

MODERN LUXURY Datebook

CHARITY
& SOCIAL
ATLANTA 2025

JOURNEY
to a CURE

Your Guide to Atlanta's
Charitable & Social Scene

ABOUT THE COVER

Mitzi Solomon is paving the way for future generations.

by VANESSA PASCALE

photographed by SARA HANNA

Marc Bouwer gown,
marcbouwer.com; Solomon
Brothers Jewelers jewelry,
solomonbrothers.com.



Mitzi Solomon, founder/president of nonprofit organization Countdown For A Cure, wife and mother of four, is on a very important mission: to get to the root cause of conditions and diseases like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, ALS, autism spectrum disorder, cardiomyopathy, mitochondrial disease, diabetes, mental health, cancer, and more. She has found that looking at them through a mitochondrial lens could be our best chance at finding a cure.

It seems that discussions focusing on mitochondrial research have only recently made their way into mainstream media. Why isn't this topic receiving more attention? Enter Mitzi Solomon, a petite powerhouse who is raising awareness and funds (last year, she raised \$524,000!) for mitochondrial research.

I had the honor of speaking with Mitzi one Sunday afternoon, where she discussed her crusade to assemble the right team—doctors, scientists, sponsors, board members, dedicated volunteers—to tackle a monumental challenge. Her mission? To treat and ultimately find cures for an array of conditions and diseases linked by a common thread: mitochondrial dysfunction. From epilepsy and multiple sclerosis to NF1, fibromyalgia, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, aging, and more, Mitzi's work spans a broad and impactful spectrum, driven by an unyielding commitment to improving lives.

After Mitzi and her family experienced many debilitating health issues, she made it her mission to get to the root cause and vowed to her husband that once she got better, they would start a charity dedicated to mitochondrial research.

When I met Mitzi, she was bright and bubbly as she spoke passionately about the work she is doing with Countdown For A Cure; you would never suspect that she is suffering from health issues or in pain from “an invisible disease.”

“I'm very good at not letting many people know how I am truly feeling, even my closest friends, as I do not want to impart my issues on anyone,” she says. “I have worked hard on perfecting my tolerance for pain. I'm a very determined individual, and I have a lot of grit.” This is a testament to her incessant drive and passion for this project and life in general. Her tireless work and tenacity to help others, especially future generations, is honorable and worthy of being highlighted, which is why she was chosen to be this issue's cover star. What Mitzi is doing is so important and will undoubtedly change the world for the better.

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PATRON PROFILE

Mitzi Solomon's Honorable Journey to Find a Cure

by VANESSA PASCALE

Photography by SARA HANNA

Mitzi Solomon, wife and mother of four, is on an important mission: to get to the root cause of conditions and diseases like cardiomyopathy, neurodegenerative disorders, mitochondrial disease, autism spectrum disorder... and mitochondrial research is the way.

Mitzi and her husband, Jeff, founded Countdown For A Cure, a nonprofit dedicated to accelerating mitochondrial research to advance the field of mitochondrial medicine to improve lives affected by mitochondrial dysfunction.

All her life, Mitzi battled health challenges that included persistent pain in her legs, hips, back, hands, and neck. They started in childhood and were dismissed as growing pains but never went away. Her body would unexpectedly give out from exhaustion, leaving her drained and needing days to recover fully. Countless doctor visits would not determine why, though theories ranged from exhaustion and muscle weakness to anxiety or depression. Deep down, Mitzi knew those were not the root causes; rather, something deeper was going on.

As an adult, Mitzi noticed a pattern—her kids were having health problems, too, and they seemed to get worse with each one. “Each of my kids dealt with something early on—tonsils, adenoids, tubes, laryngomalacia, aspiration, low muscle tone. Yet, nothing about it felt routine; everything felt like an emergency. Our home away from home became Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta.”

Her health issues continued. Mitzi suffered a stroke just 45 minutes after giving birth to her third son. Then, her daughter (fourth child) was born unable to breathe



Mitzi Solomon with her husband and four kids

‘Knowledge from research funded by charities like Countdown For A Cure will enable us to harness the full potential of mitochondria for a life brimming with energy and health.’

—DR. ROBERT LUFKIN, NYT BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LIES I TAUGHT IN MEDICAL SCHOOL*

due to silent aspiration and laryngomalacia, leading to a whirlwind of hospital visits, trips to out-of-state specialists, many surgeries, and numerous stays in the PICU. Her daughter was put on a feeding tube; doctors warned it could be years before she’d come off it. “I refused to accept that. We got her off the feeding tube in a year,” says Mitzi, who was in fight-or-flight mode and running on adrenaline the entire time.

When the adrenaline wore off, her health began to unravel. “I broke out in hives that didn’t go away for a year, suffered from

hair loss, and dropped to 85 pounds. My legs would arbitrarily fail me at times. I had bad tremors. Then, my body just shut down.” After consulting numerous doctors and undergoing genetic testing, Mitzi was diagnosed with a number of conditions, including Celiac disease, Mast cell activation syndrome, Dysautonomia, an unspecified mitochondrial disorder, and being on the spectrum for Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. All of this happened just as the COVID-19 pandemic began, adding another layer of chaos to her journey.

“Years ago, my geneticist, the brilliant

Dr. Fran Kendall, told me something that changed my perspective, “Mitzi, it’s not about mortality, it’s about morbidity. You don’t need to worry about dying, but you do need to focus on your quality of life.” At that moment, Mitzi knew she had to take matters into her own hands and become her own health advocate and detective. She told her husband, “As soon as I get better, and I will, we need to start a charity to get to the root cause of these conditions and diseases. Everything is connected; nothing is coincidence.”

Mitzi started researching and reaching out to scientists. She realized that a major challenge today is that many conditions are treated in isolation without addressing their root causes, particularly the pivotal role mitochondria play in the body. Dr. Debra MacIntyre of Vitality Project, Mitzi’s naturopathic doctor, shares, “When I look at taking a person through a healing process, it always has to start with mitochondrial function. If that is low, your cells cannot function properly, and your healing process will be compromised.”

“Our mitochondria are the most fundamental aspect of being alive, the key to aging, and the root of many diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and cardiovascular disease,” says Douglas C. Wallace, PhD Director of the Center for Mitochondrial and Epigenomic Medicine at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

Natalie Yivgi Ohana, PhD Co-Founder and CEO of Minovia Therapeutics, shares, “Every heartbeat. Every brilliant idea. Every muscle movement. Whenever you sing, dance, run, laugh, eat... all those trivial activities require energy. More than 90% of the energy demands are produced by the mitochondria. Whenever mitochondria are damaged or become dysfunctional, those trivial activities are no longer trivial, and diseases are formed, from rare, deadly genetic diseases to heart failure and diabetes to drug-induced mitochondrial toxicities, even aging. Aging is mitochondrial dysfunction... The key is to support our mitochondria: not do things that destroy them.”

Mitzi points to environmental toxins and contaminants, oxidative stress, processed foods, and modern lifestyles as contributors to the problem. “Our mitochondria were never designed for the environment we live in today. It’s no wonder so many people are getting sick.” Thankfully, awareness is growing. “Mitochondrial health is finally becoming a hot topic. From longevity supplements

Hemant & Nandita dress, hemantandnandita.com; Diamonds By Drish Hope necklace (all proceeds go towards Countdown For A Cure), diamondsbydrish.com; L.A. Stein earrings, lastein.com; Solomon Brothers Jewelers ring, solomonbrothers.com.



to improve cellular health, to cold plunges, infrared saunas and red light therapy, it is great to see that everyone is starting to talk about mitochondria and the web of connectivity.”

Through her nonprofit, Mitzi is cultivating a mitochondrial community dedicated to collaboration, advancing the future of mitochondrial medicine, and increasing awareness of the importance of mitochondrial health. “In recent years, I have become especially aware of mitochondria and the importance of it,” says wellness practitioner, Stacey Leebern. “While I always thought about the root cause of disease, the acknowledgment of mitochondria and the role it plays has become forefront. I am fascinated to see where the new research takes us. Organizations like Countdown For A Cure are instrumental in bringing awareness to this important topic.”

Mitzi shares, “When we understand how important mitochondria are for our health, it is very surprising to realize that there are no diagnostics for mitochondrial dysfunction and no approved treatments for these devastating conditions. We aim to drive the development of mitochondrial therapies; there is so much to learn from the extraordinary communication abilities of mitochondria.” NYT Bestselling Author Dr. Robert Lufkin adds, “Knowledge from research funded by charities like Countdown For A Cure will enable us to harness the full potential of mitochondria for a life brimming with energy and health. These microscopic powerhouses fuel every aspect of our well-being and enhance the body’s ability to combat aging and disease.”

Currently, several technologies are under development in the mitochondrial space to combat a multitude of conditions and diseases, including novel mitochondrial transplantation treatments: healthy, young, and functional mitochondria are produced and cryopreserved for future medical use in mitochondrial diseases and common diseases. “Mitochondrial transplantation will be a game-changer,” Mitzi says. “Imagine restoring cellular energy production in treating diseases—or even addressing the effects of aging—by replacing damaged mitochondria with healthy ones.” Mitzi believes that it will be as simple as an infusion in the coming years and that a bank of young and healthy mitochondria for anti-aging therapies will be offered.

Countdown For A Cure recently funded a groundbreaking project led by Dr. Anupam Patgiri at The Patgiri Lab at Emory University. The lab is developing innovative strategies to restore mitochondrial and metabolic

The Web of Connectivity Diagram by Countdown For A Cure illustrates Mitochondrial Dysfunction as a central underlying element of many common conditions and diseases.



homeostasis in diseases, paving the way for potential therapies. "Countdown for a Cure is about protecting the health of future generations," says Mitzi. "As mitochondrial research gains momentum, people will look back and recognize its profound global impact in just five to 10 years. That's why I remain deeply committed to this cause."

Balancing illness, a nonprofit, and family life is no small feat, but Mitzi is grateful for the support of her husband, parents, and friends. Her husband goes above and beyond, helping with everything from carpools and cooking to cutting her food when her hands fail her—all to help conserve her energy throughout the day. "He helps me up the stairs when my legs give out. His support means everything, and I never take him for granted."

"Advancing research in mitochondria offers profound hope for transforming mental health care, and organizations like Countdown For a Cure are crucial in driving these efforts forward."

—DR. CHRISTOPHER M. PALMER, HARVARD PSYCHIATRIST, RESEARCHER AND AUTHOR OF *BRAIN ENERGY*

Her kids also step up to safeguard her energy. "They're always telling me, 'Please rest, Mommy,' and take care of things like clearing plates, taking the dogs out... They're incredibly empathetic." Mitzi loves supporting her kids' school and sports activities. "My favorite thing is cheering them on at tennis matches, basketball and baseball games, golf tournaments, and school events." She cherishes family dinners, movie and game nights, and vacations. "Family time is sacred." "I'm definitely spread thin, but it's worth it because my three passions in life are my husband, my kids, and this charity."

EVENING OF ENERGY 2025

On February 8th, 2025, Countdown For A Cure will host its second black-tie gala, Evening of Energy 2025, at the St. Regis Atlanta. All proceeds will go directly to supporting life-changing mitochondrial research. The event will include a cocktail reception, dinner, an informative program, raffle, a silent and live auction, and an afterparty featuring DJ Babey Drew.

"We're expecting 400 guests, a mix of individuals from the Atlanta community and beyond, including scientists, doctors, celebrities, and many supporters of our cause," notes Mitzi. "Our event is brilliantly led by Dr. Michael Gottschalk, an Emory orthopedic surgeon, and his wife, Kimberly. Auction Chairs Heather Lourie and Lauren Schwartz, along with their committee—Barbie Bregen, Ashley Cohen, Jenni Nowak, and Laura Zuckman—are doing an incredible job. Sponsor Chairs Ali Eisner and Melissa Sannes, with help from Dr. Heather Gatcombe, have been phenomenal. Their friendship, dedication, and extraordinary efforts make this gala possible."

Award-winning actress Dania Ramirez will host the evening. "Dania is one of my dearest friends," Mitzi shares. "She became involved not only because of our friendship but also because her father is battling Parkinson's disease. She strongly believes in CFAC's mission and hopes the research will help her father and pave the

way for future generations."

Last year's sold-out event raised \$524,000; they hope to surpass that amount this year. "The very reason we breathe oxygen is because of our mitochondria; they are what keep us alive... As we age, and especially when we're sick, our mitochondria work tirelessly, fighting alongside us to catch our breath. For years, researchers in mitochondrial biology have been waiting for the rest of the world to recognize their importance. While progress is being made, the marathon to uncover its full potential continues, particularly in the contexts of chronic diseases and aging. It's inspiring to see Mitzi and Countdown For A Cure in the lead pack of the race," says Colwyn Headley, PhD. "The future of health lies in looking through a mitochondrial lens. So many exciting things are about to unfold. It's amazing to be part of it," says Mitzi.

"Intriguingly, mitochondria are influenced by a range of biological, psychological, and social factors," says Dr. Chris Palmer, Harvard psychiatrist and researcher. "When they falter, the brain can suffer, leading to symptoms of mental illness. Advancing research in this area offers profound hope for transforming mental health care, and organizations like Countdown For A Cure are crucial in driving these efforts forward."