

Family Carers Briefing Physical Health, June 2018



Many carers we spoke to felt that their own health was taken less seriously than the health of the person they cared for. They said they had less time than they needed to look after their own health by taking regular exercise, for example.

We know that there is a strong link between mental health and physical health, and carers need support to look after both. A better understanding of the link can help carers understand the importance of their own health and wellbeing. More information about this can be found at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/p/physical-health-and-mental-health>



Positive practice:

Many GPs' practices encourage carers to register with them as carers. This can help make sure carers get support and regular health checks. The Carers' Trust has gathered good practice of GP surgeries identifying and supporting carers. You can find their report here <https://professionals.carers.org/identification-of-carers-in-GP-practices/>

People with learning disabilities should be invited to have an annual health check, as they can have poorer mental and physical health. The NHS Choices website sets out what the check should cover. For information go to:



<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks/>

Also, everyone aged between 40 and 74 should be invited for an NHS health check every five years. For more information see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-health-check/>



Seasonal influenza (“flu”) can leave you feeling unwell for more than a week and can lead to more serious illnesses. The person you care for is also more likely to catch the flu if you have it. Carers can have a free vaccination against seasonal flu. GP practices and most pharmacies offer the service. You will usually need to book in advance and answer a few questions about your health. There are more details about the vaccination in this NHS document:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/who-should-have-flu-vaccine/>



The Care Quality Commission monitors, inspects and regulates health services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety. They also set out what good and outstanding care looks like. Their report on good GP services for carers may be useful.

<http://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/gps/nigels-surgery-44-caring-carers-what-does-outstanding-care-look>

Resources:

Carers UK has a lot of useful information on staying healthy as a carer on their website. See <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health>



The Carers' Trust has a range of factsheets and short articles on your health as a carer. See: <https://carers.org/article/health-and-wellbeing>

Postural care is very important for carers and those they care for. People who find it hard to move are most at risk of developing body shape distortions. This is because they often sit and lie in limited positions. Failure to protect body shape can have serious consequences for a person's health. It can also be difficult for carers to safely and effectively move the people they care for.

Good postural care is about using the right equipment and positioning techniques. For carers, the NHS Choices website has advice on lifting and handling and on how to get an assessment for equipment to help you safely move someone. For more information go to: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support/mobility-problems-carers/>

One important health area where carers told us they struggled was getting enough sleep. We know that lack of sleep can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, stress and diabetes. Experienced carers suggested following general relaxation advice like trying to find time for a relaxing bath or half an hour to read a book can be great. However, they also said that what some carers are coping with is beyond what can be helped by these steps, and if they don't work, you should talk to your GP as soon as possible and ask for more support.



They also suggested asking for specialist help and going back to your GP or Occupational Therapist (OT) again for help if their first suggestions aren't helping. Your GP can refer you to a sleep specialist, and there is equipment available that can give practical help – a sleep expert or OT can advise. Carers UK also has some great advice on their website on how to get better sleep. See:

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/getting-enough-sleep>

Some health organisations are using social prescribing to help improve people's health. Social prescribing is where primary care services like GP practices can refer patients with social, emotional or practical needs to a range of non-clinical services. This can include everything from arts groups and volunteering to gardening and dance clubs.

The Local Government Association has shared examples of good practice from across the country. You can find them here

<https://www.local.gov.uk/just-what-doctor-ordered-social-prescribing-guide-local-authorities-case-studies>

Not every area uses social prescribing and what can be prescribed does vary, but it can give some extra options to support people. For example, Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority jointly employ community support workers who are based in GP surgeries and can help patients find out where to get help and support on a range of

issues. There is more information about social prescribing in Sheffield on the SOAR (a community regeneration charity) website: <https://soarcommunity.org.uk/health/social-prescribing/>

In different parts of the country, health trainers can help people improve their health by exercising, eating better, stopping smoking, etc. For example, Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust have a team of health trainers and there are more details here: <https://www.bdct.nhs.uk/services/health-trainer-service/>

Health professionals agree that people can stay healthier by reducing the amount of alcohol they drink, stopping smoking, eating more healthily and taking some exercise. If you want to talk to someone about getting healthier, you can talk to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist, and there is some great information on the NHS Choices website and elsewhere on alcohol, drugs, smoking, diet, and exercise. See links below for further information:



<http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/alcohol>

<http://www.talktofrank.com/drugs>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/10-self-help-tips-to-stop-smoking/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-fitness-ideas/>

**Additional information:**

A carer's assessment is a discussion between you and a trained person from your council (or another organisation that the council works with). The assessment should consider the impact the care and support you provide is having on your own mental and physical health. Further information regarding carer's assessment is available here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support/carers-assessment/>

Carers who have had the assessment have the following advice:

- Try to be seen in person rather than doing the assessment on the phone.
- It can be easier to be open and honest about your own needs if the person you care for is not there during your assessment, whether that is at an assessment centre or in your own home.
- Consider having someone with you to support you.
- Prepare in advance for the assessment and consider making some notes to help you remember the things you want to say. For example, what happens on a difficult day? What does being a carer mean to how you feel, and what do you actually have to do on a day-to-day basis (for example extra laundry? Buying special food? Having to use taxis to get around rather than using buses? How does caring affect the hours you can work or the job you can do?).

- Think in advance what support you would ideally like to receive, and how often. This gives you a starting point.

NHS England is the organisation that sets out the detail of how NHS care and treatment should be delivered. In 2016, they published 'An integrated approach to identifying and assessing Carer health and wellbeing', which sets out how carers in England will get support from the NHS to care for loved ones. For the full report go to:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/identifying-assessing-carer-hlth-wellbeing.pdf>



NHS England has published a toolkit, that sets out how all services can work together to identify and support carers. The easy read version of this is available here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/working-together-to-support-carers-easy-read-document/>

The Carers' Trust ran a campaign to get Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to do more to identify carers, by using the toolkit that NHS England provided (see link above). The campaign has now ended, but details of it are available here: <https://carers.org/carers-toolkit-campaign>