

Information leaflet

Why it is important for special guardians to stay healthy

Taking on the responsibility of someone else's child can impact upon a person's physical and mental health and wellbeing and it can be hard for them as a result to find time to do things they enjoy and that make them happy.

Maintaining good health is important for special guardians. Carers will feel that all their attention needs to be on the child but finding ways that they can look after themselves and ensure that their health is good is important as it will allow them to provide the best care to their child.

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 or save time but there is plenty of evidence about the long-term damage they can do if used too much.

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 special guardians can do with their child.

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

It is also important for special guardians to remember that their 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.

Exercise

Introducing regular exercise into a routine can make all the difference to someone's physical health and wellbeing. Encourage special guardians to find an activity they 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 special guardians take more interest and effort to exercise they will notice the difference it can make to how they move and feel.

Finding an activity that special guardians can do with other carers or groups can provide them with motivation. They could also try and find an activity they can do as a family.

Staying calm

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

It may be that they 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.

Practical tips to share with special guardians

- Special guardians could experiment and introduce new flavours through herbs and spices from different countries and regions that they and their children have never tried.
- They could try and grow produce in their garden if they have one. 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 meals. Children can really enjoy being involved in watering and weeding – and watching things grow.
- Encourage special guardians to try to cut down on the artificial stimulants found in coffee, tea, sugary drinks or alcohol. If they and their child find this difficult they can try and cut down gradually over time.

Key points

- While it is true that looking after others may be rewarding, no matter how much a carer loves and wants the best for their child being a carer is far from easy.
- Introducing regular exercise into a routine can make all the difference to a carer's physical health and wellbeing. Encourage them to find an activity they enjoy, it could be dancing, swimming or going to the gym.
- It is important for special guardians to remember that taking a moment for themselves is never selfish. In fact it is essential for them to keep going and provide the good quality care their child needs.



Useful links

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 offers free podcasts on wellbeing and managing stress.

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

Infoline: 03001233393

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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