



BACK HOME

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The gangrene hour. It happens everyday at our house. It's somewhere between six and seven o'clock. It's that bumpy stretch between bedlan and bedtime. It's the end of a work day, the end of a day at the babysitter, the end of a day of discovery, and the daily family reunion is about to take place.

"I'm home!" I exclaim as I make my way from the garage to the kitchen. Once there I'm greeted with the beaming face of a 9-month-old that brightens even a day that has seemed like a week long. However, one never knows what will come after the smile. It may be arms reaching out seeking to be cuddled, a mischevous glance that says watch me explore, or a demanding cry that means feed me. Multiply this by the needs

of a husband who also just got home and the family dog who has been waiting at home for us all day!

So it begins. The gangrene hour. A mother of three coined the term for this time period. She describes the gangrene hour as the time of day when things begin to rot. Parents are tired, kids are tired, and nothing is the way you want it to be. This is because expectations for this time of day are usually unrealistic. For example, it's been a stressful day of work and all you want to do is come home, kick off your shoes, slip into some comfy sweats, and sip some cool tea. But it doesn't usually work out so peacefully. There are dinners and snacks to serve, stories to absorb, games to play, and evening meetings for which to get ready. Moods

seem to be very fragile by this time of day.

Child-care professionals explain that one reason that this time of day hits us so hard is that everybody needs to take 15 or 20 minutes to shift gears from work to homelife. However, with small children around, the gears tend to jam instead of shift. There is no quiet house to slip into and no easy way to make the transition. When you walk in the door, you walk into the reality of homelife at this hour. And if you've been home all day, you may be in full swing of the gangrene hours already!

Here are some first-aid treatments to make this desperately needed family time a healthy, happy time. First, find a way to clear your head at the end of the day, before you see your kids. This might mean staying a few minutes later to clear up details or maybe you just need some music of your choice to listen to as you drive home. If you've been at home all day, when you spouse returns, take a few minutes for a shower or brisk walk around the neighborhood.

Secondly, hunger is usually one

of the causes of the gangrene hour. Although you don't want to spoil appetites, healthy snacks such as apple slices, carrot sticks, peanut butter crackers or raisins may keep everyone on an even keel until you can get dinner ready.

Try eliminating distractions that may be causing chaos. The television may be the main one at this time of day. It's just too difficult to hear about everybody's day, get a handle on the evening schedule and listen to Dan Rather all at the same time. For many families, there is only a two to three hour block of time that is available to be together. Don't clutter it with distractions that eliminate the opportunity to share and play together.

Create an evening routine as much as possible. While this does not need to follow a rigid time schedule, a little predictability at this time of day helps everyone. You might want to include everyone in the meal preparation. Take time during dinner to hear from everyone. Find out what was the worst thing and the best thing about your day. This might work better than the typical, "How was

your day?"

Pick out one of two of these suggestions and try it with your family. Perhaps just a more realistic perception of these after work hours is needed.

Finally, after the kids are in bed, find time to share with your spouse. After all, you need time to savor all the ridiculous, crazy, maddening things that your beautiful children did during the gangrene hour.

Need dessert in a hurry? Try these:

- Alternate layers of coffee ice cream, crushed chocolate sandwich cookies and toasted chopped pecans in parfait glasses. Keep in freezer until needed.

- Top sliced, purchased pound cake with fresh or canned peach slices and frozen raspberry yogurt.

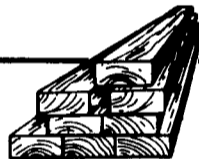
- Spoon sweetened fresh fruit over split homemade or purchased baking powder biscuits; top with vanilla ice cream and more fruit.

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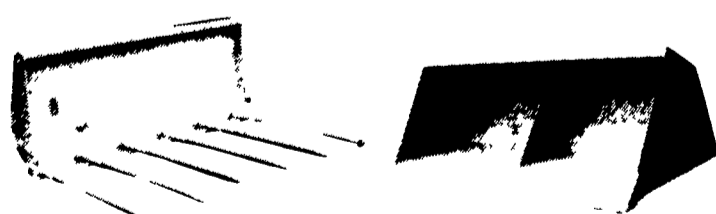
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