



Family Carers Guide May 2018

Mental Health

	<p>Many carers who we spoke to in groups and individually reported feeling tired, anxious and sad at least sometimes. More than half of the carers who responded to our survey said they were worried about being isolated.</p> <p>Carers told us that when they felt supported themselves, they were better carers. One carer said getting support for themselves was like putting food in the freezer: you can't just take things out or you'll have nothing left!</p> <p>We know that 1 in 4 people will have a mental health problem at some time in their life, and that poor mental health and poor physical health often go together, so it's really important that everyone gets the support they need to stay healthy.</p>
	<p>Positive practice:</p> <p>Many GP practices encourage carers to register with them as carers and say who they care for. This can help carers get support, and reassurance that if there was a medical emergency that took them away from home, the NHS would know that they are a carer and that someone else would need to look after the person they usually care for.</p>



Local areas have different ways of giving mental health support to carers. For example, Carers Leeds have a Mental Health Drop-in every Friday from 12:30-2:30pm at Leeds Civic Hall, where carers can get support and advice and help contacting other organisations. Newcastle Carers have a telephone support service for carers, www.newcastlecarers.org.uk/our-services/listening-link where carers are matched with volunteers who are there to listen and provide support and encouragement.

Local carers' groups often have meetings where carers can get together, talk or share problems. Many carers find this helpful and feel that other carers understand the pressures of caring in a way that non-carers don't. These groups can be safe places to share your worries with people who understand and won't judge you. As an example, Carers Wakefield run several support groups, including ones for working carers and male carers, and several local groups. A full list is on their website at www.carerswakefield.org.uk/our-services/support-groups

Other areas have their own groups, and Local Authorities, charities and GPs' surgeries can help carers find out what's available in their area.

Online groups can also give great support, especially where carers feel isolated because of where they live, the fact that they work during the day when many carers' groups meet, or because they feel shy about meeting new people. Sites like Facebook have a lot of



specialist groups. Some are based in a certain area - if you search for **Sheffield + carers** on Facebook for example, you will find the Sheffield Carers Centre page. Others are groups who focus on specific conditions or needs, for example learning disabilities or autism. Major charities like Mencap have Facebook pages as well as their websites.



Resources:

Carers UK has a lot of useful information on staying healthy as a carer, including information on stress and depression, which are common for carers.

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/stress-and-depression



The Carers' Trust and Royal College of Psychiatrists (doctors who treat people with mental health problems) have produced some factsheets about mental health for carers.

www.carersuk.org/article/mental-health-factsheets

The National Autistic Society have set up Parent to Parent (P2P).

www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/parent-to-parent.aspx



It is a UK-wide confidential telephone service providing emotional support to parents and carers of children or adults with autism.

There also lots of resources which are useful for everyone, not just carers. NHS Choices has



a webpage that lists all sorts of ways of getting help.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/

The charity Mind also has an excellent website with a lot of information and advice on mental health.

www.mind.org.uk

Some carers have recommended an approach called WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan), sometimes called a WAP, which is a way for people to manage their own mental health after some initial training. Mind have some information on their website and courses about W(R)AP are provided by various carers' organisations – contact your local carers centre to see if they offer them.

www.mind.org.uk/media/1593680/guide-to-waps.pdf

Some carers have also used a Mindfulness approach to their mental health.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/

This includes paying more attention to how you are feeling in that moment and is similar to meditation. Some carers' groups deliver mindfulness training – ask your local carers' centre if they do.

If you are feeling very distressed, you can contact the Samaritans on their free 24-hour helpline on 116 123. Their website also has lots of information on good mental health.

www.samaritans.org



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).

www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/pages/carers-assessment.aspx

The assessment should consider the impact the care and support you provide is having on your own mental and physical health. More details of the carer's assessment can be found on the weblink above. 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's 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.

We now have a good understanding of the link between mental and physical health. The Mental Health Foundation says that depression has been linked to:

- a 67% increased risk of death from heart disease
- a 50% increased risk of death from cancer.

A better understanding of the link can help carers understand the importance of their own mental health and wellbeing. More information is here.

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/p/physical-health-and-mental-health

In 2011, the government published a mental health strategy that set out how services should be improved, including an Easy Read version.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/no-health-without-mental-health-a-cross-government-outcomes-strategy>