



An Australian Government Initiative

Information for Carers

Taking Care of Yourself

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.

Although it can be difficult you need to consider your own needs as well as those of the person you care for. If your health begins to suffer caring will become more difficult and it will not be easy to continue doing all the things you need to do. You may even be unable to continue caring.

'All I can say is tired, tired, tired'.

? Why should I bother?

Caring may make many demands on you. Looking after your own physical and mental health will help keep you going.

'Carers must think of themselves first – because if they have to give up, there will be no carer'.

? How can I take better care of myself?

These general guidelines and tips about how to take better care of yourself have worked for other carers.

Getting out

Try to continue with activities you enjoy. Even though the many demands of caring may make it difficult to manage it is really important that you follow your own interests outside your caring role.

Some carers say they feel guilty when they leave the house or enjoy an activity without the person they care for. If you are finding it difficult to get out and about talk to someone about how you are feeling.

Knowing you're not alone

It's easy to become isolated when you are a carer. You might be too busy to keep up with friends and family. People may visit you less often. Loneliness may be one of the worst side effects of being a carer. Sometimes just talking to someone who understands what you are going through can be a great relief. Sharing your experiences with someone you trust – family, friends, neighbours, other carers or workers – may help.

It often helps to talk to people in the same situation. Your Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre and support groups can put you in touch with other people who share similar experiences. When ideas, feelings, concerns, information and problems are shared, the experience of caring can seem less isolating. You can contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636***.

'It is important that you don't feel alone – especially for those people who don't have family members to give help and support.'

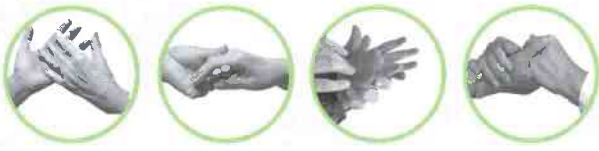
✓ Keeping healthy

Try to make sure that you:

- make time for regular exercise. This will make you feel more energetic and provide a break from your daily activities;
- have healthy, regular meals. It is not always easy to do, but it is important for your long term health;
- get enough rest and sleep. Tiredness and exhaustion often add to the stress of caring;
- look after your back if you need to lift or transfer the person you are caring for. Get professional advice on the safest way to lift and any available aids to assist with lifting; and
- talk to your GP about your caring role and the demands it makes on you.

'Don't sit back and let others take over – remain involved. Look ahead – not back.'





Taking breaks

You cannot care constantly without a break. Even though it's often not easy to do ask for help. Ask family and friends and respite care services to help you have regular and frequent breaks. The sort of break you take will depend on what suits you and the person you care for as well as the services available in your area.

Breaks can 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 can be a regular weekly event or something that happens only once a year.

Contact your local **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059*** to discuss respite options available for you and the person you care for. You can also contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636*** to discuss taking breaks.

Planning to look after yourself

Getting in the habit of making time for yourself as a regular part of your day is important. Don't feel guilty about this time – it's for you. Planning ahead and pacing yourself will also help. If possible plan activities such as housework for times when you're feeling at your best. Don't rush and remember to value yourself and all that you do.

Practising relaxation

Although it can be easier said than done you need time to yourself every day. It doesn't need to be long – fifteen minutes can do wonders. Try to take time to just sit and relax or listen to music that suits you.

'I now realise that my moods will vary. There are times when I can cope, feel positive and energetic and others when I'm sad and depressed'.

✓ Taking care of yourself – a checklist

- Do I have someone I trust to talk to about how I'm feeling?
- Am I trying to get some regular exercise?
- Am I trying to get enough rest and sleep?
- Am I trying to eat regular meals?
- Do I get enough breaks from caring?
- Have I got some regular times for relaxation?

'Avoid Isolation – foster friendships, by phone if personal contact is unreliable due to uncertainty of caring role. Keep fit – walk, swim – stress management is important. Have a conference with relatives – agree on division of care, sharing of responsibilities – be specific on commitments. Take a break'.

? What if I'm not coping?

Most carers will tell you they have times when they feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. If you're feeling this way talk to someone about it – your family, friends, GP or contact your Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre on 1800 242 636*.

? Where can I get more information?

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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A national network of
carers associations
www.carersaustralia.com.au