

Parenting can be stressful and overwhelming, especially when your child has a diagnosed condition. After a diagnosis, there is significant emotional impact on the family<sup>1,2</sup>. Many positive strategies have helped parents cope after their child's diagnosis, including self-care and professional support<sup>2</sup>.

While it's natural to want to focus all of your energy on your child and their needs at this time, it's important not to neglect your own health and wellbeing. Remember to take care of yourself, too.

### What is self-care, and why is it important?

Self-care refers to anything that we do to help support our own health and wellbeing; recharging so you don't get too tired, stressed or burnt out. The idea of self-care is simple yet can be easily forgotten, especially after your child's diagnosis. While your own needs are probably the last thing on your mind during this time<sup>2</sup>, self-care is important because when you take care of yourself you will be better able to care for your child. You will also be better able to enjoy their company.

There are many ways that you can engage in self-care – there is no right or wrong way, it's all about what works for you. Self-care is different for everybody and will be based on your interests, the things that you enjoy and what makes you feel good. While some people might like mindfulness or meditation, others will prefer writing in a journal or listening to music. Self-care can be as simple as enjoying the afternoon sun, making time for a cup of tea or checking your social media.

### One parent described the importance of self-care:

*"Having time off parenting has been really important. I get two days off a week. They're just school days but that's been really important. So I've got time to recharge. I do one or two things that make me feel good about myself: swimming, and I do some yoga as well."*<sup>1</sup>

### Things that will help

#### Make time

If you don't make self-care a priority, it will always fall to the bottom of your 'to do' list. Research suggests that people list a lack of time as the biggest reason for not engaging in self-care<sup>3</sup>. While it's understandable that you may not have the time for dinner out with friends or weekends away, it is possible to take a few minutes each day to stop what you're doing and take some time for yourself.



### **Practice**

You can start the process of using self-care by finding small ways to incorporate it into your everyday routine, even if it is just 5 minutes. It's about making small efforts, and the more you practice self-care, the more it will become a part of your routine.

### **Know that self-care is not selfish**

Self-care is all about taking care of yourself – this is not selfish, it's necessary! You may be able to ignore your needs in the short term, but it's not sustainable in the long term<sup>4</sup>. You can't help and support your child and family if you are constantly stressed, tired and burnt out. Don't feel guilty about doing things that you enjoy or make you feel good.

### **Be kind to yourself**

Parenting a child with a diagnosed condition can be hard work, and you are doing the best you can. You will likely have days where it all seems too hard and you may feel like everything is falling apart, or you are not doing a good enough job. Be kind to yourself in these moments. It might help to think about what you would tell a friend who is feeling the same way.

## Self-Evaluation

What are some things you enjoy doing? What things did you like to do before your child was diagnosed?

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What are some things you can say 'no' to, so that you can say 'yes' to self-care?

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How could you incorporate self-care into your everyday, even if it's only in a small way?

Write some ideas down and then give them a try!

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## References

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