

Caring

Your members'
magazine

NEWS • CAMPAIGNS • SUPPORT • EXPERIENCES

Issue 56 | Winter 2020



Mum, me and the tortoise

A carer's tips for a balanced life

A New Deal for carers
What we're calling for
from Government

Getting active
Staying healthy at home

 **carersUK**

How to be heard – 10 tips for carers

When you're caring for someone, it can sometimes feel like you aren't being heard. In a conversation, some things are out of your control: your environment, or how much the other person is really paying attention. However, there are things you can do to give yourself the best chance of getting your points across:

- 1 Remain polite, calm and patient** – the person you're dealing with is more likely to go out of their way to help you.
- 2 Try to keep the discussion factual and non-judgemental.** For example, say "The care workers coming to care for my mother rarely speak to her" rather than "The care workers swan in and always ignore my mother, which is cruel."
- 3 Be firm.** Say "I would like to speak to you about getting a break" rather than "I was wondering whether I could get a bit of a break?"
- 4 Be specific.** Instead of saying "I can't cope anymore", say "I'm exhausted and I need a few days off as soon as possible."
- 5 Stay focused.** Stick to your point and remember why you're talking to the other person. Perhaps write down your points so you have them in front of you.
- 6 Repeat your request.** If you feel you're being side-tracked, try to keep the conversation on what you want to discuss. Don't be afraid to repeat what you want.
- 7 Listen to what the other person says.** It is easy to carry on thinking about other things when someone is replying, but you could miss important bits of information.
- 8 Don't be afraid of silence:** it can give you both a chance to think calmly. It could also be a sign that the person is thinking seriously about what you said.
- 9 Be sensitive to the needs of the person you are speaking to.** For example, if the receptionist at the doctor's surgery looks stressed, say "I can see you're very busy – please can I just have a minute of your time?"
- 10 Expressing gratitude and thanks goes a long way.** Everyone likes to be thanked and it might make things easier for you the next time you need to speak to them.



Being Heard, our new self-advocacy guide, is packed with ideas to help you understand your rights as a carer, communicate effectively with professionals and look after your wellbeing. You can download the guide here: carersuk.org/self-advocacy

Alternatively, you can order printed copies from our shop. Call 01933 221 781, email orders@shopcarersuk.org or visit shopcarersuk.org. The guide is free of charge for carers, but you may need to pay for postage and packaging.

Welcome

In a year that brought challenges that no one could have predicted, our latest research shows how the pandemic has continued to affect carers across the UK.




Our mission is to make life better for carers:

We give expert advice, information and support 

We connect carers so no one has to care alone 

We campaign together for lasting change 

We innovate to find new ways to reach and support carers. 

CARERS UK HELPLINE

T 0808 808 7777

Opening hours:
Monday–Friday, 9am–6pm

E advice@carersuk.org

KEEP IN TOUCH

Carers UK
20 Great Dover Street,
London SE1 4LX
T 020 7378 4999

E info@carersuk.org
carersuk.org

Carers Scotland
T 0141 445 3070
E info@carerscotland.org
carerscotland.org

Carers Wales
T 029 2081 1370
E info@carerswales.org
carerswales.org

Carers Northern Ireland
T 028 9043 9843
E info@carersni.org
carersni.org

Following on from our report at the start of the coronavirus crisis, our subsequent research and report, *Caring behind closed doors: six months on*, showed how hard hit carers have been, with more than half saying their physical health has been affected and 64% saying their mental health had been negatively impacted. I'd like to say a personal thank you to everyone who took the time to share their experiences. It's this information which gives us the authority to continue to campaign on your behalf, demanding both recognition of unpaid carers and that your voices are heard by all of the UK governments. In this issue, we share more information on these worrying findings along with what we are doing as a result, including our open letter to the

Chancellor calling for greater support for unpaid carers. But as we continue to highlight the real-life challenges carers face every day – and planning for a major campaign in 2021 – we're very aware that the holiday period can bring even more challenges. Local restrictions or concerns over staying as safe as possible may mean that you might not have the additional support of friends or family during this time. We hope that you'll be able to find some peace and joy, but if you need us, we will be opening our Helpline on both Christmas Day and the following Bank Holiday Monday, News Year's Eve and New Year's Day from 9am–6pm on **0808 808 7777**.

Please do stay safe – along with all at Carers UK, I wish you the best for the coming year,

Helen

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Dawn's Diary

How a smart meter could benefit your household



If you help someone you are caring for manage their energy bills, or would like to have more control over your energy bills, a smart meter may be of benefit to you.

Smart meters have a digital display which you can use to see how much energy you are using and how much it costs, in near real time. They also take digital meter readings and automatically send them to your energy supplier, so you receive accurate (not estimated) bills and don't have to do manual meter readings yourself.

Contact your energy supplier to ask about what they offer, or Carers Scotland have more information on smart meters available online: carersuk.org/scotland/training-resources/technology/smart-meter

LifeSkills

Created with  BARCLAYS

Our partnership with Barclays LifeSkills

Carers UK are partnering with Barclays LifeSkills to help those over 50 remain in work, many of whom may be struggling to juggle work with caring responsibilities.

Barclays LifeSkills was developed in 2013 and this new three-year partnership with Carers UK will help more carers join the 9.4 million people who have already benefitted from developing the skills to thrive in the workplace.

Barclays LifeSkills is proudly supporting Carers Rights Day (see round up on page 6). As part of our partnership, we also created a series of flexible working films and the "Let's talk about flexible working" guide. See page 20 for more information.



New Forum section

Within our online Forum we now have a dedicated space for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) unpaid carers to ask questions and share and discuss their specific experiences of caring. If you would like to find out more, visit our Forum today (carersuk.org/forum) and click through to the 'BAME carers' section.

Two media campaigns you may have seen this winter

We're proud to have been selected as one of four charities to feature in this year's The Telegraph 2020 Charity Christmas Appeal, helping tell the stories of unpaid carers across the UK while raising vital funds through donations from their readers. Running from early November until January 2021, there have been multiple interviews and features across their titles including with both our members and our extended family of supporters, sharing the particular challenges they have faced during this year and helping others understand the significant impact COVID-19 has had on carers' health, wellbeing, relationships and finances.

You can read these incredible stories by visiting telegraph.co.uk/telegraph-christmas-charity-appeal-2020 where you can also make a donation.

Carers Northern Ireland have been busy working with a variety of organisations to support BBC Northern Ireland's Christmas Appeal, 'Staying Connected at Christmas - overcoming loneliness, together' which aims to raise awareness of the effects of loneliness and provide information, support and advice on how everybody can do something - big or small - to help someone in need. Tara Mills from BBC News NI said, "In our programmes I talk to people every day who are helping their family and friends, their neighbours and colleagues. Is there anyone you could call or write a letter to? Sometimes the simplest things have the greatest impact". The campaign ran from 07-11 December: bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/northernireland/appeals



Opening times during the festive period

We are aware that the festive period may be a particularly challenging time for carers this year. Our telephone Helpline will be available as normal on **0808 808 7777** from Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm, including Christmas Day, Bank Holiday Monday, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

Please note that the email advice service will be limited during the festive period, and you may get a faster response by calling the Helpline in the first instance. If you need somebody to talk to, Samaritans is also available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year on **116 123** or you can email jo@samaritans.org

Exclusive offer for members from The Able Label

Sometimes, helping the person you care for get dressed can be problematic - or their clothing might make taking care of themselves during the day more difficult. The Able Label have considered how some of these problems could be reduced and have launched a new collection, 'Adaptive Clothing to Help Carers Care' and are making a donation to Carers UK from the sale of any item ordered from this

range. As a special thank you to Carers UK's members, they are offering you a 10% discount until 31 January 2021 by visiting theablelabel.com/collections/adaptive-clothing-to-help-carers-care and entering the code **ABLECUK10**. You might also be entitled to order without needing to pay VAT on your items too. Check their website for more details.

Carers Rights Day 2020

Held on Thursday 26 November, this year's Carers Rights Day theme was **'Know Your Rights'**

To mark this day, we launched a new research report, *Unseen and undervalued: The value of unpaid care provided to date during the COVID-19 pandemic*, which estimates that after eight months, the value of unpaid care provided by carers comes to a whopping £135 billion – totalling £530 million for each day of the pandemic.

Our Chief Executive Helen Walker chaired an event on supporting working carers during COVID-19 and beyond, where Mims Davies MP, Minister for Employment, gave the keynote speech, and we shared our new flexible working films and guide, which you can view here: carersuk.org/flexibleworking

Despite competing with government announcements about new COVID-19 tiers, we achieved national media coverage, both in print and online, from the *Telegraph*, Sky News, BBC News, Channel 5, *Irish News*, *Scotland Herald*, and not to mention 17 radio station websites! A huge thanks to our incredible members Norman and Elaine for participating in some fantastic TV interviews, raising the profile of carers.

We were pleased to see support from politicians across the board, including a heartfelt email from Ed Davey, Leader of Liberal Democrats, who is himself a carer; a supportive comment in response to our research report from Liz Kendall MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Social Care; and a tweet in support of Carers UK and Carers Rights Day from Caroline Dinenage, former Minister for Care. Several MPs signed an Early Day Motion in Parliament recognising the importance of Carers Rights Day in raising awareness of the work of unpaid carers especially during the pandemic, and ensuring they are informed about their rights and entitlements.



We also launched an open letter to the Chancellor urgently demanding more immediate financial and practical support and recognition for carers. Longer term, we are urging the government to commit to a New Deal for Carers to ensure robust delivery of support to prevent further hardship and suffering. You can find out more here: carersuk.org/letter-to-chancellor

Updated Looking after someone guide:
carersuk.org/LAS

New and improved self-advocacy guides:
carersuk.org/self-advocacy



Supporting you during the pandemic

When news of the coronavirus pandemic broke in the early spring of 2020, Carers UK needed to respond quickly to ensure that our information, support and advice for carers remained relevant and up to date. Here are some of the ways in which we've tried to support you during this extremely challenging time.

Guidance on our website

To help carers adapt to a rapidly changing situation, we now have twelve pages of helpful information and guidance for carers during the COVID-19 pandemic. From staying safe to managing food and medication to keeping active and well, these pages are updated regularly in line with government guidance: carersuk.org/coronavirus

Extended Helpline hours

At the beginning of the first lockdown, we secured funding to extend the Carers UK Helpline opening hours to 9am-6pm, Monday to Friday. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of carers we support through the Helpline has tripled, with over 1,900 carers speaking to our specialist advisers in October 2020 alone.

Online meetups

Our twice weekly online meetups were set up in early April. Since then, nearly 1,000 carers from all UK nations have attended around 70 sessions. Carers Wales have also been running their own series of 'Me Time' online meetups during the past eight months. As well as our Monday afternoon 'Care for a Cuppa' drop-in sessions, we have held a



wide range of 'Share and Learn' sessions on Thursday afternoons which usually involve guest speakers: carersuk.org/cuppa

Caring Caller volunteers

Our Caring Caller volunteer service was established within a couple of weeks of the first lockdown. A team of 12 experienced volunteers have made almost 200 calls to some of Carers UK's older and vulnerable members. We were really pleased that all the Caring Caller volunteers have agreed to transfer to a relaunched Listening Support service which will begin operating in late 2020.

Support from other carers on the Forum

Our online Forum continues to be a place of refuge for many of you. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Forum during the pandemic and provided support and understanding to carers who have reached out to share the challenges they have been facing. Join the conversation at carersuk.org/forum



Round up from the Members' Conference

Thank you to everyone who joined our first online **AGM and Members' Conference** on 8 October. With over 250 of you joining us during the day and a record number of sessions provided, this was our largest ever conference.

We were really pleased that 89% of you said you found the conference 'excellent' or 'good', and we appreciated your positive engagement with the conference speakers throughout the day.

At the AGM, our Treasurer Eleanor Bradley presented a review of Carers UK's income and expenditure for the year 2019/20, which helped to illustrate the organisation's currently strong financial position. After eight years as Chair of Carers UK, David Grayson stepped down as a trustee during the AGM and welcomed our new Chair Nick Baird, who then introduced himself to members.

Chief Executive Helen Walker launched the Members' Conference with a look back on Carers UK's achievements during the past year and highlighted our priorities for 2020/21. We then heard from four carers from each UK nation about the challenges they have faced during the coronavirus pandemic and the support that's helped them through this difficult time. In the final session of the morning, members split



into groups to share their ideas and feedback on the priorities for Carers UK's new strategy, Vision 2025.

After the lunch break, members were given a choice of joining two interactive sessions which focused on 'keeping well in your caring role'. These sessions covered how music can support your caring, preparing for caring coming to an end, winter survival tips for carers, keeping fit and healthy, helping you sleep better and hobbies for improving your wellbeing. In the final session David Grayson gave a farewell speech and Helen Walker thanked him for all he has contributed to Carers UK.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for what was a special and memorable day.

We appreciated your patience when we had a few technical issues and have enjoyed reading your reflections in your feedback forms. As one member said,

"It was amazing to hear such in-depth, passionate conversations solely on caring. It made me realise that caring is so under-appreciated in society and people are unaware of our struggles."

For those who couldn't attend, or who would simply like to revisit what was discussed, you can view recordings, slides and resources from the day: carersuk.org/members-conference-resources

A successful first virtual Scottish Carers Parliament



Carers Scotland hosted the first ever virtual Carers Parliament in November. The Carers Parliament has been held in Edinburgh for eight years, supported by the Scottish Government. But for 2020 this was a very different event – or in fact events! Three days of events were organised on 16, 17 and 25 November, starting with two days of discussion workshops on a range of issues affecting carers including financial inequality, renewal after the pandemic, the social care review, mental health, human rights and transitions for young disabled people. Information on the discussions and key issues raised is available on the Carers Scotland website.

We were also delighted to host a webinar with Professor Jason Leitch, Clinical Director for the Scottish Government. Professor Leitch has been a regular feature on in Scottish media during the pandemic and provided answers to some of the many questions carers had on managing risk and supporting the person they care for at this difficult time. A film of this session is also available to watch online.

And finally, to the main event on the third day! Starting with a welcome message from the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, those in attendance then heard from two carers – Abbie, a young adult carer and Christine, a parent carer – on the challenges they have faced during the pandemic. The day also saw the launch of the Scottish government's new Carers Wellbeing campaign to encourage carers across Scotland to seek the emotional and practical support that will help them look after themselves. This was launched by Jane McCarry, better known as Isa from Still Game, an ambassador for the campaign and a carer herself. Find out about what support is available at nhsinform.scot/caring or by calling **0800 011 3200**.

Carers then heard a lively discussion on questions from carers posed to Scottish Government Ministers, Clare Haughey and Joe Fitzpatrick, COSLA Health and Social Care Spokesperson,

Councillor Stuart Currie and Lucinda Godfrey, CEO of Dundee Carers Centre. The main programme ended with a brilliant spotlight on Young Carers, a film produced by young carers about young carers. But that wasn't all.

We couldn't let carers leave without a chance to get any information they might need, so we hosted seven virtual information rooms on breaks, employment, digital skills, caring at end of life and more; plus some sessions to help support carers wellbeing on self-care, laughter yoga and our ever-popular Care for a Cuppa: just the chance for 'a blether with other carers'. You can find out more about this year's Carers Parliament including videos of events and reports on key issues at: carersuk.org/scotland/policy/carers-parliament



We need a New Deal for unpaid carers

Research we have undertaken in recent months has shone a light on the lengths that unpaid carers have gone to to care for and support family and friends through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of carers continue to provide extraordinary hours of care each week for loved ones with increasing needs during the crisis, often without the usual help from family and friends, and with limited or no support from local services.

As a result, many carers have been left exhausted, socially isolated and close to burnout. Many have also taken a financial hit, and seen their health and wellbeing decline.

Our *Caring Behind Closed Doors: six months on* report from October showed that 4 in 5 unpaid carers (81%) are providing more care during the pandemic than they were before lockdown, and that more than three quarters (78%) of carers

reported that the needs of the person they care for have increased recently.

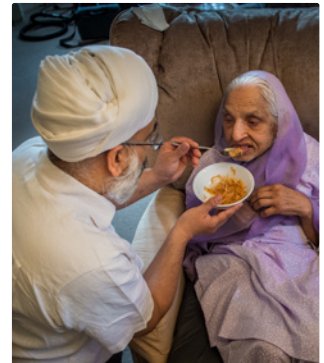
Without the support of families and friends caring, the response to COVID-19 could have been very different, and health and care services could have quickly become overwhelmed. Indeed, research we recently released to mark Carers Rights Day 2020 found that unpaid carers have provided £135 billion worth of care in the first eight months of the COVID-19 pandemic. That means with each passing day of the pandemic, unpaid carers are saving the UK state a staggering £530 million in the care they provide.

These levels of care are unsustainable and it is now clear that carers are struggling to cope with the amount of care they are now having to provide. Indeed, our research has shown that two thirds of carers have not been able to take any breaks at all during the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting their physical and mental health, while over half have seen their physical health impacted by caring through the pandemic.



81%

4 in 5 unpaid carers (81%) are currently providing more care than before lockdown.



78%

More than **three quarters** (78%) of carers reported that the needs of the person they care for have increased recently.



As a result, we are calling for immediate action by Government to ensure carers get the support they need. It is vital that we give back to carers, who have done so much to support others at a time of crisis. We want to see:

- 1** Recognition by all Governments of the role and contribution of carers, backed up with practical action that improves carers' lives.
- 2** Immediate payment of £20 a week to those with an underlying entitlement to Carer's Allowance to match the rise already given to those in receipt of Universal Credit.
- 3** Additional investment in breaks for carers, both through the pandemic and beyond.
- 4** Targeted and up-to-date information and advice for carers, including the support available if someone is deemed to be clinically vulnerable or caring for someone in this group.



Right now, we are focussing on making sure that everything possible is being done to open up services to give carers a break and reconnect with those they care for. We're also pressing hard for carers to be made a priority for the COVID-19 vaccination, just as they have been with flu.

So far, we've been successful in securing gradual changes to lockdown regulations in England, being able to have respite, disability exemptions for meeting others and now support bubbles – all things that carers have been asking for.

But we are not just focussing on the immediate action needed. After what carers have experienced during the pandemic, we also want the government to implement a New Deal for Carers, with medium term tangible action to support carers and those they care for.

This New Deal for Carers needs to start with a tangible cross-cutting Government Action Plan and move to strong and robust delivery of support as part of Governments' plans for the future of social care reform in each of the nations.

Longer term, carers also need to be placed at the heart of a reformed and sustainable social care system that provides well-funded, good quality care that gives choice and independence to families.

We will continue to fight for a society that respects, values, and supports all unpaid carers.

Taking pride in being a carer

Carer Antony Pinol on how he overcomes feelings of shame to feel pride in his caring role.

“I’m just a carer at the moment but...”

I was talking to an old university friend I hadn’t seen for several years when I spoke this familiar phrase. I’ve been my older sister’s full-time carer for nearly three years now (she has a learning disability, epilepsy and a whole host of mental health issues) and whenever someone asks me what I do for work, I always find myself uttering the above, along with a half-hearted excuse for my current job.

There’s no reason why I should belittle my role as carer or why I shouldn’t see it as a proper career. The amount of physical and emotional work that I, and other carers like me, face daily is testament to that.

So, why do I feel this shame?

Part of the reason is my lack of confidence. I spend too much time comparing myself to other people – it doesn’t take much time snooping at university friends’ LinkedIn profiles for me to feel that my role as a carer pales in comparison to the lawyers and bankers they have become. The truth is, I need to stop comparing

my life to other people’s. I need to stop thinking that just because my current vocation is different from the norm (especially for a 29-year-old man), that means that it is less than the norm.

Other people’s opinions also play a role in perpetuating the shame I sometimes feel about being a carer. A lot of people I encounter don’t consider caring a legitimate career or a worthwhile way to spend one’s life. People seem to think it a free pass for me to stay at home and avoid adult responsibility, while getting paid for it. None of this could be further from the truth.



What can carers do to feel proud of their work?

When people’s comments or my own self-critical mind get me down, I find it helpful to reflect and make a list of everything I’ve done that day in my caring role.

This is a recent day’s list:

- I spent half an hour trying to get my sister to fill a test tube with urine so that the doctor could test her for a urinary tract infection.
- I cleaned my sister’s bedroom.
- I went into town and bought my sister an MP3 player to try and occupy her when she’s having periods of sadness.
- I helped my sister interact with our dog (she has a habit of hugging him too tightly if she isn’t supervised).
- I laughed with my sister as we stroked our dog.
- I hugged my sister as we watched TV after she’d told me that “life wasn’t worth living”.
- I laid awake at night worrying about the new anti-psychotic medication my sister’s on and the effect it would have on her.





When you care for a family member it's easy to forget about a lot of the work you do, irrespective of how hard a task might be (for instance, cleaning up my sister's vomit after she's had a seizure).

I tend not to think of it as work because, in my mind, I'm just being a good brother. Writing a list of all the things I've done helps me become fully aware of the amount of work I'm doing and its worthwhile nature.

Looking at this list now, what does it tell me?

Being a carer is not an easy job. The simplest of things can present incredible difficulties — the thirty minutes it took me to get my sister to do the urine test is a perfect example of this. I have to be able to turn my hand to pretty much anything at any time of day:

caring for someone you live with is a 24/7 gig. Sometimes I even get up in the middle of the night to help my sister if she's had a seizure.

The list also reminds me of the emotional work involved in being a carer, which goes unseen but is a big part of the job. Lying awake at night worrying is a common occurrence for me.

Lastly, the list reminds me of the joy I bring to my sister's life. Remembering how she smiled as we played with our dog warms my heart and tells me that I'm truly helping to improve her quality of life.

If you're a carer, try not to compare your role to the 'norm'. In fact, stop comparing your life to other people's – period. In my experience, comparison is

most definitely “the thief of joy”, as the old saying goes.

If you find yourself feeling ashamed or inadequate, try making a list like mine. Consider the effect that the things on this list have had on the person you care for: the smile they point in your direction when you make them a nice meal, the laughs you share when you crack a joke. Sometimes the smallest things you do can have the biggest impact on the person you care for, but they're easy to forget unless you make an effort to remember them.

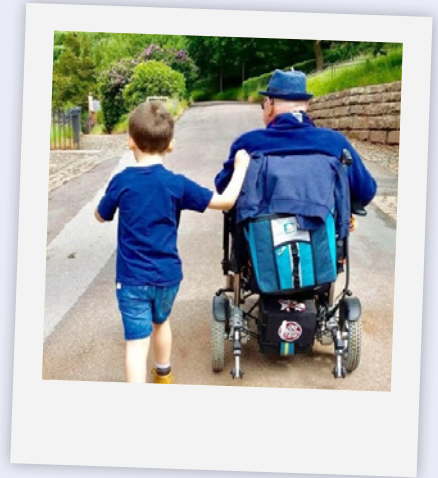
Look at that list and be proud of the positive effect that you are having on someone else's life – that's no small feat and not a lot of 'prestigious' careers would offer you that opportunity.

Sharing the caring – Peter’s story



When the call went out to Rotary GB&I members to volunteer, Dr Peter Green signed up at once. Peter kindly shared with us his experience of caring, why he chose to volunteer and why he feels our partnership will make a difference for carers.

My experience as a carer starts in the 1950's when my grandmother came to live with us after falling down the stairs in her own home – but I don't think the term carer had been invented then!



“However, my life as both being a carer or being cared for began when in 1985, after many years of developing corneal macular dystrophy, I was virtually blind. My girlfriend, Jackie, said that we had better get married so that we could face the future together, whatever the future held for us. Then on the 6th January 2000 when, aged 53 and still very active, I fell out of bed and broke my neck. I spent a number of months completely paralysed from the neck down but subsequently made some recovery.

“On leaving the Spinal Injury Unit I was told the stage of recovery that I had achieved was the best I was going to get. From that point on my wife Jackie became my fulltime carer, as I spent most of my time in a wheelchair.

“Over the years Jackie’s care for me increased even while I had become more used to doing things for myself, working with and around my disabilities. Then,

around 2012, I became a carer, in a small way, for Jackie as she developed arthritic fingers, so to speak. It became a ‘Share the Care’ system, that we developed. One or the other would do as we could – with opening tins being a shared event!

“Unfortunately, Jackie was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on the 1st December 2019 (my birthday) and she passed away on the 19th (our Wedding Anniversary). The future for me was in a care home, as it would take too much ‘brought in’ care at our disabled apartment.

“However, (and I should say ‘to my surprise’ but in some ways it wasn’t), our youngest daughter Claire, husband Phil and six-year-old Daniel, insisted I should move in with them and would not take no for an answer.

“So, the care I now get is from many sources; Claire, Phil and Daniel, my three brothers; friends; neighbours; fellow Rotarians of course; and not forgetting the local NHS.



I feel that being a Rotary GB&I member has given me a greater insight into the various levels of care that are needed in our community and for our club members, and ‘partners’, who are somewhat of a cross section of our adult community.”

“Jackie and I, when she was alive, were always aware that the majority of our fellow members ‘were there for us’ if we ever needed help.

“I feel the Rotary GB&I Carers UK partnership will make a difference for carers both within Rotary GB&I and also our local communities.”

Awareness is vital and the greater support that can be given to carers and Carers UK, the more widespread the awareness will be of who needs care and also the support that is available.”

Over the previous six months we have been building our incredible partnership with Rotary GB&I. Together, we want to make a difference by reaching and connecting unpaid carers in local communities across the UK with the support available to them.

By raising awareness of caring within Rotary’s network of over 45,000 members in 1,700 clubs, we can reach more carers who may not recognise their caring role and may be in desperate need of support – as well as the many Rotarians who themselves are carers.

A central part of our partnership is Rotarians volunteering their time and talents as a Rotary GB&I Carers UK volunteer. We are delighted to share that so far we have had 85 Rotarians volunteer across the UK with many more signing up to take part.

Keeping your finances in check

The costs of caring can make it harder to make ends meet, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the pressure. If you are worried about your finances, you don't have to deal with the situation alone. We've brought together some key guidance and sources of support to help you feel more in control.



Help with debt

If you are experiencing difficulties paying back loans or credit card bills because of COVID-19, talk to your lender and see if you can agree a 'payment holiday' (temporary break from repayments). If you agree this with your lender, they should record it in such a way that will not impact on your credit score. Facing up to debt and money issues can be difficult. But there are a number of organisations offering free and confidential debt advice and support, so there's no need to pay a debt management company to sort out the problem. It's also really important to check your entitlement to disability and carers' benefits, and your employment rights if you are in paid work and caring.

During the COVID-19 pandemic

There are many schemes and grants being provided across the UK to support anyone going through financial hardship during the pandemic. To find out more, take a look at our online guidance which details what financial support is currently available for those affected by COVID-19, depending on where you live: [carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/a-z-of-changes-to-benefits-assessments-and-support-covid-19#sec7](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/a-z-of-changes-to-benefits-assessments-and-support-covid-19#sec7)



For more information about grants in general, see our web guidance: [carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-household-finances/grants](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-household-finances/grants) Also see page 25 to find out what support grant-giving charities can offer.

Help with tax

TaxAid and Tax Help for Older People have launched a new coronavirus support service to help those who are vulnerable and struggling with tax problems to claim the support they are now entitled to. Their helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm on 0345 120 3779. Their YouTube tutorials are also available to help: [youtube.com/channel/UC48Q463tRKAnW-B8XqxEG9w](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC48Q463tRKAnW-B8XqxEG9w) For more information, see their website: www.taxvol.org.uk



Benefits

The benefits calculator on our website can help you find out more about potential savings you might be able to make. The calculator is supplied by Turn2us, a national charity that helps people in financial hardship to gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and

support services. Try it out at carersuk.org/benefits-calculator

It's important to be aware of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on any benefits you're claiming. Our 'A-Z of changes to benefits, assessments and support' directory can help you keep track of new changes being introduced to the benefits system as a result of the coronavirus. It could also alert you to other financial support you could be entitled to. Visit carersuk.org/covid-19-a-z for more information.

Free debt advice and support

Debt Advice Foundation:
0800 043 4050 | debtadvicefoundation.org

Debt Support Trust:
0800 085 0226 | debtsupporttrust.org.uk

National Debtline:
0808 808 4000 | nationaldebtline.org

StepChange:
0800 138 1111 | stepchange.org

More information on dealing with debt

Citizens Advice:
citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money

Money Advice Service:
moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/categories/taking-control-of-debt



Avoiding scams

Unfortunately, there are a number of scams going around that mention the COVID-19 pandemic, with some scammers pretending to be from charities or government agencies. As scams become more sophisticated, it is important to be vigilant, especially if you care for someone vulnerable.

Don't click on unusual-looking emails or links, check the identity of unknown callers, and be wary if you are asked to provide personal information or money – for example, banks won't contact you and ask for your PIN number or credit card details.

Citizens Advice has advice to help you protect yourself and anyone you care for from scams: citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/get-help-with-online-scams If you believe that you or someone you care for has been a victim of a scam, you can report it to Action Fraud, the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cybercrime. Call 0300 123 2040 or visit actionfraud.police.uk

Knitting my way to calm

Creative, peaceful and easy to put down, knitting might be the perfect carer's hobby says Carers UK member Alison Cram, who cares for her father.

I've been a knitter for as long as I can remember. I was only four or five when Mum taught me how to knit squares to make into blankets. Well, they were supposed to be squares – mine were a little wonkier than that.

That didn't stop me though, and aged about seven I knitted a blue scarf for Dad. The finished result was full of holes and uneven stitches and looked more like a fish net than something that would keep out the cold. Nevertheless, I had made it for him, so Dad would put it on and tuck it into his old jacket as he went out to do jobs in the garden.

I hadn't seen the scarf for decades and presumed that it had found its way into the ragbag. Then last year I was searching for a box of cotton hankies for Dad and discovered the scarf, neatly folded at the back of a shelf,

kept and treasured for all these years (excuse me while I stop typing for a moment, I think I have something in my eye).

Over the years my knitting progressed and I graduated onto jumpers, cardigans, hats and mittens.

Now that I'm a carer knitting has been a lifesaver. I spend a lot of time with Dad just sitting. If he's left on his own too long Dad can become anxious – worried that he's been forgotten or abandoned. So even if we're not listening to the radio or I'm not reading aloud to him, it's important just to be there. All in all, it's a lot more sitting around of an afternoon or evening than I would normally choose.

But with knitting I can use that time to be creative. I can enjoy the rhythm of the repetitive stitches, the gentle click

click of the needles, the feel of the soft wool in my fingers. I swear it's a form of meditation – a gentle activity that helps me to switch off from caring responsibilities and calm my mind, even if only for a short while.

It's the perfect carer's hobby, too. Easy to put down (if I need to fetch something for Dad or rescue a mug of tea held at a precarious angle) and equally easy to pick up again. Even if I only have a few minutes to spare I can manage to knit a few rows.





And it may sound a little strange to non-crafters, but knitting is part of my identity. Everyone knows I knit, so friends and family will ask what I'm working on and I'll chat to fellow knitters about wool and patterns and techniques. It really is knitted into the fabric of my life (sorry).

So if you haven't tried knitting, I can highly recommend it. It doesn't have to be expensive – there are online knitting and craft sites with wool at a range of prices, as well as free knitting patterns. And projects can be small too – tea cosies, scarves, fingerless gloves, hats, hot water bottle covers and mug hugs can be made with just one or two balls of wool. The online knitting community is a welcoming one and there are plenty of YouTube videos to help you out if you get stuck.

It doesn't have to be knitting of course. There are many crafts out there that aren't complicated or expensive: from crochet and sketching to patchwork and beaded jewellery.

Anything that helps you to switch off and enjoy flexing your creative muscles is just fine.

I always knew that knitting could be fun and creative. I didn't realise it could save my sanity too.

Links

For a wide range of wool, craft supplies, free patterns and video tutorials visit www.lovecrafts.com/en-gb

Let's Knit magazine has a good website for advice, chat and patterns at www.letsknit.co.uk

More free knitting and crochet patterns are available at knitrowan.com/en/designs-patterns

Don't forget many independent wool shops across the country are selling their wool and supplies online.

When restrictions allow, most local libraries carry a section of craft books, plus charity shops often have a basket of odd balls of wool that you can pick up cheaply.

The tide is turning for flexible working

If you're managing caring responsibilities alongside paid employment, you'll no doubt be used to spinning multiple plates. Changing your working arrangement could be one way to ease the pressure, but where would you begin and who would you turn to?

In our new video series, carers Ally, Jane and Niki, talk us through the steps you could take to approach your employer and arrange the changes needed. We've captured their main tips and guidance below and you can watch the films on our website: carersuk.org/flexibleworking

What does flexible working cover?

If you're currently feeling stressed or burnt out, it's worth taking a bit of time to reflect on what type of arrangement would best suit your circumstances. It's helpful to consider what options may be available, such as:

- working from home or another location
- working compressed hours (eg, covering your contracted hours over four days instead of five)
- working part-time or job sharing with someone else
- having more flexibility with the hours you work so you can work around someone's caring needs.

Ally, who cares for his son with Down's syndrome and autism says, "A lot of employers have job-sharing schemes, part-time work or you can combine your hours into fixed days."

Where do you start?

There is some groundwork you can do initially to work out your options.

Check whether your employer has a flexible working policy. This will give you a good foundation on which to build your request.



If it feels daunting to go about this alone, you could get support from those with specialist knowledge. For example, you could approach your trade union or a carers' organisation for advice.

Jane recommends acting sooner rather than later, before you have complications with care:

"Start the conversation when the care issues are small and manageable, and not yet a major a problem."



Jane sadly lost her father earlier this year and now cares for her mother alongside working part-time in a shop. Her mother is increasingly physically frail and needs help running her home. She adds, “If you’re struggling to talk to your manager... talk to your colleagues.”

How to communicate your request well

It can be hard to open up about your situation when you feel it is private and personal. Ally, a Visitors Advisor for Transport for London, and double carer for his son and wife, stresses how important this is. “I would suggest to anybody – do not be afraid to talk because if you do not talk, nobody can help you.”



Niki works for Cisco and cares for her husband, Matthew, who has myotonic dystrophy. She explains that it’s really helpful if you feel prepared for the conversation. “Prepare for it, put some notes together. Look at what you want the outcome to be.”

“It’s important to not lose sight of your worth. Know your value, because you’re there for a reason.”

“Being honest and open about your circumstances is integral to getting the right outcome from your employer. If you don’t share what extra pressures you’re under, they will never fully grasp what you need.

As Ally points out, “One of the advantages of flexible working is being there for my son when he needs me.”

Niki mentions that when outlining your situation, it’s a good idea “to anticipate what the challenges could be.” And Jane adds, “Think of a solution or a suggestion of a solution.” Make a point of how you can add value to the company or organisation in other ways.

Debunking the myths

Misinformation or misunderstandings about the value of flexible working, especially among employers, can lead to barriers that need not be there; Jane highlights that not only is flexible working “very possible,” it is also “very productive”.

In fact, as Ally describes, it can be a “win-win situation for both the employer and the employee”. While some people worry that requesting the change will be an uphill struggle, Ally found it was an easier process than he imagined:

“When I put in for flexible working, it seemed like it would be a long process. It would be difficult. But once we started to go through it, we found that it is an easy process.”

In the current climate of the pandemic, more and more people are waking up to the possibilities and benefits that more flexible working patterns can bring to an organisation.

“There’s no stigma to becoming a carer,” says Ally. “This is the myth: If you’re a carer, don’t tell anybody about it because people will talk about you. No, that’s a myth. By you getting that opportunity to do flexible working, you are going to be there for them more.”

These flexible working videos have been created as part of our partnership with Barclays LifeSkills.

Hitesh Daudia: Caring story

How did your caring journey begin?

I had been looking after both mum and dad for many years previously, but when my dad passed away in 2014, that's when it got intense. I didn't know where to look for help or information on how to cope with all this. So, I just carried on day after day, firefighting to tape it all together and make it work. The big problem was that the stress and depression crept up slowly. That meant while I was trying to care and extend my mum's life, I'd be losing the quality of my own life. In time my whole life changed, it took up every second of my mental minutes just to keep my head above water.

At which point did you realise you are a carer and did this realisation change anything for you?

The first 18 months after my dad passed away, I had to do everything for my mum. We both went into depression and needed bereavement counselling as there was no support from family during this time. This was probably the toughest challenge I had in my life. At that point I realised it was just mum, me and the tortoise (Rocky).

I wasn't prepared for the work life balance and mental challenges I'd be facing. From juggling doctors appointments, handling mum's tantrums to short-term memory loss, following up with the chemist for delayed medication, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, filling in online forms, handling financial bills, and the list goes on....

What does a typical day caring for your mum look like?

First, I have a nutritional drink to keep my immune system in good shape. Then me and mum do some HIIT exercises. I created a YouTube video of this to inspire other carers looking after their elderly parents. My mum enjoyed watching how many people viewed it and it inspires her to help others. So now I'm creating an authentic Indian cooking YouTube for her.

Then we hug and say the Ho'oponopono phrases

"I love you, I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you."



Ho'oponopono is an ancient Hawaiian healing system. It is essentially about complete freedom from the past.

We then have breakfast. Mum loves the garden so will be out in nature as much as possible. In April we planted some sunflowers seeds, and they grew to 8ft, which put a smile on our faces. I wrote a letter to some friends and put the seeds in there, so they could plant them and





NOT to watch the news anymore.

My mum loves her food shopping and to deny someone their passion is heart-breaking. I knew if I didn't find a way soon, I would be burnt out. This mindset keeps so many carers stuck. But we are not alone, help is out there, you just need to be brave and take that first step. I said to myself, "Enough is enough, I can't go on living this way". That's when I started looking for solutions and activities for my mum. I created my own caring system that allowed me to focus on what is important to me.

What has changed most within your life since caring?

I've stopped working 9 to 5 as I needed something that allowed flexibility. So, I decided to focus on working from home on my own projects. This allowed me to help mum out when needed. A few pros: I don't need to travel to work. You save money on lunch time meals and travel costs. I can take a break when I feel necessary.

Cons: We as human beings need that interaction with other people so working on your own can feel lonely and I know many carers experience loneliness, as they feel they can't talk to people about their individual circumstances. You must be organised otherwise your



experience the joy of nature and pay it forward too! If I'm not helping mum, I'll be working on my online course and mentoring/coaching other carers to help them create a balanced lifestyle in achieving more by doing less, using technology, systems and processes I've created (www.hiteshdaudia.com).

How have you and your mum coped during lockdown?

I can imagine for many carers the intensity has increased tenfold. It was challenging as we used to watch the news every day and it was depressing. It made my mum anxious and both of us couldn't sleep. So, I had to make the decision

whole day will slip away, and you feel you haven't achieved much.

Are you part of any carer groups or communities?

When I have time, I do manage to attend Carers UK online Care for a Cuppa and Share & Learn sessions. There are lots of Facebook groups I'm part of where people share how they feel and get lots of support. But I was looking for something different and couldn't find it. So, set up my own Facebook "About Time" community by going live every Thursday at 7.30pm GMT to give some practical advice and answer carer's questions from my experience and knowledge. (www.facebook.com/groups/AboutTimeCommunity)

Are there any activities that you have introduced into your caring role that you would recommend to a fellow carer?

We need to take care of our wellbeing because if you fall ill as a carer you will not be able to care for the person that needs your help.

Meditation – as a few people were asking me how I do it. I share my technique on how to do this on my Facebook and YouTube pages.

Regular HIIT Exercise – as it's quick and doesn't take much time.

Food – I've changed my diet to a more plant based, and my body has more energy to



do the things I need to for the day.

Volunteer – I help feed the homeless once a month and volunteer for Basket Brigade every year, delivering food parcels to less fortunate families at Christmas. It's really fulfilling, doing something nice for another person that appreciates it.

Gratitude – we both have a journal we write in each day. Watch what happens to your life in a month if you practice this every day.

What have you learnt the most about yourself since becoming a carer?

Time is precious, you will never get it back! I took my mum and dad on their first cruise in 2013. They said it

was the best holiday they had in their life. I cannot express how happy that made me feel. You are the captain of your ship. Nobody understands or wants to acknowledge what is really going on. People you meet online, family members, friends can all give you advice on how to do your caring role, but only the person caring really knows what's going on.

"I have become stronger during this challenging time and have found the energy I needed through consistency from the simple steps mentioned before."

Here to Help

Since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, grant-giving charities have been working to support those hardest hit. The new campaign 'Here to Help' from the Association of Charitable Organisations (ACO) is raising awareness of the financial and wellbeing support these charities can provide during this crisis.

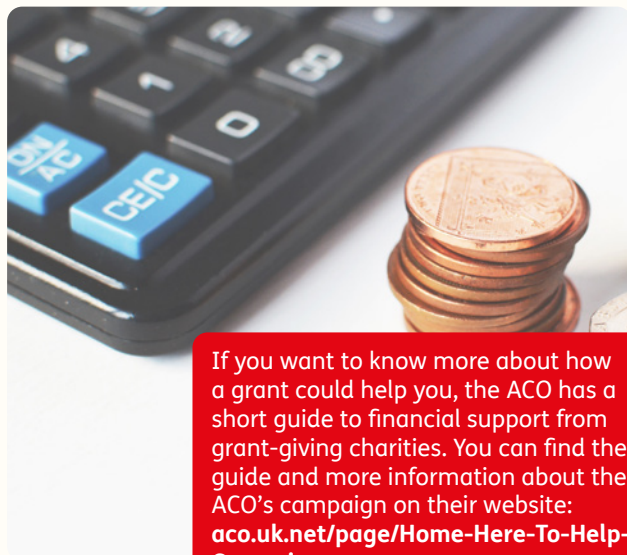
Here to Help launched in September, in response to concerns raised by some of the ACO's 120 grant-giving member charities that more people would face financial hardship as a result of the government's Job Retention Scheme (furlough) ending.

To help people in need, the ACO has been raising awareness of the support available from grant-giving charities. Working with key referral and advice agencies across the UK, the ACO has armed staff and volunteers at local agencies with knowledge of what's out there, so they can direct people to the right place.

If you are on a low income, there are many way grants can support you: from helping you pay for daily essentials, such as food and bills, to paying for furniture and disability adaptations. Grant-giving charities also provide many other services to help people manage their mental health during the pandemic, from counselling to befriending services.

Whilst there are lots of grant-giving organisations out there, it can be hard to know where to find them. The Here to Help campaign aims to highlight the broad range of charities offering support. For example, occupational charities support people who work or have worked in a particular job, and regional charities support those in their local area.

The ACO is also promoting the Turn2us Grants Search (grants-search.turn2us.org.uk) to help you find grants you may be able to apply for. Simply fill out a few details about yourself (or the person you care for on their behalf), eg age, gender, location, any illness or disabilities and any past or present jobs, and the 'Grants Search' will reveal a list of all the charities you may be eligible for support from.



If you want to know more about how a grant could help you, the ACO has a short guide to financial support from grant-giving charities. You can find the guide and more information about the ACO's campaign on their website: aco.uk.net/page/Home-Here-To-Help-Campaign

Dealing with uncertainty – tips from carers

Many of us have found it hard to predict what may happen next week, let alone next year. Not being able to plan ahead can be draining and difficult to deal with emotionally.

To help rejuvenate your spirits during these colder months, we're sharing some tips and ideas from fellow carers: Wyn, Catherine, Liz and Elaine.

Adapt your plans

"It's important to know that you can still connect with others, even if you can no longer meet for chats in person," says Wyn. "We now do this over the phone – not the same I know – but we always try to have a light-hearted conversation not dwelling on the negative."

We may reflect on simple pleasures we've taken for granted, such as visiting a friend for a cuppa. Try to focus on what you can do now instead. For example, you could agree to have tea and cake with a friend by video call or over the phone.

Have a routine but vary it

Having a routine helps provide a sense of stability for those you care for as well as yourself. This sense of control can provide peace of mind, but mix up your usual activities every so often. For example, have a go at yoga or Zumba.

"I feel a routine is good for the carer and the person being cared for," says Catherine. "I have a system whereby there are times when I have to be on the computer to look for work, engage in forums, etc, so this is now in our 'mental diary' so to speak."

Create a goal

From learning a language, to walking so many steps a day, keep your goal simple



and specific so that it's easier to stick to. Sometimes, being creative is a lovely way to release any tension you're feeling.

"I've been doing a lot of knitting, making soft toys which I'm going to give to a charity near me," explains Wyn. "I am also attempting to put our family tree together which is interesting."

Lose yourself in a form of escapism

Some of us like to relax by watching a feel-good film; while others prefer enjoying good food or observing nature: "Feed the birds," suggests Liz and "Don't be afraid to indulge in a winter pud; everyone loves a crumble." Others, like Wyn, thrive in having the opportunity to get immersed in a good book: "Reading books has always been a passion of mine; I download on Kindle and lose myself in a wonderful story."

Be kind to yourself

“Acknowledging how I feel helps me to be mindful of what I can do to help myself,” explains Elaine. “Physical activity is always a way to lift your mood. Walking outside takes my mind off my worries. When it’s cold and raining, doing a short easy exercise routine at home, or just putting on my favourite piece of music and dancing in my living room, also helps.”

Limit the amount of news you watch and try to avoid digesting negative information at key times when it could play on your mind. Most importantly, ignore that inner voice that can be self-critical, and find a way to give yourself the break you deserve.

More support

If you are struggling, speak to your doctor or share how you are feeling. The Samaritans provide a 24-hour listening service on **116 123** and there are many other sources of support available. Visit carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-mental-wellbeing for more information on looking after your wellbeing.

Track the Act and Coronavirus in Wales Report



On 5 November 2020, Carers Wales published two briefings: **Track the Act and COVID-19 BRIEFING: Impact on Unpaid Carers in Wales.**

The Track the Act briefing is our fifth annual report about how the implementation of the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014 is impacting carers in real terms. Given the impact of the pandemic, we also compiled the **COVID-19 BRIEFING: Impact on Unpaid Carers in Wales.**

Track the Act paints a worrying picture about the fragility of support to carers before the pressures of COVID-19 hit. Even before the pandemic, many carers had no choice about whether they were ‘willing and able’ to care, or what level of caring they undertook as they were unable to access the services needed. Carers’ ability to have a life outside of caring continues to be compromised and their health adversely impacted.

Our findings indicate it is time the role and contribution of unpaid carers as the

third pillar of our health and care system is properly acknowledged. We need to work together to ensure that systems work properly and seamlessly so that carers rights become a reality and carers get the support they deserve. Carers need to be confident that the systems and services are in place to support them to continue to care for the most vulnerable.

We also called on public authorities to reinstate and start new services to support unpaid carers as soon as possible, as carers are enabling health and social care to continue functioning at this challenging time. We also want to see the vital role of unpaid carers clearly acknowledged as the third element of our health and social care system, and recognised including in the rebuilding, financing and delivery of health and social care going forward.

To find out more and read the reports, visit carersuk.org/wales/news-campaigns/track-the-act and carersuk.org/wales/policy-resources-for-professionals/policy-library

Getting active at home

Ask the Expert



Carers often tell us that finding the time and motivation to take part in physical activity can be difficult for carers at the best of times and in our recent Caring Behind Closed Doors survey, 70% of carers told us that they'd reduced the amount of activity they'd taken part in since the pandemic began.



Restrictions may mean that you're not able to do the kinds of physical activity you're used to but the good news is that you don't need to spend lots of money or go somewhere to keep active – there are lots of options you can do at home! Many carers also find at home activities are great if they're unable to be apart from the person they care for but they still want to keep fit.

DVDs and videos from trainers are an option but there are also lots of free videos available online that you can try:

- Active Essex has a range of online videos which you can find on their [Keep Essex Active YouTube channel](#), including everything from football and tai-chi, to gentle stretching and aerobics.
- Joe Wicks (The Body Coach) has a variety of aerobic workouts available on his [YouTube channel, youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1](https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1). Joe regularly adds new videos, all of which can be found on his channel along with hundreds of others he filmed previously.

Alternatively, you might have other inventive ideas about adapting your favourite activities you would normally do outdoors so you can do them from home or you might enjoy simply putting some music on and dancing!

Top tips



Start slow

Like any activity, building up your activity as you gain in confidence and strength is a good way to build a routine. If you can do some activity, that's great and if you can do more than that's even better. These warm up and cool down suggestions from the NHS can also help reduce the risk of injury:

nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-warm-up-before-exercising/ and nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/body-blast-cool-down



Try to fit in 10 minutes when you can

Carers often tell us that finding the time to be active is difficult, but every minute counts and even 10 minutes of activity at home is beneficial for your health. If you build activity into your routine you're more likely to keep up a habit. 10 Today has gentle activities available to do in 10 minute chunks online and via the radio:

10today.co.uk



Involve other people at home!

An online video is an activity that you and the person you care for or others in your household can do together. Getting fit can be fun, especially if you find something that you all enjoy. This Girl Can have produced a range of Disney Dance Workouts with songs from films that are especially good if you have children or grandchildren at home: thisgirlcan.co.uk/activities/disney-workouts

Whatever activities you take part in, be sure to take steps to keep safe and comply with the local or national government guidance in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Carers UK are currently working with Sport England on an exciting project funded by the National Lottery to look at ways to support carers to take part in more physical activity to improve their health and wellbeing. We've been funded to research into is those aged over 55 living in England but the research results which will be released in early 2021 will be used to campaign for better support for all carers. For more details, contact: carersuk.org/keeping-active

Tea, tablets and dentures



In this instalment of Dawn's diary, she helps reassure John with comforting words, tea and food, as he struggles with his memory and adjusting to the nights getting darker.

John's back door is locked so I let myself in, expecting him to be at Kathleen's. But he's here, hovering in the living room doorway, wearing a pair of trousers that don't meet in the middle and an uncertain look.

'Are them my keys?' he asks, indicating the keys in my hand.

'No they're mine.'

'Do you know what's happened to mine? I can't...'
He wanders off to look for them.

'I'm sure they'll be around somewhere.'

'Are these mine?' He pulls his spare set from the hook and tries a key in the door. I can see they're the right ones but he struggles to get the key in, taking it out and putting it back in again until he's satisfied it fits.

'There,' I say, 'mystery solved.' But he still doesn't look happy. Without his dentures in, hair all over the place, his too small trousers showing his undies in the gap where he can't get the zip up, he looks raddled and confused, completely demented.

'Come and sit down,' I say. 'You're not quite yourself today are you?'

'No.' He looks me in the eye for the first time. 'I sort of fell on the floor. Out of bed.'

'How did that happen?' Was this getting up or getting into bed?

'I'm not sure. Off the edge like. I was moving the blanket and I kind of fell off with it.'

'And did you hurt yourself?'

'Not much. It was dark.'

'You didn't bang your head?'

'No.'

'Well, no harm done then. Let's get you a drink.'

I fetch him some tea and sit with him for around forty minutes in relative silence, giving him time to come round. He's tried to light a fire but only got as far as setting light to some newspaper in the grate, so the room is smoky with soot blown back down the chimney by the strong wind outside. Though it's too warm for a fire, I put a couple of bits of wood on, conscious that if I don't get it going he might try to clear it out later while the embers are still warm. After a few minutes the wood starts to burn and I open a window to let some of the smokiness out.

'That's got it going,' John says as a big puff of smoke billows into the room.

'I think it's the wind doing that,' I say.





'It said on the news a woman had her caravan blown off a cliff by the wind.'
'Eh?'

Chewing is still an issue so we've adapted what we buy and cook for John to include softer foods, thinly sliced bread. Today I make him mashed potatoes, carrots and half a tin of chicken in a creamy sauce that's been languishing at the back of the cupboard for ages. I expect it to be fairly disgusting but when I taste it, it seems right up John's street; nursery food, plain and inoffensive.

'I'll have to put my teeth in,' he says, starting to get up when I bring it through.

'I'll get them.' I empty the Steradent water from the mug and swill them in cold water, dislodging a pea from yesterday's lunch. I'm as squeamish as ever about

touching his dentures but, as with so many things I do for John now, I tend to focus less on the unpleasantness of actually doing it and more on how bad I'll feel if I don't. Tea and tablets. More tea. John looks better than he did when I arrived, slightly more with it.

'My memory,' he muses, 'I'm forgetting a lot of things lately.'

'I know you are.'

'It's not all the time.'

'I know. I think you have some days when you're a bit more forgetful than others don't you?'

'I try not to let things...' he trails off. *'If you get up in the night and you need a wee. When there's no light on.'*

'Is that how you fell over last night?'

'I think so.'

I tell him about peeing in the bidet in a pitch black hotel bathroom, thinking it was the toilet, that David had left the seat up. He laughs. *'So it's easy to get disorientated in the dark,'* I reassure him, *'especially if you're half asleep.'*

'That's right.'

A terrible thought. *'John, did you knock anything over when you fell?'*

'I don't think so.'

'Do you mind if I have a look?'

I really don't want to go upstairs and find he's knocked over the bucket he uses at night, but if he has, I can't leave it for David to discover later. Behind the door, the bucket is mercifully upright, last night's effusions still swirling around the bottom. I leave it for David to empty.

But when he goes round at 6.30pm, the house is in darkness, John already in bed. He lets himself in and has a look around. No sign that John's eaten anything since lunch. It's worrying that he's going to bed so early. The clocks don't go back for another week; presumably, when they do, he'll go to bed even earlier.

New publications for carers



A selection of Carers UK resources to help you get the information, advice and support you need.

Looking after someone

Looking after someone is our guide for anyone caring for family or friends, outlining your rights and the practical and financial support available.

Updated for 2020-21, the guide includes updated information in light of COVID-19.

carersuk.org/LAS



Being Heard: a self-advocacy guide for carers

Being Heard is our self-advocacy guide for carers, helping you communicate your needs as well as speaking up for the person you care for.

Updated for 2020, the guide contains new information to help you communicate your needs with professionals, know your rights and look after your wellbeing.

carersuk.org/self-advocacy



“Let’s talk about flexible working”

Balancing work with caring is challenging – but flexible working can help.

Supported by Barclays LifeSkills, our new “*Let’s talk about flexible working*” guide has practical information to help you start the conversation with your employer.

carersuk.org/flex-working-guide

