



An Australian Government Initiative

Information for Carers

Taking a Break

❓ Why take a break?

Carers are usually family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Carers may be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.

Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day. Some carers are eligible for government benefits, while others are employed or have a private income.

Caring can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Regular breaks from caring can help to relieve the stress and exhaustion you may feel from time to time.

Breaks can also provide benefits for the person being cared for. They can give people new experiences and something to look forward to, and memories to look back on.

These breaks are often called respite, and the services that help you arrange breaks are usually called respite care services.

✔ There are lots of ways to take a break

The sort of break you take will depend on what suits you, and the person you care for, as well as the services that are available in your area.

Breaks may be taken in your house or away from it. They might be for a few hours, a day, overnight or longer. It might mean that you go to an exercise class, attend a wedding, catch up with friends or family or go on holidays. It may be a regular weekly event or something that happens only once a year.

- ✔ My son attends a special camp every school holiday. This gives me a break and some time to spend with my other kids.
- ✔ A respite worker comes to the house every second Friday and cares for Mum while I go out and catch up on all the things I need to do.
- ✔ The local hostel has my wife stay for one weekend every second month. I use this time to go fishing with my mates.

- ✓ The first week in December is always a special time just for me. Dad stays in the nursing home and I use the time for whatever I want. Sometimes I go away and sometimes I just stay home and do nothing.
- ✓ I was able to arrange for a respite worker to come and stay with my daughter in our house over the weekend while I travelled interstate for a family wedding.

'I would like to have someone come and look after him just for a few days, so I could go somewhere by myself and have a good rest in body and mind'.

? How can I organise a break?

Some carers get regular breaks from caring when family members or friends help out informally. Sometimes, however, extra support is needed such as when a longer break or specialised care is required. Other carers get little or no help from family and friends.

Respite care is provided by many services and organisations, which will vary according to the age and condition of the person you care for, and the area in which you live. It may be difficult to obtain respite in some areas and most services have waiting lists. Your local Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre will be able to let you know what is available for you and the person you care for.

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres are experienced in finding respite options for people of all ages and conditions. They can be contacted on **1800 059 059***.

Your nearest **Commonwealth Carelink Centre** can provide you with information about the range of community care and other aged care services available in your local area.

They can be contacted on **1800 052 222***.



? What type of respite is available?

There are many different types of respite. Some of the most frequently used types include:

- in-home respite care;
- day care programs;
- residential respite care in an aged care home;
- residential respite care for younger people with an illness or a disability;
- weekend and holiday programs and opportunities. These can be for the carer, the person with an illness or a disability, couples or for the whole family together;
- recreation activities in the community; and
- camps for brothers, sisters, and carers under 18.

These types of respite might suit you and the person you care for or you may have your own ideas about the type of break you would like or the type of assistance that would reduce your stress. Some services also cater for people with particular language or cultural needs.

'Once I got respite it was like seventh heaven. All the pressures were taken off'.

? What if I have special needs because of my language or culture?

There are sometimes services available that cater for people's special cultural needs such as diet or types of activities. Other services may have workers who speak languages other than English. If you have special needs contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636*** and ask them if appropriate services are available.



'Mary and I had been together 43 years and had never spent more than a night apart. But the social worker said I needed a break from the long hours. Now I can have that break, and come back to her refreshed and looking forward to seeing her and being together again.'

? What stops carers from taking a break?

- Putting their own wellbeing last.
- Not knowing what is available, or how to get help organising a break.
- A lack of respite services available in their area.
- Being too tired to make the effort.
- Wanting a break, but the person being cared for doesn't want outside help.
- Feeling that it's all too much trouble.
- The costs of some types of respite.
- The demands of other family responsibilities.
- Concerns about the quality of some types of care.

? How often can I ask for a break?

Some people who use respite care services do so regularly, perhaps once or twice a week. They may also have a regular pattern of holiday respite set up to enable them to take a week's or fortnight's holiday.

It is important not to wait until you are feeling stressed before you arrange a break. Regular breaks are an important part of any stress management program, and can help the person you care for get used to a routine of respite. Most services have waiting lists so try to plan your respite well in advance.

? What about the person I care for?

Many people being cared for look forward to a break as much as their carers do. A new face, new conversations, new activities and a change of scenery are often very welcome.

Sometimes the person you care for may be reluctant to agree or cooperate with your need for a break. They may feel angry or confused about your need for a break and be anxious about what it means for them. With time, appropriate arrangements can usually be made.

Your local Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre can help you if the person you care for continues to be reluctant to use respite services.

'Respite is very important to me in relation to the other kids'

✓ Taking a break for the first time

You may feel concerned that you will no longer be in charge of what happens to the person you care for or concerned they will not be well cared for without you. You may also be concerned about the cost of respite services. If you are finding it difficult to take a break, talk to a worker about your feelings. Your **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** can answer your queries about costs. You can contact them on **1800 059 059***.

Some tips from other carers that may help:

- ✓ Starting with small breaks and working up to longer ones;
- ✓ Making respite real for both of you by taking a complete break – don't be tempted to visit; and
- ✓ Remembering that it is important for your health and well-being to take regular breaks. It's worth a try.

? In an emergency what will happen to the person I care for?

It's important to plan regular breaks but sometimes emergencies can happen which mean you need urgent respite care. An emergency might be the death of a relative or a sudden illness or accident that means you must be admitted to hospital. Emergency respite care can be arranged in most areas if needed. Your nearest **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** can be contacted 24 hours a day on **1800 059 059***.

You can use an emergency care plan to make alternative arrangements for the person you care for. This may help you stop worrying about what would happen if you had an accident or suddenly became ill.

Emergency Care Kits are available as part of the Carer Information Pack. The kits contain emergency contact cards for you to carry in your purse or wallet and instructions and forms for making an emergency care plan.

'Don't feel guilty about it. If you need help, ask for it. Don't let the situation get desperate.'

? How much will it cost?

Some services may be free while others may charge a small fee or charge according to your income. Residential respite usually charges a standard fee. Private services may be expensive.

? Where can I get more information?

Contact your **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059*** to discuss what respite options may be available for you and the person you care for.

There is a lot more information for carers available on a range of topics. Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres in each state and territory provide carers with referral to services and practical written information to support them in their caring role. Contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636***.

Alternatively, carers may use the services provided by the carer association in each state or territory.

The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can help you if you need assistance with a language other than English. TIS can be contacted on **13 14 50#**.

COMMONWEALTH CARER RESOURCE CENTRE
1800 242 636*

*Free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates
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carers associations
www.carersaustralia.com.au