



**Are you
looking after
someone?**



Essential information for carers

Carers Week is an annual campaign to celebrate and recognise the 6.5 million people in the UK who care (unpaid) for family or friends who have a disability, illness or who need support in later life.

What is caring?

Every day 6,000 people in the UK will start looking after someone close to them, unpaid.

For many, caring is something that happens slowly and gradually when someone becomes older, or has a progressive illness or disability. For others, caring comes suddenly, for example as the result of an accident or stroke.

When you start caring it's really important to look after your own health and wellbeing too, as it can impact on different areas of your life.

10 steps to help you

Read our 10 steps on the following pages to help you think about the support and information that might be useful for you.

Get involved

Take part in Carers Week to draw attention to the contribution carers make to families and communities throughout the UK. And help someone you might know who is caring to access information and support.



Carer's assessments

You are entitled to a carer's assessment (or Carer Support Plan) if you provide care for someone who is older or has a disability or serious illness.

Carer's assessments (or Carer Support Plans if you are in Scotland) are a way of identifying your needs as a carer. You can ask for one from your local council's social services department. They, or your local carers organisation (or health and social care trust in Northern Ireland), will give you more information about how to prepare for your assessment or support plan.

It's important to get one when you start caring as it helps you understand about the role of caring and how it affects you, how much caring you can realistically do and what help may be available. Your caring situation may change over time – so remember to get reassessed.

1. Ask questions and talk about caring



Caring is something that is likely to happen to most of us.

It's important that you think about how taking on this role might have an effect on your own health and wellbeing (including work, relationships and finances) and impact on those around you.

Start by talking to family and friends – do you have shared concerns and anxieties?

If caring starts suddenly, try to make the time to find out about local organisations and support groups. Also talk to the health and social care professionals you meet – they should be able to signpost you to helpful advice and information too.



2. Find out about the condition



Chances are there will be at least one condition affecting the person you're looking after.

Try talking to health professionals like a GP or consultant, as they can help you understand what to expect. Pharmacists can also help explain the different types of medication and any side effects. Don't be worried about repeating questions or asking for clarification.

There might also be an organisation specific to the condition of the person you care for. Organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Motor Neurone Disease Association and MS Society are specialists about these particular conditions and provide a great deal of advice to help families and friends.

My husband hasn't wanted to talk about his MS from the day he was diagnosed. I was at the GP for a routine appointment and before I knew it I had off-loaded all my worries about the future.

3. Consider the options



Think carefully before making major decisions like giving up work or changing your living arrangements.

Sometimes you may feel like a course of action is the most natural thing in the world. Sometimes you may feel like it's the only option available to you. It's worth considering all the options before making big decisions about the care needs of your loved ones. Make decisions that take into account your own health and wellbeing and keep you connected to your life outside caring. The Carers Week charities have dedicated information services to help you consider those options, including online tools such as Which? Elderly Care's services directory.

Recent changes in technology have seen a range of products designed to help you look after loved ones.



4. Think about your finances



Many people find that caring takes its toll on their finances and it's often something that people are not prepared for.

You may face extra costs. You might see a rise in your heating bills or make more use of your car or public transport to get you to appointments, or to make visits to the person you are caring for. Your income could also reduce if you give up work or reduce your working hours.

Age UK, Carers UK and other Carers Week partner charities can help explain the impact caring might have on your finances and where you can access support – as well as provide you with a benefits check. You can also get in touch with Citizens Advice. You may be eligible for financial assistance through a variety of benefits.



5. Talk to your employer



If you are working it is worth being clear about your company's policies and procedures.

As a working carer, you are likely to need a range of support at different times - from access to a telephone to check on the person you care for, to leave arrangements to deal with someone coming out of hospital.

You have a right to request flexible working and time off to look after dependents in an emergency.

Carers UK has lots of information on how to talk to your employer about caring and your rights at work.

When my mum had a stroke I felt that my world had turned upside down. I was so busy at work – and with my own kids – I just didn't know where to turn.

I was exhausted and stressed but plucked up the courage to tell my manager. She was really supportive and we agreed some temporary flexible working arrangements until things got sorted.

6. Find out about available support



Accessing support to help you can make a big difference.

Your local council (or health and social care trust in Northern Ireland) can tell you about local support groups and services, and they may be able to provide short breaks to help you get time to yourself. A carer's assessment (or Carer Support Plan in you are in Scotland) could help you get practical support such as assistance from care workers in the home.

Many of the Carers Week charities provide support, including Independent Age who can give advice and information about social care for older people, and Carers Trust who have a network of local services providing support to carers, including breaks.

Look into getting assistance to purchase equipment and have adaptations made to the home of the person you look after.

When care services finally turned up it was like the cavalry arriving! A huge worry was lifted from me.

It was also good for Dave to have someone else to talk to. If you can't get services immediately, keep asking and don't be put off.



7. Plan for emergencies



It's important to have a plan in place in case something goes wrong.

Could family and friends help? Do you have contact details handy to get in touch with people in an emergency? In some areas there are emergency card schemes that have been set up for carers, often by the local council/trust or a local carers' organisation, for example a local Carers' Centre.

Another tip is to keep everything about the person you care for regularly updated and in one place – treatment records, medication changes, admissions to hospital and so on. Try talking to your local council/trust or carers' service to think through potential eventualities – asking for a carer's assessment is a great way to start.



8. Stay healthy and connected



At times it may seem that your own life is swallowed up by the role you perform as a carer.

Making sure you are looking after both your mental and physical health is vital. Getting a reasonable night's sleep is important; if you find yourself surviving on scraps then you need to do everything you can to change this. Carers UK has information on its website about sleep.

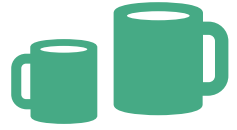
Exercising, eating well and making time for proper meals are also key. Walking, swimming, yoga or gardening can all make a big difference and can help you stay connected to the world outside of your caring responsibilities.

Everyone needs a break from caring at times. This could come from family and friends helping out, using an agency, employing a care worker or getting help from your local council or trust. Carers Trust provides grants towards the cost of short breaks, respite care and holidays.



If you have a carer's assessment, looking at time for you and your health and wellbeing is an important part of that discussion.

9. Talk to other people



Loneliness and isolation can be a big problem for carers, especially as friends and family might not understand how tough it can be.

Many find that meeting other carers, chatting online and getting support from those in a similar situation can help. All the partners involved in Carers Week provide opportunities to get in touch, through online forums and social networks, helplines and local support groups.

Find out what is happening near you at carersweek.org

Talking to other carers is absolutely crucial – no one else understands the sheer, relentless stress.

10. Be prepared for change



Your caring responsibilities may change over time.

The condition of the person you care for may deteriorate or improve. You may need additional support or to arrange a move to supported living or residential care.

For progressive conditions like Motor Neurone disease and some kinds of MS, specialist organisations like MND Association or MS Society can provide information about changes in the condition and how to manage these.

Conditions like cancer can involve long-term and complex treatment and Macmillan Cancer Support can support you to understand the different treatments.

Age UK, Independent Age and Which? Elderly Care provide specialist information and advice on different care options for older people.





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To be Healthy and Connected, carers need the information and practical support to care safely without harming their own physical and mental health and the right advice and financial support to be able to stay fit and eat healthily.

What can you do support the health and wellbeing of carers? Pledge your support on our website.

carersweek.org/pledge



These charities have joined together to make Carers Week happen in 2018:



0800 169 6565
ageuk.org.uk



0300 772 9600
carers.org



0808 808 7777
carersuk.org



0800 319 6789
independentage.org



0808 808 00 00
macmillan.org.uk



0808 802 6262
mndassociation.org



0808 800 8000
mssociety.org.uk



[which.co.uk/
elderlycare](http://which.co.uk/elderlycare)

Find out more: carersweek.org



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