



Knowing Your Limits: Assessing Fatigue for Parents of Special Needs Kids

This guest article was provided by Gwen Payne of [InvisibleMoms.com](https://invisiblemoms.com).

As a parent of special needs children, it's important to be aware of your levels of fatigue. Knowing your limits is key to preventing burnout and creating a treatment plan that will maintain and benefit your mental/physical wellbeing in the long term. In the following article, we'll discuss a few things to keep an eye on.

Sleep Quality

[Sleep quality](#) pertains to the amount of 'restful' or 'restorative' sleep you have experienced. This is less to do with quantity and instead other factors such as sleep latency (how long it takes you to doze off), sleep-waking (disruptions to your sleep cycle during the night), wakefulness (minutes spent awake during the night after you go to sleep) and efficiency (relating to the time

actually spent sleeping whilst in bed). Tracking these variables is made easier with [a Fitbit](#) and smartwatches, which can measure your heart patterns to determine an ultimate sleep quality rating.

You should also seek to track the sleep quality of your child. Doing so can help you to determine causes for disruptive behaviour and strategise to help improve these moving forward. If you're concerned that your or your child's sleep quality is of too low a standard, you can try lowering light exposure (such as with blackout curtains to block street lights) or monitoring temperature.

Physical Activity

Exercise is crucial for informing mood, thought patterns, and, of course, physical wellbeing. As a parent of special needs children, you may find yourself short on energy and this can lead to reduced physical exertion. This is something you may want to address, however, as going for a jog or lifting weights may be exhausting in the short term but ultimately leads to long-term [increases](#) in energy levels via improved cardiovascular health and the release of endorphins. If you're out of practice, start with light exercises, yoga, or pilates, and work your way up to more strenuous activities.

It's also important to ensure that your [living space](#) is conducive to good mental health. This might mean decluttering, introducing plants, or even moving furniture. You might find that a rearrangement helps facilitate your new exercise regime.

Social Support

Amongst the most important factors when it comes to maintaining mental health whilst caring for a special needs child is a healthy social support network. Experts tend to identify [four](#) support sub-groups - emotional support, practical help, sharing points of view, and sharing information. Depending on the conditions of your routine, you may need any one of these at any time. If you don't already have the right people around you, sometimes help can be found [online](#). In fact, there are plenty of social media groups or organisations dedicated to connecting parents.

Hobbies

Even as a parent of a special needs child, it's important to remember that you're still a person in your own right. Staying connected to your interests can help to distract you from the daily stressors and protect your identity as an individual. You might even consider going back to school or enrolling in a [part-time course](#) to keep your curiosity alive.

Unwanted Outcomes

As you strive for balance between special needs care and self-care, it's important to be cognisant of any unwanted outcomes. It's possible, for example, to under-treat a serious medical issue like [depression](#) by ascribing symptoms to fatigue. On the other hand, it's possible to overburden support networks with unwarranted concerns. If you feel that you might be a threat to yourself or struggling with excessively negative thoughts, seek out the help of a professional.

Parenting is always difficult but the issue is made twice as complicated when you're tussling with special needs. If you want to retain your well-being, it's important to acknowledge this and stay alert when it comes to any changes that occur to you, whether mentally or physically.

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