

**Are you
looking after
someone?**

**Essential
information
for carers**



What is Carers Week?



Carers Week was established by Carers UK 25 years ago and is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring and highlight the challenges unpaid carers face.

Caring can be hugely rewarding but it can also have an impact on all aspects of a carer's life. Looking after someone without the right information and support can be tough. This is why our theme for Carers Week 2019 is **Getting Carers Connected**.

In 2019 Carers Week has been made possible through **Carers UK** working together with six other major charities. These charities are:

Age UK, Carers Trust, Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society, Rethink Mental Illness and Sense.

Are you a carer?

A carer is someone who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental or physical illness, or who needs extra help as they grow older.

Every day 6,000 people in the UK will start looking after someone close to them, unpaid. For many, caring is something that happens gradually when someone becomes older, or has a progressive illness. For others, it arises suddenly, for example as the result of an accident or stroke.

Caring is something that will affect each and every one of us, whether we become a carer or need care ourselves.

10 top tips to help you

Whether you are new to caring or have been looking after someone for years, we hope that you will find this booklet useful. Our 10 tips on the following pages should help you think about the support you might need.



1. Ask questions and talk about caring

The amount and type of support carers provide varies. You may spend a few hours a week picking up prescriptions and preparing meals for the person you care for. Or you could be providing emotional or personal care around the clock.



It's important that you think about how taking on this role might affect you and those around you. Caring can have a significant impact on your health, work, relationships, and finances.

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

If you suddenly find that you are now a carer, try to make the time to find out about local organisations and support groups that can help you.

2. Find out about the condition



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

Try talking to health professionals like a GP or consultant in the first instance, as they can help you understand what to expect. Pharmacists can also explain the different types of medication the person you're caring for is taking and make you aware of 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. Charities such as **Motor Neurone Disease Association**, **MS Society** and **Sense** offer specialist information for particular conditions and provide advice to help families and friends. **Age UK** can provide information if you are looking after someone who is older.



3. Look after your own health and wellbeing



At times it may seem that your own life is swallowed up by your role as a carer. It can be hard to find the time to look after your own mental and physical health when you're taking care of someone else.

You may struggle to get a good night's sleep and you may have to handle many difficult decisions at once. Sometimes stress can creep up on us, and it's helpful to talk about how we feel rather than hope the stress will go away. **Rethink Mental Illness** has resources on their website that can help you if you are worried about your own mental health.

Where possible, finding time to exercise is important. Your leisure centre may offer a discount to carers, which could make it easier for you to go to an exercise class or go swimming. As a carer you are entitled to a free flu jab and if you have not seen your GP for some time, why not arrange a health check?

There may come a time where you feel like you need a break from caring. This could come from family and friends helping you out, using a care agency, employing a personal assistant or getting help from your local council or trust. **Age UK** has information about getting a break and **Carers Trust** provides grants towards the cost of short breaks, replacement support and holidays.

If you have a carer's assessment, thinking about time for you and your personal health is an important part of that discussion.





4. Talk to your employer

If you are combining paid work with caring, it is worth checking out your company's policies and procedures in relation to caring responsibilities.

As a working carer, you are likely to need varied support at different times – such as being able to make a call to check on the person you care for.



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

Carers UK and **Motor Neurone Disease Association** have lots of information on their websites on talking to your employer about caring and your rights at work.

5. Think about your finances



Caring can take its toll on your finances and it's often something that you're not prepared for. You might face extra costs. You might see a rise in your electricity bills or make more use of your car or public transport for visits or appointments. You might also have to reduce your working hours or decide to give up work entirely.

Carers UK, Age UK, MS Society, and other Carers Week supporter charities can help explain the impact caring might have on your finances and where you can access support – as well as provide you with advice on benefits. **Rethink Mental Illness** can offer financial advice through their Mental Health and Money Advice service.



6. Get connected through technology



There's a whole world of technology that could help make the home safer and your life as a carer easier.

While technology can never replace being with others, simple devices and apps can help people connect on a day-to-day basis. They may also help someone live independently for longer and give you peace of mind when you can't be around.



Carers UK has lots of information about how technology can help with caring.

Technology can also help you connect with other carers through online forums providing emotional support.

Motor Neurone Disease Association and **MS Society** have online forums open to carers if you are supporting someone affected by those conditions.

7. Plan for an emergency



It's important to think about what you could do if something goes wrong or your situation changes suddenly.

Could family and friends help you? 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 (or trust) or your local carers' service.

Try to update everything about the person you care for regularly and keep it in the same place. This could be treatment records, medication changes, admissions to hospital, and so on.

Talking to your local council (or trust) or carers' service may be helpful in thinking through potential issues. **Sense** has resources that can help you plan for the future. If you haven't had a carer's assessment, this is a great place to start.



8. Get connected with other carers



It's common to feel lonely or isolated as a carer, 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, such as **Rethink Mental Illness's** support groups, can help.



All the supporter charities involved in Carers Week provide opportunities to get in touch, through online forums and social networks, helplines and local support groups. **Carers Trust** and **Carers UK** have online directories where you can find out what services are available near you. You can also use technology to connect with other carers.

Find out what events and activities are happening near you throughout this year's Carers Week at **carersweek.org**

9. Prepare for change



The needs of the person you care for may change over time.

You may need additional support or to arrange a move to supported living or residential care. It can be difficult to find the time to plan ahead – but there is support available to help you think about this, including from **Carers Trust**.

For progressive conditions like motor neurone disease and some kinds of multiple sclerosis (MS), organisations like **Motor Neurone Disease Association** or **MS Society** can provide information about changes in the condition and how to manage these. If you're looking after someone with complex disabilities including deafblindness, **Sense** can give you specialist support through their 'Decisions to Make, Steps to Take' toolkit on their website.





10. Get connected to support

The right support can change your life.

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 could help you get practical support such as assistance from care workers in the home. Please see the page opposite for more information.

Many of the Carers Week supporter charities provide advice, including **Age UK**, who can give information about social care for older people, and **Rethink Mental Illness** who provide information on the rights of carers supporting people with a mental illness. **Carers Trust** has a network of local services across the UK providing support to carers.

Find out about what help is available to purchase equipment and have adaptations made to the home of the person you care for. **Sense** provides information about different types of technology and communication aids available for people with complex disabilities, including deafblindness.

“It was such a relief to talk to people who cared about what I was going through and understood how I felt. They did more to help me than they will ever know.”

Pete, carer



Having an assessment as a carer

Arranging for an assessment of your needs as a carer could be the first step to gaining some vital support.

How do I go about it?

In England and Scotland

Contact the social services team of the local authority where the person you care for lives.

You would request an Adult Carer Support Plan rather than an assessment from the local council in Scotland.

In Northern Ireland

Ask for a carer's assessment from the local health and social care trust where the person you care for lives.

In Wales

Contact your own local authority and request a carer's assessment.

How will it help?

An assessment is not a test of your abilities as a carer. It will help provide an overview of your own needs and what you can manage. Some people also find they qualify for extra support.

Bear in mind that assessments don't just apply as a one-off when you start caring. As your circumstances change, or as the person's needs develop over time, you can ask to be reassessed.



Further information

Every year Carers Week is brought to you by charities with different specialisms and a shared goal of helping you get the information and support you need in your caring role.

This year's charities are:



Age UK

ageuk.org.uk



Age UK is here to make sure every older person is respected, protected and treated with the dignity they deserve.

If you need advice or information on money, care or health, call **0800 678 1602**. This number is open 8am to 7pm, every day of the year.

Carers Trust

carers.org



Carers Trust works to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems. You can call Carers Trust on **0300 772 9600**.

Carers UK

carersuk.org



Carers UK is here to make sure that no matter how complicated your query or your experience, you don't have to care alone.

Carers UK has an expert telephone advice and support service if you want to talk about caring. Their helpline providing information is open on Monday and Tuesday between 10am and 4pm on **0808 808 7777**.

MND Association mndassociation.org



The **Motor Neurone Disease Association** is the only national charity in England, Wales and Northern Ireland focused on improving access to care, research and campaigning for those people living with or affected by motor neurone disease (MND).

You can call MND Association on **0808 802 6262**. Their helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm and 7pm to 10:30pm.

MS Society mssociety.org.uk



Whether you have multiple sclerosis (MS) or care about someone who does, **MS Society** is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between.

For a confidential chat about anything MS, you can call their MS Helpline free on **0808 800 8000**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 7pm.

Rethink Mental Illness* rethink.org



Rethink Mental Illness believes that no matter how bad things are, they can help people severely affected by mental illness to improve their lives. They aim to bring meaningful change through their services, groups and campaigns. Their Advice Service provides practical advice on living with mental illness, medication, care, treatment, and carers' rights. Call on **0300 5000 927**, Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm.

*England only

Sense sense.org.uk



Sense believes that no one, no matter how complex their disabilities, should be isolated, left out, or unable to fulfil their potential.

Contact Sense about getting support, including information and advice on a range of issues. You can get in touch through their information and advice service on **0300 330 9256**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Get involved

What can you do to get carers connected?

Pledge your support for Carers Week on our website.

carersweek.org/pledge

Find out more carersweek.org



Headline supporter



Also supported by



#carersweek

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