

Carer Fatigue and Stress

Caring for someone has many positive and rewarding aspects to it and it can be the most loving thing you can do for someone else. It can however, also be challenging, leaving you feeling exhausted and in some cases can be extremely lonely and isolating. If you find you are struggling it is important to ask for help and support.

The stress of caregiving can take a toll on your physical and mental health and your relationships, which could lead to burnout, a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. At this time, both you and the person you're caring for suffer, which is why caring for yourself is a necessity. Looking after your own mental and physical wellbeing is just as important as making sure the person you are caring for takes their medication on time and goes to their medical appointments.

If you can recognise the signs of carer stress and burnout, you can take action to prevent things from getting worse and start to improve the situation for both you and the person you are caring for.



Common signs of carer stress:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Irritability
- Tiredness
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Overreacting to minor things
- New or worsening physical health problems
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling resentful
- Drinking, smoking or eating more
- Neglecting responsibilities
- Stopping or reducing your hobbies/interests

Common signs of carer burnout:

- You have less energy
- You catch a lot of colds
- You feel constantly exhausted
- You neglect your own needs, either because you are too busy or you just don't care
- Your life revolves around caregiving but it gives you little satisfaction
- You find it hard to relax
- You are impatient and irritable with the person you are caring for
- You feel helpless and hopeless

How you can cope

Caring for a loved one will never be stress-free, however, the following tips may help you to avoid the symptoms of carer burnout and find more balance in your life. The feeling of being powerless can contribute greatly to stress and burnout. It's important to remember with regards to your state of mind you aren't powerless.

Appreciation – the feeling of appreciation goes a long way towards you being able to enjoy your life more, however the person you are caring for may not be able to show you their appreciation. If this is the case you should try to imagine how your loved one would respond if they were healthy. Remind yourself that the person would express gratitude if they were able.

If you're not getting external thanks, you should praise your own efforts. You could do this by finding ways to acknowledge and reward yourself. Remind yourself of how much you are helping by making a list of all the ways your care is making a difference, you can look at this when you are feeling low.



If you are feeling unappreciated talk to a supportive family member or friend about how you are feeling, who will acknowledge your efforts. Sharing your feelings with family or friends can be very therapeutic.



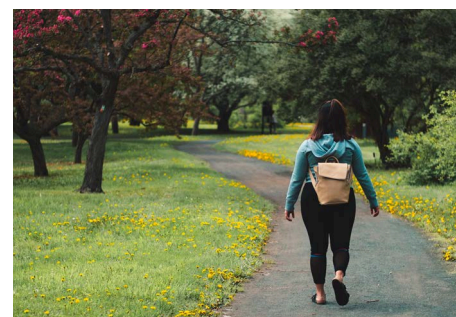
Ask for help – don't try to do it all alone. Taking on all of the responsibilities of care giving without regular breaks or assistance will lead to burnout.

In order to have a break ask friends and family who live near you to do some of your everyday jobs, like doing your food shopping, cooking you a hot meal, or sitting with the patient so you can take a well-deserved break. Don't expect friends and family members to automatically know what you need or how you're feeling. Be honest and up front about the situation.

Spread the responsibility by asking as many family members involved as possible. You could share the care giving tasks. For example, one person could take care of medical responsibilities, another with finances and bills, and another with household chores or buying groceries. Even someone who doesn't live nearby, can then help with the finances.

If someone offers assistance, say yes. Accept help when it's offered. Your family and friends will want to be able to support you. Have a list of small tasks that others could easily take care of, such as driving your loved one to an appointment, mowing the lawn or fetching your groceries.

Getting time outside of the house is important, even if it's just to go for a walk or a coffee with a friend. Ask a family member, friend or care worker to spend time with your loved one, so you can have some time away from the home.



If you don't have anyone who can help you, you could contact a local charity or organisation who have volunteers or paid help to provide some in-home services, this could either be occasionally or on a regular basis. There may also be local adult day care centres.

Give yourself a break

It's important to look after your own wellbeing, so ensure you include some leisure time for yourself into your schedule. Give yourself permission to rest and to do things that you enjoy on a daily basis. You will be a better carer for it.

There's a difference between being busy and being productive. If you're not regularly taking time-off to de-stress and recharge your batteries, you'll end up accomplishing less in the long run. After a break, you should feel more energetic and focused, so you'll quickly make up for your relaxation time.



Don't let your friendships get lost whilst you are busy being a care giver. Maintaining your personal relationships will help you remain an individual and keep you positive. If it's difficult to leave the house, invite friends over to visit you for a cup of tea or coffee or dinner.

Make regular time for hobbies that bring you happiness, whether it's reading, working in the garden, knitting, walking with the dogs, or watching the football.



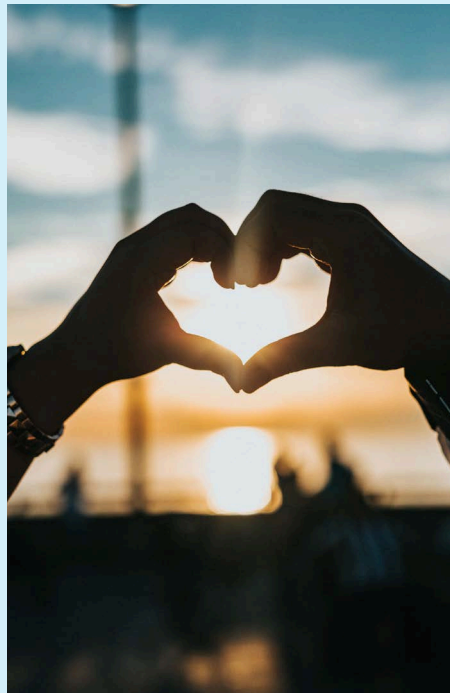
Small luxuries can go a long way towards relieving stress and boosting your spirits. This could be as simple as taking a long bath, having your haircut or buying fresh flowers for the house.

Laughter is an excellent remedy for stress. Read a funny book, watch a comedy, or call a friend who makes you laugh.

Look after yourself

Taking care of your own physical and mental health is vital as a carer. You can't pour from an empty cup, so in order to ensure you can provide a good level of care to your loved one, you need to be as healthy as you can.

It's easy to forget about your own health when you're busy with a loved one's care, so don't skip check-ups or medical appointments. Don't add to the stress of your care giving situation with avoidable health problems.



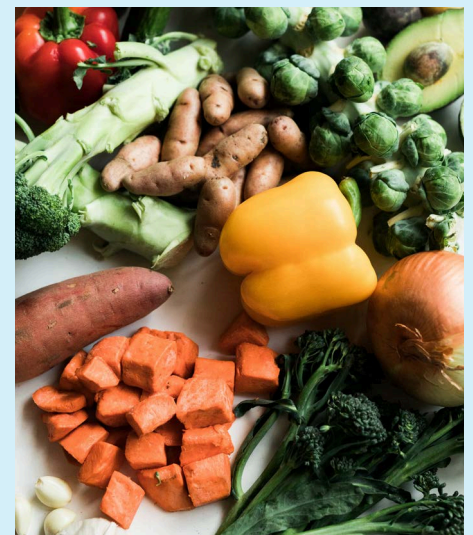
Exercise can help with both your physical and mental wellbeing. You may feel you're too tired, stressed or don't have time to exercise, but you will feel better afterwards. Exercise is a powerful stress reliever and mood enhancer. Aim for a minimum of 30 minutes a day, which can be broken up into three 10-minute sessions if that's easier. This can be as simple as a walk or working in the garden. Regular exercise will also boost your energy levels and help you fight fatigue.

A daily relaxation or meditation practice can help you relieve stress and boost feelings of joy and well-being. Try yoga or **mindfulness**. Even a few minutes in the middle of an overwhelming day can help you feel better.



It is important to ensure you are eating a balanced diet. Eat fresh fruit, vegetables, lean protein, and healthy fats such as fish, nuts, and olive oil. Reduce the amount of sugar and caffeine you eat.

We spend about a third of our lives asleep. Sleep is essential, it is as important to our bodies as eating, drinking and breathing, and is vital for maintaining good mental and physical health. Sleeping helps us to recover from mental as well as physical exertion. When you're well rested, you think more clearly, feel better, and have more stamina and energy.



Join a care giver support group

A support group is a great way to share your worries and concerns. They will enable you to be able to speak to other people who are going through similar experiences. If it's difficult for you to leave the house, there are many online groups available.

In most support groups, you'll talk about your problems and listen to others talk, which will mean that not only will you get help, but also you will be able to help others. Most importantly, you'll find out that you're not alone. You'll feel better knowing that other people are in the same situation, and their knowledge can be invaluable, especially if they're caring for someone with the same illness as your loved one.

To find a support group, ask your GP or hospital, or check the website or call a charity who supports your loved one's health problem.

You will find useful information and support on the NHS website, [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) and on the Carers UK website [carersuk.org/home](https://www.carersuk.org/home)



Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

Health & Wellbeing e-portal

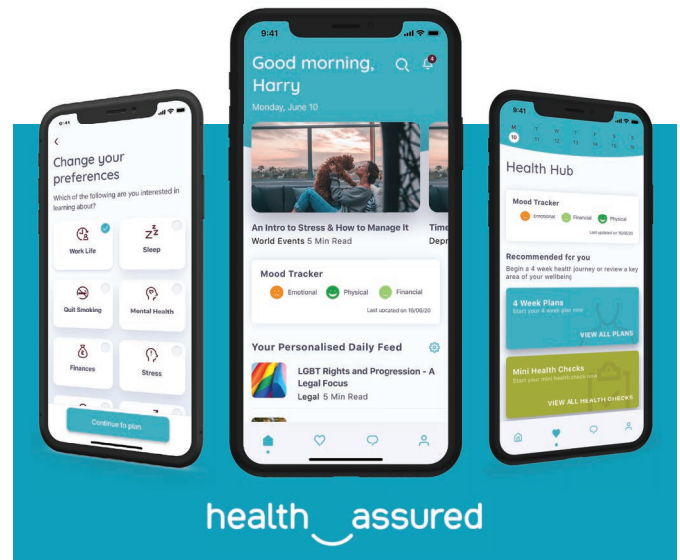
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Username: policemutual Password: careline

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