Every day is Mother’s Day for fans of *Live With Regis and Kelly*. That’s because Kelly Ripa—the prettier and perkier half of the popular morning talk show—regularly amuses her audience with hilarious tales of pregnancy, parenthood, and, yes, the occasional poop story. This is a woman who once famously joked, “I think children are like pancakes: You sort of ruin the first one, and you get better at it the second time around.” Ripa knows of what she speaks: She has three kids—Michael, 10; Lola, 6; and Joaquin, 4—with her husband, actor Mark Consuelos.

So what makes Ripa’s televised take on motherhood worth tuning in to, and not simply a broadcast version of swapping wallet-sized photos on PTA night? Unlike her predecessor, Kathie Lee Gifford, Ripa has managed to escape the cloying trap and win over devotees with her self-deprecating good humor and wise approach to the tricky trials of child rearing. In other words, this ain’t the Cody and Cassidy show by a long shot.

She’s definitely on to something. Being able to laugh—at your kids and yourself—is essential, says Steven Parker, MD, WebMD’s children’s health expert and a pediatrician who co-authored the 1998 edition of *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care* and wrote a textbook for pediatricians titled *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics: A Handbook for Primary Care*. “Children are born to give us a run for our money. Even tough situations we face with them can ultimately be very, very funny. So be ready to have a rueful, good sense of humor.”

Ripa, 37, is clearly on board. She recounts the time her eldest, Michael, screamed he was being kidnapped after Ripa told him it was time to leave a toy store. “He took everything I’d taught him about what to do in that kind of situation and used it against me,” she says with wry indignation. Or when Joaquin decided to play hide-and-seek...
under his bed—long after being tucked in—causing a four-alarm meltdown among his family members, who scoured the apartment as they called his name in vain. “The only thing left to do was to call 911,” says Ripa, but just as she reached for the phone, Mark discovered their son. “I was shaking, I was so relieved—and so angry, too! That kid!” Ripa laughs aloud now.

And then there is her daughter. According to Ripa’s mother, Esther Ripa, Lola is Kelly’s own very Mini Me. “Kelly was an old soul from the beginning, just full of her own opinions from a very young age, and always so chatty and mentally ahead, and Lola is exactly the same. . . . Girls love to press your buttons.”

“Lola challenges me,” Ripa agrees with affection. Which raises the question: Are there obvious differences between parenting her sons and daughter? “Oh, definitely,” she answers. “My sons are forever happy to see me, and my daughter Linda, reports Ripa—remained in a coma for nearly a month.” In this era of tech excess, Brodkin advises that Ripa and all parents maintain “the courage of their own convictions.” In other words, “Make sure you’re not succumbing to peer pressure from other parents who are giving their kids these things. . . . And remember: What feels right generally is right. Trust yourself if you want to say ‘no.’”

So what, according to Ripa, makes for a ‘good mom’? “I wish I had the answer. . . . I get advice from both my mother and mother-in-law all the time. But I think the most important thing is to remember to be a parent and not a friend. My kids know I’m not their BFF.”

“Basically, it’s my philosophy that doing the easy thing in the short term makes it harder for parents in the long run. Giving in when you want to say ‘no’ quiets things down momentarily, but you’ll just have more of the same—and then some—down the road,” says Ripa. “I’m big on letting my kids know exactly what I expect. I think children are consistency junkies; they need schedules and parameters, and it’s up to us to provide them. My kids understand that we love them no matter what—and they also know that ‘no’ means ‘no’.” Parker’s views are right in league with Ripa’s: “Kids need to know you’re there to direct them. It’s a mistake to indulge their every whim,” the child expert says. “And now kids are exposed at a younger age to more sophisticated issues. It’s so important to remember that they are doing and to discuss the pressures they’re up against. Take the Internet. Parents should never allow kids to surf the Net without supervision. Guide them and set limits. They won’t like it. But you wouldn’t allow a young child to walk down the street alone. We need to be equally critical when it comes to online safety.”

“Which is just one concern among many, now that Michael is in double digits and this close to pushing for more independence and privacy. Is Ripa ready for what’s also right around the corner—adolescent angst?” Michael’s only 10, so all that murky teen stuff hasn’t happened yet. . . . But we’ll just keep doing what we’re doing when it does.”

Maybe she’ll get lucky and have three teenagers like she once was. Esther Ripa reports that while her “bubbly, outgoing” daughter showed a normal degree of rebellion during those years back in the ‘barbs of New Jersey, she remained dutiful even when she was misbehaving. “Once, Kelly
Body after baby

Sure, Ripa is “ripped”—now. But she didn’t get there without working for it. Each of her three pregnancies slowly and safely. “It took me a year and a half after every baby to get back to normal,” she tells WebMD. “I didn’t stress about it. Weight is just a number, and I knew that if I ate well and exercised, eventually it would come off.” Geralyn Cooper Smith, an exercise physiologist and certified personal trainer in New York City, offers these postpartum tips for getting back in shape, after your doctor has given you the green light.

Start low-impact. Postpartum and breastfeeding women need to protect their joints, which show increased laxity from pregnancy hormones and are susceptible to injury. “Try walking, swimming, biking, or low-impact aerobics for at least 30 minutes, three to five days a week,” Cooper Smith advises. “Maintain an intensity level that leaves you breathless, but not panting.”

Weight it out. Strengthening muscles protects joints and supports the alignment of the spine, so lifting free weights is a good idea for postpartum and breastfeeding women. Cooper Smith says to “go for the highest weight you can handle where 12 reps is a challenge and form is not compromised. Do two to three sets of each weight exercise.”

Work the abs. Add planks, “bird dogs,” crunches with a twist, and pelvic tilts to stabilize the spine and tone the tummy. “You may never have the abs you once did,” says Cooper Smith, “but, remember, skin elasticity improves over time. If you’re willing to do the work, you can tone and tighten your midsection—and it can look great.”—LGP

Healthy Approach

Balancing it all without burning out requires skill—and planning: “Listen, I run my family like a cruise ship. ‘Shuffleboard at 5!’” Ripa jokes. Everybody knows exactly what’s happening, all the time. And my house is like the CDC—I’m all about containment. We keep things really clean, really neat. The rooms are hydrated with humidifiers. When Michael was first in school, I had pink eye six times that year. Now, it’s prevention, prevention, prevention. We do supplements, probiotics, you name it.”

A probiotic, for those not in the know, is a food or drink that contains healthy bacteria. Lactobacillus acidophilus, found in yogurt, is the best known; yeast is also a probiotic substance. “Parents may want to ‘consider the benefits of probiotics in the diet when it comes to their children, who may experience GI [gastrointestinal] ailments such as diarrhea that are tied to common childhood illnesses,’” says Kimberly Cover, RS, CNSD, LDN, a nutritionist at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. For example, says Cover, a daily cup of yogurt goes a long way in maintaining a healthy GI tract for your child—and it has many nutrients, including protein, calcium, and vitamin D, if the yogurt is fortified.

Foods that provide the body with multiple nutrients pack a powerful punch in our convenient, contemporary lifestyle—one that often doesn’t allow the luxury of time and optimum nutrition quality,” she adds.

Some people prefer taking supplements, which come in powder form and can be bought over-the-counter. “If you are considering taking a probiotic supplement, always check with your physician, especially if you are also taking [other] medications,” advises Cover, who adds, “Some research shows that taking probiotic supplements every day can actually have a harmful effect—so, as with any medication, follow your doctor’s suggested regimen carefully.”

Prevention, in all its forms, is a mantra among family physicians. “To avoid common infectious diseases, good hand-washing is key,” says Parker. “To prevent behavioral problems such as constant limit-testing and oppositional behavior, consistent and firm limit-setting will usually do the trick,” he adds.

“And to raise a physically fit child, healthy nutrition—including how much animal fat in the diet, not a lot of junk food, plenty of whole grains, fruits and veggies, plus plenty of exercise—sets the stage for becoming a healthy adult.”

Does Ripa have any health concerns of her own? None worth mentioning, although there is that pesky little sweating problem, which she playe for laughs on her morning show. It seems even size 2 über-moms get a little too damp under the arms, and Ripa sought a proven treatment for her hyperhidrosis: Botox.

“But I don’t rule out cosmetic Botox down the road. ‘People write that I’ve had it [injected in her face], which I take as a compliment, because I haven’t. Maybe for a milestone birthday. I don’t know. … Forty’s coming up fast! Because I make no judg- ments on anyone who decides to use it.”

By all appearances, it seems Ripa leads a balanced life, and she’d be the first to agree. “Sometimes Mark and I see these little faces around the breakfast table and we just look at each other and think, ‘How did we ever make something so beautiful? Our kids—well, they’re our hearts.’”

Connect with other moms this Mother’s Day and every day at www.WebMD.com.