

Do you let yourself relax?

Life's a beach...or is it? For many women, summertime is marked by all work and no play—and the loss of a major payoff. “Relaxing makes you happier *and* helps you tackle your to-dos with new vigor,” says psychotherapist Abby Seixas, author of *Finding the Deep River Within* (Jossey-Bass, 2007). Are you allowing yourself the R & R you need? Test yourself below.



1 It's been a crazy day, so you've decided to pick up a pizza for dinner. You're about to place the order when your husband tells you he's craving home-made salmon croquettes. You:

- a Scoff and ask, “Oh yeah? So what time is your mother expecting you?” Then you order a pizza as planned.
- b Gather your strength and trudge to the market for ingredients, hoping you can get the meal under way before either of you gets too hungry.
- c Propose a deal: If he runs to the store and helps with the prep work, you'll happily handle the cooking.

2 On a gorgeous Friday afternoon, your boss surprises the staff by letting everyone leave at 1 P.M. as a reward for an extra-productive week. You:

- a Get an oil change, refill a prescription, hit the bank and mail your daughter's camp forms—now your weekend is freed up for housework!
- b Drive to the beach and don the “emergency bikini” you keep in the trunk. When your family calls asking where you are, you say, “Paradise—or at least I was until the phone rang!”
- c Run some quick errands, then go home to your garden for a few happy hours of digging.

3 You're mingling at a neighbor's pool party when you notice that the hostess looks overwhelmed. You respond by:

- a Loudly shaking the ice in your empty glass and yelling, “Refill, please!” How else are you going to get her attention?
- b Setting a good example for the other party guests by serving yourself.
- c Running home to grab your apron, then manning your neighbor's kitchen while she works the crowd. It takes a village, right?

4 You board a red-eye flight exhausted and are looking forward to a nice snooze. But the woman next to you starts venting about her life's hardships. You:

- a Let her talk for a minute, then yawn and say, “Goodness, just *hearing* about your ordeal is exhausting. Would you mind if I took a nap?”
- b Politely conceal your fatigue as she details an intimate family conflict. Then you offer your best advice.
- c Shout, “Lady, your yapping is keeping me from napping!”

5 Your family is enjoying a rare weekend getaway. On Saturday morning everyone is eager to go for a bike ride, but your motel room is a disaster. You:

- a Stay behind to make the beds and pluck hair out of the sink. You don't want to trouble the housekeeping staff.
- b Lace up your sneakers and clear the clutter off the floor. You'll be sure to leave a nice tip.
- c Ignore the mess. On your way out the door, you use bar soap to write “Need more toilet-ries!” on the bathroom mirror.

From *Sex and the City: The Movie*/FilmStills.net. Text: Paula Wehmer and Katie Hynes.

psych quiz

5-7 POINTS You're a **DUTIFUL DOER**



You are hardworking and incredibly diligent. But no matter how much you plug away, there's always *something* that needs to be done, like stepping in as a short-order cook at your neighbor's party. "This can't-stop mentality may stem from a multitasking tendency in the female brain," explains counselor Abby Seixas. "The downside is that you can end up believing you have no worth unless you're helping or doing."

This mental wiring isn't something you can simply shrug off. "Going from 60 to 0 can be impossible," acknowledges personal coach Jennifer Louden, author of *The Life Organizer* (New World Library, 2007). Instead, she suggests redirecting the brain with a reminder of your own needs: Ask yourself, *When do I most feel like myself?* Then try to carve out a little time for that activity, whether it's knitting or kickboxing. Says Louden, "Once you rediscover the energizing benefits of focusing on you, that will naturally start to take precedence over tasks that are less important."

8-12 POINTS You're a **JUST ENOUGH**



Your empathetic, collaborative spirit makes you a magnet for responsibility. But when faced with a potentially draining chore (like listening to a stranger's life story), you know when to hit the brakes. "Women in this group accept that their to-do lists and the demands on their time will *never* disappear—and this acceptance is ultimately freeing," observes Seixas. Once you stop rushing toward some false notion of completion, taking a break doesn't seem so crazy.

Still, we all have days or weeks when life gets busy and relaxation eludes us. "If you find that your thoughts are constantly racing ahead to what's next on your list, it's a sign that stress is throwing you off kilter," says Seixas. Fortunately, you can reverse this effect with just a few deep breaths. "Pause to sit in a quiet place and breathe deeply as you focus on the sights, sounds, smells and physical reality of *right now*," Seixas instructs. "This helps redirect your mind away from the endless tasks that await and back to how you are feeling in the present."

13-15 POINTS You're a **DON'T BOTHERER**



The way you see it, life's too short *not* to relax. As a result, you don't take kindly to assaults on your free time—such as when your husband spontaneously requests an elaborate dinner from scratch. Many women arrive at this MO after years of putting themselves second. "If you do too much for others for too long, you can reach a breaking point that produces a rebellious mind-set," explains Seixas. But this stubbornness could be cheating you of greater happiness. "You miss out on the confidence boost of meeting concrete goals," she notes. "Plus, you don't get to enjoy the powerful high of working with others."

To become more at ease with the idea of people relying on you, Louden suggests tackling a collaborative task that happens face-to-face—for example, making dinner *with* (not for) your husband. "Focus on how great it feels to be a valued part of the undertaking," says Louden. Once you see that doing for others doesn't have to infringe on your freedom, you'll be more inclined to help.

Score chart

Question 1

- (a) 3 points
- (b) 1 point
- (c) 2 points

Question 2

- (a) 1 point
- (b) 3 points
- (c) 2 points

Question 3

- (a) 3 points
- (b) 2 points
- (c) 1 point

Question 4

- (a) 2 points
- (b) 1 point
- (c) 3 points

Question 5

- (a) 1 point
- (b) 2 points
- (c) 3 points

From left: from *Sex and the City*; *The Movie*/FilmStills.net (2); HBO/Everett Collection.