



This is the *Health Matters* podcast.

### **How to Avoid the Superwoman Complex with C. Nicole Swiner, MD**

I'm your host Kimberley Payne and this is the show for women who want to improve their spiritual and physical health.



This week we're talking with Nicole Swiner, MD. Dr. Swiner is a family physician, wife and mother of 2 in North Carolina. She loves taking care of the family as a whole—from the cradle to the grave. Her interests include Minority Health, Women's Health and Pediatrics. For her undergraduate education, she attended Duke University and went to medical school at the Medical University of South Carolina, in Charleston, SC. She's lived in the Triangle since finishing residency at the University of North Carolina and continues teaching medical students and residents as an Adjunct Associate Professor with the university's Family Medicine department. When she's not treating patients at Durham Family Medicine, she's speaking in the community, writing, or spending time with her family. Her passion is making medicine "plain" to her patients, so that all people, from all walks of life, can understand how to take better care of themselves and their families. You can learn more about her at [www.drswiner.com](http://www.drswiner.com) Welcome Nicole.

#### **Nicole**

Hi, thank you so much for having me Kimberley.

#### **Kimberley**

Thanks for being on the show. Let's talk a little bit about the Superwoman Complex or the Superwoman Syndrome. Tell us a little bit more about it.

#### **Nicole**

In my research for the book and in dealing with patients like myself who are working moms or at home taking care of the family etc. I actually came across the term of the Superwoman Syndrome. And this, I think, was first popularized by a book that was under the same title by Marjorie Shaevitz back in the 1980s. This idea of the Superwoman goes way back. It came out of the notion of women going out into the workforce in the 1950s and 60s, just after the war, becoming a little bit more career oriented either by force or by choice and then a couple of decades later realizing that these women were carrying a lot of weight and burden on their shoulders. Not only now are they stepping outside of the household and holding down full-time jobs and making waves and moving up the ladder at work but then they still had to come home and do the usual conservative, typical ideas of a woman and a wife and mom. So they had to balance those two worlds and we realize that they weren't doing that great of a job. Some were dealing with, many were dealing with, the medical issues that came out of dealing with the amount of stress of having to deal with both worlds. The fact that we often feel that we have to be perfect in all realms ends up damaging us in multiple ways.

**Kimberley**

Yes, when it comes to damaging us in multiple ways, what kind of problems can come from this?

**Nicole**

A whole slew of things. I first want to say that it's not all society's fault. A lot of these burdens come from ourselves. Because we saw our moms and our grandmothers and aunts initially look like they could handle it all we kind of adopted that for ourselves. We thought if they can do it I can do it too. I can work or I can be a stay-at-home mom and also do all of these other things and carry these other titles and be in organizations, be a soccer mom, and PTA president I'll be happy just handling those things and signing up for it. But if you become overwhelmed with those things your body will soon tell you. Whether it's because of your blood pressure starting to rise or not being able to sleep as well at night—which then has its own amount of medical issues that come out of that whether it be weight gain and with weight gain comes diabetes and heart disease and all that—all these things can be interrelated. It comes from doing too much.

**Kimberley**

That's a common problem. So what can we do differently and how do we fix it?

**Nicole**

Well first of all we have to recognize that we are overwhelmed. Some of us, God bless, do a wonderful job wearing all these hats and look beautiful doing it and are perfectly happy. I don't want to say that all women who are involved in their community, and work, and take care of their lives at home are miserable. I want to put that disclaimer in. However, for those that become overwhelmed and stressed out and may not understand why, we all at different points of our life need to stop and take an assessment of things. Hey, I feel like I'm doing well. Am I moving in the right direction in my career? Am I working too little, working too much? Am I seeing enough of my family? Are they well—physically and emotionally? And really take an account of the different areas of life that are important to you and figure out, okay, let me prioritize. I know that number one is God and church, number two is my family,

and number three is work. I want to make sure that all those things are in alignment and in one accord and I'm the happiest that I can be, you know, realistically. That's the first step, taking an assessment.

After you take that assessment then you need to put your words into action. You say, "Maybe this year my son doesn't have to be in three or four extra-curricular activities." Because not only does that stress us out with having to move our schedules around to take him to multiple places during the week, and then he's tired and we're tired, and we're not getting good quality time as a family. So maybe you can pare it down to one or two activities or not sign up for so many things that you have to show up for all the time. Pick out those things that are important and then actually stop spreading yourself so thin. So those are the two hardest things to do in the process and probably the most important.

### **Kimberley**

I remember when my kids were younger. I decided that we wouldn't do any outside of school extra-curricular activities except for in the summer. That really freed us up in the fall and winter and spring months where you're just busy with school and activities that are going on at school to begin with. So we focussed on summer because you have those full two months to fill for the kids if they wanted to do soccer or some kind of camp or arts. I found that really liberating because not only did the kids still get all the activities that they enjoyed, it filled up the summer time so that they weren't terribly bored all the time, and it freed up the other seasons so that we weren't stretched so thin.

### **Nicole**

That's good, very good. Now how did you come to that decision? Were you doing it a different way and figured out wait a minute this is too much? Or were you smart enough to say from the beginning that nope this is how we're going to do it and that's how it was?

### **Kimberley**

No, it got too much. It just got to that point where you think, this is crazy. And we live in the country so it's a 20-minute drive just to get into the city so that alone was a deterrent to do all these activities. And in the evenings, we still found lots of things to do that we could do together as a family. And I really enjoyed that too, having more emphasis on just the family unit. We would play basketball outside or we would do some board games or watch a movie together or whatever. There was more of that too. We weren't split all the time with one person going here and the other there. Personally as a mom I really enjoyed that.

Now you wrote the book, *How to Avoid the Superwoman Complex*. Tell us a little bit about that.

### **Nicole**

The book kind of came out of, born out of a labour of love, and necessity. As you mentioned in my bio I came out of residency in 2007 and started working in a hospital owned practice at that time but soon became a private practice. I was going along and doing pretty well and enjoying my “real” life as I was finished with school. Because I’m a family doctor, I take care of everyone—from babies fresh out of the hospital all the way up to 99.9 years old—and with that I saw a lot of young families and seemed to kind of gain a niche for working moms and/or young moms taking care of their families. At the same time I was becoming a wife and a mother and learning some things as I went along. I could relate a lot to my patients. That was one part of it.

The other part of it was in an effort to broaden my patient panel I started writing these medical articles for the community for a local newspaper called the Triangle Tribune and over the years I noticed that I kind of had a theme of stress and stress-related type medical issues. So that along with it I could probably put some of these things together and broaden my audience and reach a larger population by sharing some of the things that I learned as a young working mom, and learned in treating my patients. So in 2014 I said I’m just going to do it. I’ve written a lot of stuff, I’m going to put it together and bring it up to Chapters and March 2015 I was blessed with it being able to become a reality.

### **Kimberley**

That’s fantastic. We’ll definitely have a link to your book on the website.

Now, we’re going to move on to the BEEP round. Nicole will give quick tips on the four disciplines of Bible study, eating healthy, exercise, and prayer or BEEP. So what do you have for us for a quick tip for Bible study?

### **Nicole**

For Bible study, of course in our busy lives we all need to make sure that we leave time for worship, praising and worshipping God. My favourite scripture has always been Hebrews 11:1 about faith being the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Just because faith is so important in every day living. Either pick that scripture that you kind of meditate on, it’s kind of your mantra or every day, every week make some time for studying the Word so that it keeps you anchored, it keeps you positive.

### **Kimberley**

What is your quick tip for eating healthy?

### **Nicole**

Eat more sensibly. We all have a pretty good understanding of what’s good food and what’s bad food and usually it’s the bad food that tastes the best. So enjoy life, enjoy food but be sensible. Having dessert every single night is probably not the best thing to do. You need to make sure that you’re eating very well as you can during the week but during the weekend you can treat yourself and have that dessert, have that thing that you love but in moderation is always good.

**Kimberley**

And your quick tip for exercise?

**Nicole**

Good regular exercise, defined as two to three times per week for at least 30 minutes at a time, is not only good for clearly weight loss and maintaining weight but even if you don't lose an inch or lose a pound (which can be pretty discouraging for most women), even if you don't lose any of that just think of the other positives that are coming out of it. Good feeling endorphins, adrenalin, you feel better, your mood is better, your heart is working, lowering your sugar, lowering your blood pressure. Even if you don't lose any weight remember that there are other good positive things to come out of regular exercise.

**Kimberley**

Excellent. And your quick tip for prayer?

**Nicole**

Do it often. That's pretty quick. Every morning—even before I pick up the phone, get on the social media or look what's happening on the news—I try to say my quick Lord's prayer just to remind me to be thankful, to be mindful, to stay focussed for the rest of the day. And try to keep things in perspective. So do it as often as you can, usually first thing in the morning to start your day off right.

**Kimberley**

That's great. Now I understand that you have a gift for our listeners. Can you tell us about that?

**Nicole**

What I'm offering is for the first three people that go to any of my social media venues; my Facebook page with the title of my book, I have a Twitter page under DocSwiner, and I have Instagram under Mrs Swiner. The first three folks who've listened in can go in and put a comment about the show or make some indication that they've listened to the show or #HealthMattersPodcast or #HTSC for the book, I will give free copies of the book and also a free t-shirt. My husband, who is very wonderful in many ways, but he also has a t-shirt company called CodeSwitchgear.com made a Superwoman Tee inspired by the book. So I'm going to give away a book and a free t-shirt for the first three listeners to post that.

**Kimberley**

Wow, can you tell us again your link for Facebook?

**Nicole**

Yes, on Facebook not only do I have a page under my name but specifically for the book, titled How to Avoid the Superwoman Complex. On Twitter it's DocSwiner. Instagram is Mrs Swiner.

### **Kimberley**

That's a great gift. Thanks again to Nicole Swiner for her expert advice and thank you for joining us today.

This interview has been brought to you by [Fit for Faith—a 7 week program to improve spiritual & physical health](#). You can discover more about this book and other health programs at [www.kimberleypayne.com](http://www.kimberleypayne.com).

If you liked this episode please help spread the word by leaving a rating and review on iTunes.

This has been the Health Matters Podcast, believing that prayer & Bible study are to the spirit what exercise and healthy eating are to the body.

Blessings on your journey to health.

### About Kimberley Payne

Kimberley Payne is the host of the *Health Matters – Healthy Spirit Healthy Body* podcast. She is author of *Fit for Faith – a 7-week program to improve spiritual and physical health* and is a motivational speaker offering workshops and online courses based on her book. She hopes to inspire women to live happier, healthier lives that glorify God. She is happily married and lives with her husband in a village east of Toronto, Canada where she hikes and bikes. Visit her website at [www.kimberleypayne.com](http://www.kimberleypayne.com)

