librach. And while these questions are undoubtedly difficult to broach, the information you'll gain will provide you and your doctor with important insight into your own fertility.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Also ask Mom when she went through menopause because you'll likely experience it at a similar age, which may affect when you decide to start your own family.

Q DO YOU EVER GET A STOMACH ACHE AFTER YOU EAT?

Yes, asking Mom about her digestive issues may seem like TMI, but cramps and bloating are often signs of a food allergy or intolerance, says Laurie Harada, executive director of Anaphylaxis Canada. Though most people experience symptoms in childhood, food allergies and sensitivities – such as gluten or lactose intolerance – can also develop in adulthood. Knowing about any of Mom's food triggers will encourage you to take note of possible warning signs and see your doctor if you have a food reaction (be sure to tell her if you have a family history of food allergies). ▶

HOW ON EARTH CAN I BRING THAT UP?

Depending on what type of relationship you have with your mother, broaching heavy topics like depression and infertility might seem taboo. Start by choosing an opportune moment, says Ilana Tamari, a family therapist in Toronto, and be sure to preface your expectations. "Tell her that you don't want to infringe on her privacy but that you need to know more about your family's health history," she suggests. "Nine times out of 10, she'll feel compelled to stretch her limits and have that talk – not only for her sake but also for yours."



KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Also ask Mom if she eats when she's upset. Turning to the cookie jar for comfort is a learned behaviour, says Merryl Bear, director of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre. If your mom is an emotional eater, talking about it may help you understand why you reach for food when you're not hungry.

Q WHEN DID YOU START TO NOTICE WRINKLES?

You may not want to admit it, but, chances are, you're going to look more and more like your mom as you age. Don't believe us? A recent study from the Loma Linda University Medical Center in California confirms that our faces tend to age like our mothers', especially around the eyes. "Genetics can be unavoidable, but there are things you can do to modify these changes," says Dr. Jason Rivers, a Vancouver-based dermatologist. If you're not already doing so, start using a broad-spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen daily to reduce skin damage. And when you do start noticing fine lines, add an over-the-counter retinol cream to your daily face-care routine – it will increase the production of collagen and elastin, which improve skin tone and texture.



KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Also ask Mom if she has any age spots: grey, brown or black discolourations that typically appear on the face, hands, shoulders and arms. (Chances are, you may have already seen them.) These ▶

WHICH DUO ARE YOU?

Dr. Deborah Carr, author of *Making Up With Mom*, identifies the most common mother-daughter communication types.

The pressure cookers

WHO YOU ARE When the two of you have something to address, you let it be known. But while Mom thinks she always knows best, you're tired of being told what's right.

COMMUNICATION

CHALLENGE Mom's unsolicited advice tends to come across as judgmental and aggressive, so you reject it without really listening.

HOW TO GET OVER IT Mom needs to recognize that you're a competent adult who can make your own decisions; you must realize that her advice has value and may not actually be intended as criticism.

AS SEEN ON TV Eleanor and Blair Waldorf, *Gossip Girl*



The sweep-it-under-the-rug pair

WHO YOU ARE You both keep mum about any problems you're facing, mistakenly thinking that you're protecting the other person from unnecessary worry.

COMMUNICATION

CHALLENGE By holding back about your problems, the emotional intimacy you share is minimized.

HOW TO GET OVER IT You're both adults now and need the courage to be honest and show each other that you appreciate hearing the truth, no matter what it is.

AS SEEN ON TV Holly and Rebecca Harper, *Brothers and Sisters*



The silent saboteurs

WHO YOU ARE You both use actions – not words – to make your points known when an issue arises.

COMMUNICATION

CHALLENGE Mom's subtle actions – from shaking her head while you're speaking to tidying up your house as soon as she arrives – can be more hurtful than words. Instead of calling her on it, you respond by shutting her out of your life.

HOW TO GET OVER IT

Carr's advice is the same for both of you: Think about the consequences of your actions and start using words to explain how you feel.

AS SEEN ON TV Barbara and Sarah Henrickson, *Big Love*



The heavenly duo

WHO YOU ARE You recognize the strengths that you both bring to the relationship and understand how your words and actions affect each other.

COMMUNICATION

CHALLENGE When minor issues arise, they may get blown out of proportion. Mom may also not understand why you need to cancel plans occasionally or cut your daily phone call short.

HOW TO GET OVER IT

Each of you has other relationships to tend, so remember that the closeness you share shouldn't be measured by the amount of time you spend together.

AS SEEN ON TV Susan and Julie Mayer, *Desperate Housewives*



harmless discolourations (also known as liver spots) can be hereditary, but they can be easily avoided with diligent sunscreen use. Retinol or glycolic acid cream can help fade any existing spots.

Q HAVE YOU EVER STRUGGLED WITH DEPRESSION?

If one of your parents or a sibling has experienced severe, long-lasting depression, you're more likely to struggle with the illness yourself, says Dr. Sheila O'Byrne, a registered psychologist in Calgary. Difficulties at work, financial stress and relationship problems can also increase your risk. Knowing the symptoms (which may include feelings of despair, lethargy and uselessness, as well as weight fluctuations, loss of interest in day-to-day life and social withdrawal) and being aware of your family history can help you be proactive about seeking treatment from a mental health professional, if necessary. Plus, if your mom has struggled with depression, she can tell you what strategies helped her cope.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and postpartum depression (PPD) can also run in families. If Mom – or another close family member – has suffered from either condition, you should be extra-vigilant about seeking help if you experience a prolonged case of the winter or baby blues. ▶

A FEW THINGS YOU CAN TEACH MOM

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE

If she's reluctant to discuss her health with anyone but her family doctor, she might reconsider if she knew that a massage therapist could help alleviate her arthritis pain or that a naturopath might be able to ease her menopause symptoms. (She might also not know that most alternative-health practitioners are highly trained medical professionals.)

YOU CAN FIND RELIABLE HEALTH RESOURCES ONLINE

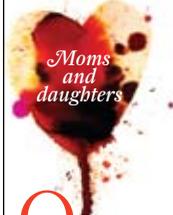
Searching the web for health information can be intimidating – and potentially misleading – if you don't know where to start. Sharing some of your savvy surfing strategies, like focusing on sites backed by governments, hospitals or medical schools, will get Mom on the right track.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUMP IRON TO BUILD MUSCLE

If she's intimidated by barbells and bench-press machines, suggest that she try Pilates or aquafitness – both are gentle on muscles and joints and can help her get toned. Plus, since they're led by an instructor and likely to be attended by other women her age, she'll feel more confident breaking a sweat.

THERE'S MORE TO HEALTHY EATING THAN TOFU

Your mom might not be aware of the nutritional benefits of some of your new-found favourites, such as quinoa, kale and pomegranate, or how to prepare them. If she doesn't live close enough to come for dinner, mail her a few of your favourite recipes.



Q HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CHEATED ON?

It's a powerful question, says Dr. Jacqueline Milner-Clerk, a clinical psychologist in Darmouth, NS, because younger women often feel that cheating is the ultimate dealbreaker. But if your mom has dealt with an unfaithful partner, she might be willing to explain how she got through the heart-break and whether she decided to stay in the relationship, which may cause you to re-examine your own assumptions about infidelity.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING Also ask Mom how she handled other relationship problems, like bad breakups or serious arguments. You may gain fresh insight on how to handle similar situations in your own life.

Q DOES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE RUN IN OUR FAMILY?

"Heart disease and stroke kill more women every year than all forms of cancer combined," says Dr. Beth Abramson, a cardiologist in Toronto and spokesperson for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. If any of your relatives have experienced high blood pressure, heart attack or stroke, you need to talk to your doctor about whether she should monitor your blood pressure and waist circumference (extra fat around your midsection is a cardiovascular risk factor). And, regardless of your family history, the risk of heart disease is high for all Canadians. There is good news, though: Reducing your sodium intake, eating lots of fruits and vegetables and getting 30 minutes of sweat-inducing exercise daily are easy, effective ways to ward off future problems.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING High cholesterol and a predisposition to diabetes can also be genetic, says Abramson, so ask Mom if there's a family history of heart disease, stroke or diabetes. If so, talk to your doctor about your best defence strategies.

Q WHEN DID YOU START GETTING MAMMOGRAMS?

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that women have mammograms every two years starting at age 50 and that women in their 40s discuss the risks and benefits of regular mammograms with their doctor, says Gillian Bromfield, senior manager of cancer control policy for the Canadian Cancer Society in Toronto. However, these aren't hard and fast rules: "If you have a number of relatives on one side of your family who have had breast cancer or if several close relatives on either side developed the disease at a young age, you might be at increased risk," she notes. If that's the case, it's never too soon to discuss early-screening options with your family doctor.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING "Ovarian cancer sometimes runs in families that also have high rates of breast cancer," says Bromfield. If you have a family history of either disease, be sure to tell your doctor. ☺