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Five Tips to Keeping Your Disabled Loved One Healthy, Happy and Well

It may be hard to believe, but a recent [study](#) by the CDC found that nearly one in five Americans is disabled. As the caregiver of a loved one with a disability, you have the vital responsibility of providing a healthy environment where your loved one can flourish. Here are five tips for keeping your disabled family member happy, healthy and well:

Get informed. [Educate](#) yourself about your loved one's specific disability (and any related conditions), and ensure the rest of your family does the same. And don't stop at the medical level; look at blogs run by disabled adults and children, and news articles about technological advances in the field. Arming yourself with information is one of the best ways to ensure a better life for your loved one. Plus, it can really take the edge off of that nagging worry of unknown complications.

Ensure your loved one stays active. Regular physical [activity](#) is important, and adaptations can be made to accommodate many mental or physical restrictions. Play

volleyball with a balloon in the backyard or take a walk together in the park. And in addition to being a fantastic source of cardiovascular and aerobic exercise, (Supervised) swimming and, specifically [aquatic therapy](#), is a great way to relieve chronic pain and a great form of exercise that doesn't stress the joints.

Keep your home well-organized. This is especially important for those living with a mentally disabled loved one. [Disorder](#) can be stressful to anyone, and for those with cognitive issues it can be overwhelming. Keep things as uncluttered as possible (admittedly it can be tricky for a house with kids, but not impossible!) and essentials easy to locate. It might even be helpful to have labels on cabinets and drawers so everyone can quickly find what they're looking for.

Encourage independence when you can. It can be especially difficult to watch a disabled child struggle, but when it is reasonable, encourage him to be [independent](#). Offer help when necessary, but do your best to let him try (and even fail) on his own.

Put together a care manual. You may not always be the one caring for your loved one, so create a care [manual](#) for anyone who fills in for you. It should include specific instructions on diet, medication, hygiene and daily rituals. You could also highlight favorite activities or books, even favorite parks to visit. Create a cheat sheet for potential roadblocks. (e.g., "If carrots are rejected as a snack, ants on a log is almost always a winning compromise.") Providing this kind of information to another caregiver will ensure that the time away from your loved one will go smoothly. And think about it: if an emergency pops up, how will you possibly convey all the necessary information to a last-minute caregiver?

You are one of the biggest influences in your loved one's life, so be sure to set a strong example. Take care of yourself by eating right and exercising, and together find joy in every day!

Patricia Sarmiento loves swimming and running. She channels her love of fitness and wellness into [blogging](#) about health and health-related topics. She played sports in high school and college and continues to make living an active lifestyle a goal for her and her family. She lives with her husband, two children, and their shih tzu in Maryland.

Editor's Note: We believe the information in this article is very helpful. However, Patricia Sarmiento is solely responsible for its content and links to other resources. The links are good as of the date of web publishing, but Vitalco will not track changes to referenced resources in the future.