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HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: BALANCING WORK, FAMILY AND WELL-BEING OF FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

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Raising a child with special needs is a journey that requires love, patience, commitment, and resilience. For many families, daily life may involve therapy sessions, medical appointments, school activities, caregiving responsibilities, and financial commitments. When combined with work and household responsibilities, parents can easily become overwhelmed and place their own well-being last (Rusu et al., 2025). A healthy lifestyle, therefore, should not focus only on the child. The well-being of the entire family matters.

Finding Balance in Everyday Life

For working parents, balancing career and family responsibilities can be challenging. Having a structured but flexible routine can help families manage their time more effectively. Planning appointments, sharing caregiving responsibilities among family members, and setting reasonable boundaries between work and personal time can reduce unnecessary stress (Suresh, 2026). In addition, parents should also give themselves permission to rest. Taking a short break, enjoying a hobby, spending time with a spouse, or simply having quiet time can help restore energy. Rest is not a choice, it is part of maintaining a healthy and sustainable family life.

Healthy Habits for the Whole Family

A healthy lifestyle can begin with simple, everyday choices (Payne, 2022). Families can practise balanced eating by including nutritious foods, drinking enough water, and making mealtimes a positive family experience. Where possible, involve children in choosing or preparing meals according to their abilities and needs. Physical activity is equally important. It does not have to involve expensive equipment or a gym membership. Brisk walking together, playing outdoors, dancing, stretching, or doing simple activities at home can keep the family active while creating opportunities to bond. Adequate sleep should also be prioritised. A consistent and calming bedtime routine can benefit both children and parents, helping everyone feel more rested and prepared for the day ahead.

Caring for Emotional Well-Being

Physical health is only one part of a healthy lifestyle. Parents of children with special needs may experience emotional and mental exhaustion due to continuous caregiving demands (Marchiş et al., 2026). Recognizing these feelings and seeking support when needed is important. Parents should not feel guilty about asking for help from their spouse, relatives, friends, community, or professional support services. Asking for help is a strength, not a failure. It is also important to create opportunities for siblings to receive attention and express their feelings. Every family member deserves to feel valued, heard, and supported.

A supportive community is essential in helping families feel understood, valued, and cared for (Sokol, 1995). Community members should show genuine concern and take the time to understand the challenges families may face (Galpin et al., 2018). By listening without judgment, checking in regularly,

and offering practical or emotional support, they can help parents and children feel less isolated. A caring and understanding community can also encourage families to seek help when needed and remind them that they do not have to face their challenges alone.

Building a Stronger Family

A healthy family does not mean having a perfect routine. Some days will be easier than others, and unexpected challenges are part of family life. What matters is creating an environment where family members support one another and make healthy choices together. Small steps can create lasting changes: eating together, taking a family walk, having meaningful conversations, limiting screen time, getting enough rest, and making time for one another. Ultimately, a healthy lifestyle is about balance, not perfection. By taking care of physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, and work-life balance, families with special needs children can build a more supportive, resilient, and fulfilling life (Stevens et al, 2024).

Healthy parents, supported children, stronger families.

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