

## Looking After Yourself

Caring can be rewarding but it can also be very tiring, placing demands on your physical and emotional energy. As a carer you need to be as healthy as possible to ensure you are able to continue with your caring role. It is easy when you are coping day to day and responding to the needs of others, to forget your own wellbeing

Sadly, one in five carers report that their health suffers as a direct result of caring. For example, without proper training carers are especially prone to back problems. Many of the most serious health problems carers suffer from, such as heart disease or mental breakdown, are a direct result of stress. Caring without a break, without proper sleep and without support is extremely stressful. It is important that you recognise this and take it seriously. Remember that a little can go a long way so when you can, try and take some time out to do something for yourself.

### Look After Your Back

Carers often provide assistance with manual handling, which means they have to lift someone. This assistance can range from slight support to steady someone to lifting a person's full body weight. Current guidance shows that even light to medium lifting tasks, when carried out regularly, can lead to serious muscular or back problems. It is important to look after your back and if you already have backache, or, if you do a lot of lifting, then you should seek advice on how to lift properly. Sometimes this can be simple instruction from someone qualified to give such advice, or, you may be able to get some physical aid, such as a hoist to assist you. When lifting, bend from the knees, not at the waist, when picking anything up. An Occupational Therapist will be able to tell you if you need any equipment to help with lifting and you should contact Social Services through the Adult Services Duty & Information Team (ASDIT) who will facilitate contact with an Occupational Therapist who, in turn, will provide you with advice and assistance.

### Dealing With Tiredness

Many cases of tiredness are due to stress, not enough sleep, poor diet and other lifestyle factors.

#### Reduce stress:

Stress has been described as an occupational hazard for carers. While a certain amount of stress is normal, even good for us, excessive amounts can make people ill. It is important that carers do not align stress with feelings of failure. Excessive stress is often the result of a demanding role. Try to introduce relaxing activities into your day. This could be going for a walk, or a gentler option such as listening to music, reading or spending time with friends. Whatever relaxes you will improve your energy.

#### Eat often:

a good way to keep up your energy through the day is to eat regular meals and healthy snacks every three to four hours, rather than a large meal less often. Energy-sustaining snacks include

#### Get exercise:

you might feel too tired to exercise, but regular exercise will make you feel less tired in the long run and you'll have more energy. Even a single 15-minute walk can give you an energy boost, and the

<p>wholegrain cereal with reduced-fat milk, a piece of fruit, salad with grilled chicken, hard-boiled egg or lean ham and mustard sandwich on wholemeal bread, a low fat yoghurt or wholemeal toast, a fruit bun or slice of malt loaf - each with low-fat spread.</p>	<p>benefits increase with more frequent physical activity. Start with a small amount of exercise. Build up your physical activity gradually over weeks and months until you reach the recommended goal of two and a half hours of moderate intensity aerobic exercise, such as cycling or fast walking, every week.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Get enough sleep:</b></p> <p>Tiredness related to your caring role, can lead to exhaustion and the lack of quality sleep can have a detrimental effect on your health and can lead to feelings of anxiety, anger and resentment. Sometimes exhaustion can be caused by people doing more than they need to and it is important that carers make time to do the things that they enjoy, such as watching your favourite programmes on TV; reading; listening to music, or pursuing a hobby. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' advice on getting a good night sleep is to go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time everyday; avoid naps through the day, and have a hot bath before bed (as hot as you can bear without scalding you) for at least 20 minutes.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cut out caffeine:</b></p> <p>The Royal College of Psychiatrists recommends that anyone feeling tired should cut out caffeine. It says the best way to do this is to gradually stop having all caffeine drinks (and that includes coffee and tea and cola drinks) over a three-week period. Try to stay off caffeine completely for a month to see if you feel less tired without it.</p> <p>You may find that stopping caffeine gives you headaches. If this happens, cut down more slowly on the amount of caffeine that you drink.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Drink less alcohol:</b></p> <p>Although a few glasses of wine in the evening helps you fall asleep, you sleep less deeply after drinking alcohol. The next day you'll be tired even if you sleep a full eight hours. Cut down on alcohol before bedtime. You'll get a better nights rest and have more energy. The NHS recommends that men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day. Women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day. „Regularly“ means drinking every day or most days of the week.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Talk about it:</b></p> <p>There's some evidence that talking therapies such as counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) might help to fight fatigue. See your GP for a referral for talking treatment on the NHS or for advice on seeing a private therapist.</p>	

## Restoring Energy Levels

Caring can often be draining for large periods of time which will affect your energy levels and make you tired. If your average day leaves you feeling tired, you may wish to try and change parts of your routine to manage the effects. Here are some common energy zappers that may be making you feel tired, and tips on how to overcome them:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being a couch potato:</b></p> <p>sitting in one position for long periods of time can sap your energy, even if you're watching the TV or using the computer. Your body equates the</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Poor posture:</b></p> <p>a lot of your energy goes on keeping you upright. Bad posture - such as hunching forwards and slumping in your seat - puts your spine out of</p>
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<p>stillness with going to sleep.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> stretch often, get up and walk around away from your desk or sofa. Frequent breaks will keep your body alert.</p>	<p>alignment. The more out of balance your spine is, the more your muscles have to work in order to compensate.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> whether you're moving, sitting or standing still, your head should be lined up over your body - not sticking out in front of it - so your ears are directly over your shoulders.</p>
<p><b>Crash dieting:</b> while it will boost your energy to lose excess weight, going on a crash diet isn't helpful. Very low calorie diets, especially ones that give you less than 850 calories a day, will make you feel even more tired and can damage your health in other ways.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> lose weight by eating healthily, cutting out junk and sugary foods and reducing your portion size. Aim to lose no more than 2lbs a week.</p>	<p><b>Cabin fever:</b> it's all too easy to become homebound, especially when you are caring for somebody, you work from home or been driven indoors by the cold days and long, dark nights of winter. But lack of light and fresh air is a key cause of tiredness.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> get out for a 10-minute walk at least once during the day or when you're most tired. Even if it's cloudy, you'll be exposed to more natural light than inside and you'll feel more alert. If you simply can't get out the door, a few minutes in a room filled with natural light may also help.</p>
<p><b>Constant worrying:</b> if you're fretting about something all day long, your heart rate and blood pressure rise, and your muscles tighten, leading to fatigue and aches.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> set some time aside to concentrate on your worries. Try to think of positive solutions, then put the worries out of your mind. And schedule that dental appointment for first thing in the morning so you don't spend all day fretting about it.</p>	

## The Energy Diet

One way to help manage the effect of your caring role on your fatigue is to eat as well as you can. The best way to eat if you want to banish tiredness is to have a healthy, balanced diet that contains foods from four main food groups in the right proportions. The four food groups are:

- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods
- Fruit and vegetables
- Milk and dairy foods
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

<p><b>Eat at regular intervals:</b> if you eat at regular times, your body knows when your next meal is coming and learns to manage feelings of hunger and sustain your energy levels. Try to eat three meals a day and limit snacks - especially high-fat ones - between meals.</p>	<p><b>Start the day well:</b> breakfast gives you the energy you need to face the day. Despite this, up to one third of us regularly skip breakfast, according to the British Dietetic Association. Go for healthier options, such as porridge with fruit; vegetable omelette or wholemeal toast with a scraping of low-fat spread or jam. If you can't face eating as soon as you get up, take a high-fibre snack to eat on the run, rather than snacking on high-sugar or high-fat foods.</p>
<p><b>Aim for 5 a day:</b> most people in the UK eat too much fat, sugar and salt and not enough fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins, minerals and fibre, essential nutrients that your body needs in order to work properly. Try to incorporate at least five portions of a variety of fruit and veg into your daily diet. They can be fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced to count.</p>	<p><b>Slow it down:</b> starchy foods (also called carbohydrates) such as potatoes, bread, cereals and pasta are an important part of a healthy diet. They're a good source of energy and the main source of a range of nutrients in our diet. Starchy foods should make up about a third of everything you eat. But there are different types of starch. Where possible, go for slow-burning whole grain or wholemeal varieties, as they provide energy gradually.</p>
<p><b>Say no to sugar:</b> adults and children in the UK eat too much sugar. Sugar is not only bad for your teeth; it can also be bad for your waistline. And it gives you a rush of energy, but one that wears off quickly. Cutting out all sugar is virtually impossible. There are natural sugars in lots of foods, including fruit and veg, and you don't need to avoid these. But it's a good idea to cut down on foods with lots of added sugar, such as sweets, cakes, biscuits, non-diet fizzy drinks and chocolates.</p>	<p><b>Get enough iron:</b> Two out of five (42%) teenagers and one in three (33%) of 19-24 year olds have low iron stores, according to the National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Being low on iron can make you feel tired and faint and look pale. While red meats, green vegetables and fortified foods such as breakfast cereals are good sources of iron, the important thing is to eat a range of foods to get enough iron.</p>
<p><b>Eat enough:</b> make sure you eat the right amount for your activity level. The average man needs around 2,500 calories a day, and the average woman needs 2,000 calories. But remember, we all overestimate how active we are.</p>	

## Dealing With Stress

If you're stressed, whether by, caring role, your job or by something more personal, the first step to feeling better is to identify the cause. Professor Cary Cooper, an

occupational health expert at the University of Lancaster, suggests these ten tips to help manage stress levels:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be active</b></p> <p>If you have a stress-related problem, physical activity can get you in the right state of mind to be able to identify the causes of your stress and find a solution. Exercise won't make your stress disappear, but it will reduce some of the emotional intensity that you're feeling.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Take control</b></p> <p>No matter how difficult your problems may appear to be, there's always a solution. Feeling a loss of control is one of the main causes of stress and lack of wellbeing. The act of taking control is in itself empowering, and it's a crucial part of finding a solution that satisfies you and not someone else.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connect with people</b></p> <p>A good support network of colleagues, friends and family can ease your work troubles and help you see things in a different way. If you don't connect with people, you won't have support to turn to when you need help. The activities we do with friends help us relax and we often have a good laugh with them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Have some 'me time'</b></p> <p>Try setting aside a couple of nights a week for some quality „me time“ away from work where possible. In terms of a caring role, try sharing the load with family and friends; take rotas when available to ensure you feel relaxed and ready for the challenges of caring.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenge yourself</b></p> <p>Setting yourself goals and challenges helps to build confidence. That in turn will help you deal with stress. By constantly challenging yourself you're being proactive and taking charge of your life. You become more emotionally resilient as a person and it makes you want to do things rather than be passive.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Avoid unhealthy habits</b></p> <p>Don't rely on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as your ways of coping. This is an extremely passive and negative coping strategy that might work for the short-term. Over the long term these faulty coping mechanisms won't solve your problems; they'll just create new ones.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Work smarter, not harder</b></p> <p>Good time management means quality work rather than quantity. Our long-hours culture is a well-known cause of workplace illness. Working smarter means prioritising your work, finding coping mechanisms and trying to work as efficiently as possible.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be positive</b></p> <p>Look for the positives in life, and things for which you're grateful. Write down three things at the end of every day which went well or for which you're grateful. People don't always appreciate what they have, and this helps to put things into perspective</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Accept the things you can't change</b></p> <p>Changing a difficult situation isn't always possible. If this proves to be the case, recognise and accept things as they are and concentrate on everything that you do have control over.</p>	

## Insomnia

Simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference to your quality of sleep, which in effect will leave you feeling healthier and more energetic. Following these 10 tips from The Sleep Council will help you have a more restful night.

<p><b>Keep regular hours</b></p> <p>Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day will programme your body to sleep better. Choose a time when you're most likely to feel sleepy.</p>	<p><b>Make sure that your bed is comfortable</b></p> <p>It's difficult to get restful sleep on a mattress that's too soft or too hard, or a bed that's too small or old. If you have a pet that sleeps in the room with you, consider moving it somewhere else if it often makes noise in the night.</p>
<p><b>Create a restful sleeping environment</b></p> <p>Your bedroom should be kept for rest and sleep. Keep it as quiet and dark as possible. It should be neither too hot nor too cold. Temperature, lighting and noise should be controlled so that the bedroom environment helps you to fall (and stay) asleep</p>	
<p><b>Exercise regularly</b></p> <p>Moderate exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking, can help to relieve some of the tension built up over the day. But don't do vigorous exercise too close to bedtime as it may keep you awake</p>	<p><b>Less caffeine</b></p> <p>Cut down on stimulants such as caffeine in tea or coffee, especially in the evening. They interfere with the process of falling asleep, and they prevent deep sleep. The effects of caffeine can last a long time so the chances of it affecting sleep are significant. Have a warm, milky drink or herbal tea instead</p>
<p><b>Don't over-indulge</b></p> <p>Too much food or alcohol, especially late at night, can interrupt your sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep initially, but it will disrupt your sleep later on in the night</p>	<p><b>Don't smoke</b></p> <p>It's bad for sleep. Smokers take longer to fall asleep, they wake up more frequently, and they often have a more disrupted sleep.</p>
<p><b>Try to relax before going to bed</b></p> <p>Have a warm bath, listen to quiet music or do some gentle yoga to relax the mind and body. Your doctor may be able to recommend a helpful relaxation CD</p>	<p><b>Don't worry in bed</b></p> <p>If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again, then return to bed</p>
<p><b>Write away your worries</b></p> <p>Deal with worries or a heavy workload by making lists of things to be tackled the next day. If you tend to lie in bed thinking about tomorrow's tasks, set aside time before bedtime to review the day and make plans for the next day. The goal is to avoid doing these things when you're in bed, trying to sleep</p>	

## Other Organisations that can offer advice and support

- **NHS Carers Direct** can offer free, confidential information and advice for carers by telephoning their NHS Carers Direct Helpline 0808 802 0202 or email: [CarersDirect@nhschoices.nhs.uk](mailto:CarersDirect@nhschoices.nhs.uk).

It also has a website that has a vast range of information for carers on how to look after yourself whilst taking care of someone else. The website has tips on fitness, healthy eating, keeping stress levels down and advice on how to access respite care and the different types of respite care available. It also has legal information and advice on how to access advocacy services.

<http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx>

- **Carers UK** displays a great deal of information on their website about; carers taking care of their health, managing medicines, good sleep tips, coping with stress and taking care of your back. Click on the following link to find out more:

<http://www.carersuk.org/Information/Helpwithhealth>

- **Lloydspharmacy** has a carers section on their website which has a lot of useful information specifically aimed at carers. Follow the link to the Lloyds Pharmacy website:

<http://www.lloydspharmacy.com/wps/portal/services/carersinformation>

- **Follow the link below to explore other Caerphilly County Borough Council websites that provide information and ideas on keeping healthy, recipe & cooking ideas, fitness, activities and outside spaces -**

<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/application.aspx?s=5bvl07ZwnCA5fDhKSCQCy6rMSChDqIGBTotiKXEyB1qMYnV5ao1cxw==>