

Information leaflet

Why it's important to stay healthy

While it is true that looking after others may be rewarding, no matter how much we love and want the best for them being a carer is far from easy.

Taking on the responsibility of someone else's child can impact upon your physical and mental health and it can be hard to find time to do things you enjoy and that make you happy. Being irritated and resenting those who rely on us are natural responses.

Maintaining good health is important for special guardians. You will feel that all your attention needs to be on your child but finding ways to look after yourself and ensuring your health is good is important as it will allow you to provide the best care to your child.

Why pay attention to food and nutrition

Caring for children requires stamina, yet when time is short it can be tempting to rely on convenience foods. These may provide a short-term boost but there is plenty of evidence about the long-term damage they can do.

If we rely too much on these products we forget the pleasures of enjoying seasonal fruits and vegetables. There is also great satisfaction in making a meal from scratch and cooking is a great bonding activity you can do with your child.

It is easy to forget about the social value of cooking and eating together. Sitting around a table in the morning or evening with your family provides valuable moments to catch up, share stories from the day and wind down.

It's also important to remember that your child might not have positive emotions around food so introducing them to the joys of cooking and eating together as well as the practicalities of making meals are skills they can take into a healthy adulthood.

Why exercise?

Introducing regular exercise into your routine can make all the difference to your physical health and wellbeing. Try and find an activity you enjoy, it could be dancing, swimming or going to the gym.

Walking is a great activity and has the added benefits of being outside in the fresh air. If you take more interest and effort to exercise you will notice the difference it can make to how you move and feel.

Finding an activity that you can do with other carers or groups can provide you with motivation. You could also find an activity to do as a family. If your child is more likely to take an interest in their health if they see you are being active.

Staying calm

It can be a challenge to manage the worries and stress of your caring role but you should try and find relaxation strategies that can help you wind-down and relax. These strategies will help you cope during your most difficult times.

It may be that you can re-discover a hobby or find a new one or it could be a simple activity like reading a book or listening to music. Some carers find meditation or yoga can help them to find a balance and de-stress. Some agencies and local authorities now provide regular yoga classes for carers. They give you the chance to relax and meet others in a similar situation.

Whatever you do, remember that taking a moment for yourself is never selfish. In fact it is essential to keep going and providing the good quality care your child needs. Growing up in a calm household where the adults show them how to manage their emotions is the very best start you can give them.

Practical tips

- Think about your first drink of the day and try a reviving herbal or fruit tea.
- Try and eat food that is in season. Go to fruit and vegetable markets and look at what's available. Find out about the different produce and how to use it in your cooking.
- You could experiment and introduce new flavours through herbs and spices from different countries and regions that you and your children have not tried before.
- Think about growing produce in your garden if you have one. There is nothing more satisfying than making a dish using fruit and vegetables you have grown yourself. If space is an issue, even a tub or window box can be used to grow herbs like rosemary or mint that can be used in the meals you make. Children can really enjoy being involved in watering and weeding – and watching things grow.
- Try to cut down on the artificial stimulants found in coffee, tea, sugary drinks or alcohol. If you or your child finds this difficult try and cut down gradually over time. You may want to aim for just one cup of coffee or alcoholic drink each day.
- As a family try to eat more fresh food and avoid the processed or convenience options. Begin to listen to your body, and notice what makes you feel good and what gives you energy.

Key points

- While it is true that looking after others may be rewarding, no matter how much we love and want the best for them being a carer is far from easy.
- There is also great satisfaction in making a meal from scratch and cooking is a great bonding activity you can do with your child.
- Introducing regular exercise into your routine can make all the difference to your physical health and wellbeing. Try and find an activity you enjoy, it could be dancing, swimming or going to the gym.
- Whatever you do, remember that taking a moment for yourself is never selfish. In fact it is essential to keep going and providing the good quality care your child needs



Useful organisations

Action for Happiness

www.actionforhappiness.org

Action for Happiness is a movement for positive social change. Its website lists practical ways to increase your wellbeing.

Mental Health Foundation

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation has lots of useful information about mental health and offer free podcasts on wellbeing and managing stress.

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

Infoline: 0300 123 3393

Mind offers a 'Mental Health A-Z' and tips about how to deal with stress and relaxation techniques.

Useful reading

Caring with Vitality by Andrea Warman and Liz Clark. Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016.

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