

## Mother Nurture

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### *Swimming Upstream*

*When I think back to my own mom, she always seemed so on top of things. I feel dismayed and guilty that I'm not handling things as well and feel a lot more frazzled than she seemed to be.*

We've heard this comment from many mothers, and it's both poignant and sadly unfair to the women who feel this way, since times have changed so dramatically. In response, we'd like to offer this excerpt from our book, *Mother Nurture*.

*[From Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships, by Rick Hanson, Ph.D., Jan Hanson, L.Ac., Ricki Pollycove, M.D. Copyright © 2002. Reprinted by arrangement with Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.]*

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Let's step back for a minute and look at how we got here. During more than 99% of the time that humans (or our close ancestors) have lived on this planet, mothers raised families in small groups of hunter-gatherers. If you had been among them, your life would have moved at the speed of a walk while you provided for your needs and fulfilled your ambitions with a child on your hip or nearby. You would have eaten fresh and organic foods saturated in micro-nutrients and breathed air and drunk water free of artificial chemicals. Most important of all, you would have spent much of your day with other mothers, surrounded by a supportive community of relatives, friends, and neighbors. These are the conditions to which your body and mind are adapted for raising children.

Unfortunately, while the essential activities of mothering - pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, worrying and planning and loving with all your heart - have not altered one bit, our world has changed profoundly, and evolution hasn't had time to catch up. [You and we are genetically identical to the first modern humans of 200,000 years ago, and nearly identical to our earliest tool-using ancestors, who lived over two million years ago. Nonetheless, at odds with this basic genetic blueprint, most mothers today must rush about stressfully, constantly juggling and multi-tasking. Few modern jobs can be done with young children around, so working means spending much of the day separated from your kids – and the stresses of the unnatural schedule and pace they must then handle affect them in ways that naturally spill over onto you. Compared to our ancestors, most of us eat much fewer vegetables and whole foods, and much more white flour, sugar, and artificial chemicals, and we can't help absorbing some of the billions of pounds of toxins released into the environment each year, which even leave traces in breast milk. The so-](#)

called village it takes to raise a child usually looks more like a ghost town, so you have to rely more on your mate than did mothers in times past – but he, too, is strained by the unprecedented busyness and intensity of modern life.

If you feel like you're swimming upstream, it's because raising children was not meant to be this way. Many of the problems that seem purely personal or marital actually start on the other side of your front door.

Of course, the world is not going to change back to the time of the hunter-gatherers (and we'd miss refrigerators and telephones too much if it did!). And those times certainly had their own difficulties, such as famine or disease. But, like every mother, you can't help but feel the **impact** of the whirlwind we're all living in. Just how you're affected is as individual as a baby's footprint. Some mothers are fortunate to have low demands, substantial resources, and low vulnerabilities. All too often, however, the demands are high, resources are low, and resilience gets worn down: a mother's "cupboard" gets emptied out and shaken and it's an uphill struggle to get anything back in. No wonder that, over time, some signs of wear begin to show.

That's why we think it's so important you and every mother to take active steps to lower her stresses and increase her resources: that's mother nurture.

*(Rick Hanson is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 11 and 14. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the authors of *Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships*, published by Penguin. You can see their website at [www.nurturemom.com](http://www.nurturemom.com) or email them with questions or comments at [info@nurturemom.com](mailto:info@nurturemom.com); unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)*