



Autism parents are the most resourceful people in the world when it comes to their children. We find a way, we create a way, and we get it done every damn day.

This extraordinary resourcefulness, however, comes to a full stop when it comes to ourselves.

We ignore ourselves completely, and we justify the self-neglect by telling ourselves things like:

- I don't have time.
- I need to do more for my child.
- I'll be ok, once my child is ok.

Sound familiar? If so, you are not alone and it is completely understandable. You love your child and want to do everything you can to support them.

That said, sacrificing your well being and neglecting yourself is a disservice to both you and your child.

This is because you are your child's greatest resource: no doctor, therapy, or medication is more important to your child's long term prognosis than you.

So if you burn out from doing it all and being it all, no one benefits.

The good news is that self-care does not need to be complicated. In fact, it isn't. Self-care is any act you take to promote and perceive your wellness. And no matter who you are, no matter what your circumstances are, you can find or create time each day to self care.

## **How do I know this?**

Like I said earlier, Autism parents are the most resourceful people in the world. Figuring things out, making things happen, doing it uphill in the snow - this is our jam.

Take just 1% of the energy you devote to your child, and turn it inward.

Here are 7 simple suggestion for things you can do everyday to improve your wellness:

1. **Breathe:** Yes, I know you breathe every day. I mean deeply and on purpose. Slow breaths in through your nose and out of your mouth. This signals to your brain and your nervous system that you are safe. One popular method for doing this is 4-7-8 breathing: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds and blow out for 8 seconds. Do this for a minute and you will feel your body relaxing.
2. **Hydrate:** Stress and dehydration go hand in hand and they are a vicious cycle. Stress can cause dehydration and dehydration can cause stress. This is because our brains are about 85% water, so when the brain does not get enough water, you feel it in the form of a headache. The more and more water your brain loses, the less energy you will have and the more tired you will become. Luckily this one has a pretty simple fix, drink more water. You don't have to down your body weight in ounces in one sitting. Sipping water throughout the day is a great way of staying on top of your hydration especially during stressful times. The easiest way to do this is to keep a water bottle with you at all times and maybe even in multiple rooms so it is always present.

3. **Take a Walk:** Whenever possible, get out and move your body. It can be as simple as taking a walk around the block. The change of scenery, the separation from your tasks, and the physical movement are beneficial to both your physical and emotional wellness.
4. **Take in the Good:** Ever notice how easy it is to see the negative? This is by design. Humans have a hardwired negativity bias, once necessary to our survival, that casts us to over focus upon and over remember the negative. This means, we need to take proactive steps to see the good, but doing so is beneficial to our mental health as it allows us to have a more balanced view of our circumstances. Challenge yourself to find what is going well and celebrate it. For example, maybe your child tried a new food, or tolerated a routine change better than expected.
5. **Savor a Pleasant Moment:** Similar to taking in the good, savoring a pleasant moment is a practice that allows us to let the good in by slowing it down, remembering the details and delighting in the experience. One of my favorites: watching my child as he sleeps. Taking in the peacefulness, the safety and the sweetness and letting the warm feelings sink into my body.
6. **Talk Kindly to Yourself:** Many of us talk to ourselves like drill sergeants. This is not helpful. Research shows that self-compassion is a simple thing we can do every day to nurture and grow our own resilience. This can be accomplished by simply noticing your own struggles and offering yourself kind, supportive words. For example, "This is really hard, and you are doing a great job."
7. **Laugh:** Laughter is medicine. It lightens our mood, it releases stress from our bodies and it feels good.

These are just a few simple suggestions to get you started. It matters less what you do than that you decide, on purpose, to devote your time and resources to yourself because YOU matter. A lot.