

Mother-Daughter Wisdom: Creating a Legacy of Physical and Emotional Health

By Christiane Northrup, MD.



The mother-daughter relationship is at the core of every woman's physical and emotional health. Even before birth, mothers provide daughters with their first experience of nurturing. Mothers are our most powerful female role models. Every daughter, whether she grows up to be a parent or not, embodies her mother's blueprint and that of all the women in her ancestry. Now, in a revolutionary approach to well-being for women of all ages, renowned physician and bestselling author Dr. Christiane Northrup unlocks the profound wisdom and healing power of these maternal legacies.

Applying the unique holistic approach that made *Women's Bodies*, *Women's Wisdom* and *The Wisdom of Menopause* such transforming forces in the lives of millions of readers, Dr. Northrup has created an uplifting, enlightening, entirely new map of female development. *Mother-Daughter Wisdom* blends soulful truths with groundbreaking clinical discoveries to help us thoroughly rebuild our health. Whether coming to terms with a painful memory, letting go of harmful beliefs about themselves, or celebrating the love that is passed down from mother to daughter, generation after generation, readers of this book will come to see this intimate bond in a completely new light.

The questions and discussion topics follow are intended to enhance your reading of Dr. Christiane Northrup's *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*. We hope they will enrich your experience of this important and inspiring book.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Mother-Daughter Wisdom* includes Dr. Northrup's candid recollections of her own journey to motherhood, and her realizations about her mother. What are the legacies of motherhood in your family? If you have limited information about this, what are your greatest obstacles in discovering that history?
2. What new insights regarding conception, pregnancy, labor, and birth did you take away from the book's initial chapters? Why might Western medicine get in the way of the natural processes that ease childbearing?
3. Chapter 2 features "The Five Facets of Feminine Power," ranging from the basics of physical care to the discovery of passion and purpose in life. Which of these facets shines brightest in your life these days? Which facet would you most like to "polish"?
4. Using Dr. Northrup's analogy of life as a house, discuss the times when you moved from one "room" to another in your role as mother, daughter, or both.
5. In your opinion, is the mother-daughter legacy primarily a matter of nature or nurture? What medical legacies have been passed down to you by your ancestors? How much can genetic predispositions be modified by our own actions? Do you agree with Dr. Northrup's assessment of the role we can play in creating physical and emotional health for ourselves?

6. In Chapter 1, the author states “the only way to raise a healthy, proud daughter or heal our own relationship with our mothers, is to enter bear territory. If you are raising a daughter, you must be willing to open yourself to the place inside where you would willingly sacrifice your own life or that of someone or something else for your daughter. It also means that you must know when to stop the sacrifice for her sake as well as your own.” When have you experienced Mother Bear energy, either as the bear or as her cub?

7. Chapter 7 discusses the “emotional” versus “executive” portions of the brain and the balance between self-love and empathy. In what ways have you experienced these tensions in your day-to-day experience? Does the distinction between “shame donors” and “shame recipients” resonate with you? What strategies, if any, have you adopted to reverse feelings of shame?

8. Chapter 8 defines nourishment not only in terms of sound nutrition but as a whole-life experience. How do the concepts featured in this chapter create a foundation for the subsequent chapters? What are the keys to a “well-nourished” life, even in financial terms?

9. How do gender lines factor into the creation of “love maps” (Chapter 10)? How does American culture encode seemingly contradictory expectations for boys and girls regarding relationships and sexuality?

10. Who were some of your earliest idols and heroes? Can you think of any experiences from your own life that reflect Dr. Northrup’s statement, in Chapter 12, that “through her idols, [a school-age girl] explores ways of being in the world and experiments with her ideal self” and that “the qualities a girl admires in others are really inside herself?”

11. Chapter 12, “The Anatomy of Self-Esteem,” eloquently describes ways to instill confidence and help your daughters develop an inner guidance system. Through what means were you taught how to navigate harmful situations? To what degree do you currently “feel safe on the earth”?

12. What contemporary knowledge, from nutrition to relationships, has had the greatest impact on your health? How proactive are you in your relationships with your health-care providers? Do you keep yourself informed about medical issues that concern you, ask questions of your doctors, get second opinions when you think they are appropriate?

13. In Chapter 15, the author states that during puberty a young woman’s “unique, inborn gifts and talents are ripe for in-depth recognition and development” and that “the degree to which [she] is supported to become who [she] really is by [her family] and social networks is the degree to which [she] will bloom [and] remain healthy.” How did your family respond to or address puberty in your home? How did it affect the woman you became? Do you feel that our society would benefit from more positive coming-of-age rites, and have you personally participated in any?

14. How would you describe the relationships between women and men in your family? Did your mother defer to your father, or take on all the responsibility for the emotional well being of her family? How has your parents’ relationship influenced your own feelings about what you can expect from men?

15. Is the twenty-first century an exceptionally dangerous time to be an adolescent girl, due to high rates of substance abuse and unprotected sex? Or are we raising a generation of young women who possess an exceptional ability to take care of themselves? How do you think they will characterize our current generation of mothers?

16. What message would you most like to hear from your mother? From your daughter? What is the most healing message you could give to your mother? Your daughter?

WHY IS THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP ESSENTIAL TO A WOMAN'S HEALTH?

Dr. Northrup says:

A mother's often unconscious influence on her daughter's health is so profound that years ago I had to accept that my medical skills were only a drop in the bucket compared to the unexamined and ongoing influence of her mother. If a woman's relationship with her mother was supportive and healthy, and if her mother had given her positive messages about her female body and how to care for it, my job as a physician was easy. Her body, mind, and spirit were already programmed for optimal health and healing. If, on the other hand, her mother's influence was problematic, or if there was a history of neglect, abuse, alcoholism, or mental illness, then I knew that my best efforts would probably fall short. Real long-term health solutions would become possible only when my patient realized the impact of her background and then took steps to change this influence. Though health-care modalities such as dietary improvement, exercise, drugs, surgery, breast exams, and Pap smears all have their place, not one of them can get to the part of the woman's consciousness that is creating her state of health in the first place.

Before birth, consciousness literally directs the creation of our bodies. It is also constantly being shaped by our life's experiences, most especially those of childhood. No other childhood experience is as compelling as a young girl's relationship with her mother. Each of us takes in at the cellular level how our mother feels about being female, what she believes about her body, how she takes care of her health, and what she believes is possible in life. Her beliefs and behaviors set the tone for how well we learn to care for ourselves as adults. We then pass this information either consciously or unconsciously on to the next generation.

Though I acknowledge that the culture at large plays a significant role in our views of ourselves as women, ultimately the beliefs and behavior of our individual mothers exert a far stronger influence. In most cases, she is the first to teach us the dictates of the larger culture. And if her beliefs are at odds with the dominant culture, our mother's influence almost always wins.

(See *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, Chapter One)

HOW CAN I CREATE ENERGETIC BREAST AND HEART HEALTH?

Dr. Northrup says:

A loving, nurturing mother tends to become the very center of her family's health and happiness. She is like the family umbilical cord that everyone taps into for sustenance at all levels: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. This nurturing role can be enormously fulfilling. It can also deteriorate into martyrdom if a mother gives her children and spouse the love and care she doesn't feel that she herself deserves.

The energy of giving and nurturing others unconditionally draws on all the organs of the fourth chakra, or energy center: the breasts, heart, lungs, upper spine, and shoulders. When a woman puts her own personal and emotional needs on the back burner, the energy of her fourth chakra becomes diminished by resentment, anger, grief, longing for contact, and pure fatigue. This is the energy pattern that invites breast, shoulder, heart, and lung problems. And diseases in those areas cause the majority of deaths and disabilities in women.

A woman who has the courage to break the martyrdom cycle will be ensuring her own health and helping her daughter to do the same. The only way to teach your daughter how to recognize and state her emotional needs is to do so yourself and when your daughter witnesses this, she will be less likely to carry the mother burden into her own life.

(See *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, Chapter One)

DOES A HURT CHILD NECESSARILY BECOME AN ILLNESS-PRONE ADULT?

Dr. Northrup says:

At least 80 percent of all autoimmune diseases such as lupus, Graves' disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis occur in females. Though these diseases are associated with multiple genetic, environmental, and nutritional factors, they all have one thing in common: their symptoms are caused because the immune system of the sufferer is attacking her own tissue. My clinical experience and a significant number of scientific studies suggest that the seeds of autoimmune illness are sown in childhood. One of the most common seeds is the belief that one is on some level unacceptable or unlovable. The immune system simply carries out that belief and attacks the body. A patient who had both Graves' disease and arthritis told me:

When I was little, my mother was abusive. She told me that if I cried, she'd give me something to cry about by beating me more. So I learned to dissociate from my body and my feelings. Now my mother no longer beats me. But my immune system does. When I get upset for any reason, I get a sore throat and back pain within twenty-four hours.

Through therapy and dietary change, my patient has been able to develop a far friendlier immune system. But the original pattern is there inside her because the immune system memory is very long. Reprogramming it takes time and patience.

(See *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, Chapter Nine)

CAN MY UNVOICED FEARS BE CONTRIBUTING TO ILL HEALTH?

Dr. Northrup says:

Encourage your child to talk about her feelings concerning stressful events in her life or about the things she is afraid of. This will bring emotions to the surface so they don't have to stay in the lungs. The mind-body connection in asthma and other immune system diseases has been well documented. One of my patients found that her daughter seemed to be more susceptible to asthma attacks whenever she was visiting her grandmother, a woman who was emotionally cold and distant. The little girl eventually told her mother that she was afraid of "Maw Maw." The connection made perfect sense because an emotional trigger such as fear or sadness will almost always exacerbate an environmental one such as cat dander. By allowing her daughter to express negative feelings about her grandmother, this mother provided a powerful "witness" function, thus helping validate her daughter's experience. Over time, her daughter's body, feeling more secure with her feelings about her grandmother, no longer had to get an asthma attack to express her fear.

(See *Mother-Daughter Wisdom*, Chapter Nine)