



CARING FOR CARERS

What causes stress for carers?

Being a carer can provide great satisfaction, but it can also be very stressful. Up to half of all carers experience significant stress. Identifying the causes of stress is an important part of self-care and can also help you to seek appropriate support.

Becoming a carer for your parent, partner or child inevitably changes your relationship. This can be emotionally upsetting. Being a carer can be overwhelming, particularly if you're worried about how you'll manage or if there is financial strain.

There can be stressful family adjustments that have to be made, perhaps causing disrupted routines or loss of privacy. It can also be stressful if your freedom is restricted or you have to change your personal plans (e.g. if you could not go on holiday or had to turn down a job).

Stress-related symptoms in carers

Most of people are familiar with the 'tension headache'. Stress also increases your risk of developing back pain. A four-year study of nurses revealed that psychological stress was the most consistent predictor of which nurse would develop back pain.

What we know from this and many similar studies is that our bodies develop more symptoms when we have stress and tension in our lives. More than two thirds of carers already have back pain. Here are some common symptoms that can be stress-related:

- * Feeling low in energy
- * Pain in the lower back
- * Headaches
- * Soreness of muscles
- * Hot or cold spells
- * Difficulty in breathing
- * Numbness or tingling
- * Faintness or dizziness
- * Pains in the heart or chest
- * Heavy feeling in arms or legs
- * Weakness in parts of the body
- * A lump in the throat

What if you have high stress levels?

First of all, make sure you are getting the practical support you need. Make sure you have had a carer's assessment from your local authority and that you are getting all the welfare benefits you are entitled to.

Contact a local carer's organisation, such as a carer's centre, which can help you with this. Support from other carers can also be very helpful – they may be able to give you tips on how to cope, or just listen and help you feel less isolated.

Make sure you get a break, and keep up with some of the activities you enjoy which you may have stopped due to your caring role. Stay connected with your friends and family. Don't be afraid to ask people to help you – sometimes people just don't know what you need and may feel awkward about asking you.

There is no physical health without mental health. IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) is a Government scheme that helps people who struggling with psychological issues. If you feel you would benefit from professional help to deal with stress, anxiety or depression speak to you GP or search online for IAPT in your area.

Carer assessment

As a carer you are entitled to a carer's assessment to help you talk through what would help you to cope. You can ask for one from your local authority. There are also likely to be specific services in your area to help you such as a carer's centre, where you can get practical help and also support from other carers in similar positions to yourself.

Are you a young carer?

Did you know that there are as many as 700,000 young carers under the age of 18 in the UK? Many young carers feel that helping their family member is an important part of their life, but it is also important that young people are not taking on caring roles which might harm them.

Being a young carer might have an impact on your physical or mental health. Many young carers often find it difficult to keep up at school, or are even bullied about being a carer.

If you are a young carer, it's important to tell someone you trust, for example a teacher. You are entitled to an assessment of your needs and there is support available. Many areas have young carer services which may be able to help.

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