



Caring for elderly relatives

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Caring for elderly relatives is more common than one might think and statistics show that at least 1 in 5 adults current identify as caregivers in the UK.

Being a caregiver is no easy feat; it can be a difficult and consuming job, that requires organisation, patience and compromise. When caring for an elderly relative, lots of considerations need to be made, from task management, time management, to building a solid support system.

You might wonder how so many people with full-time or part-time jobs can juggle caregiving with their careers, whilst staying on top of everyday responsibilities. The good news is it is possible, though it can also be challenging. With new advancements in technology and medicine coming to light every day, there is a range of tools and resources at your disposal that can help you in caring for a family member.

So, whether you've been caring for a relative for some time, or are new to your caring journey, you've come to the right place. We've put together this guide to help you with the essential considerations of caring, so you can prioritise what matters most and find the support you need along the way.

Becoming a caregiver

In many cases, being a carer for a family member is an unpaid job that we do to support someone in need – a parent, grandparent, or similar. The amount of work and responsibility required as a carer depends entirely on the person you're caring for, so it's worth taking a moment to reflect on what being a caregiver means in your situation. Is your role to clean the house once a week, or do you need to be on-hand for daily support?

Depending on your situation, you might become a carer gradually, where support becomes required due to disability, illness, or something similar. As people get older, or less able, certain tasks themselves, such as running errands or cleaning around the house. Alternatively, you might inherit the role, if looking after someone that has required support their entire life.

Set realistic expectations

It's no secret that there are challenges that come with being a caregiver. The role can be demanding, so spend some time considering your circumstances before committing. Work out the level of support you need to provide and identify how and whether this is something you're able to provide in your week. You want to be realistic with how much time and attention you can contribute as a caregiver to your family member. Recognising your own boundaries will help you find a healthy balance between caring for them, living your own life and making time for other family and friends.

Create a balanced routine

Creating a schedule that balances your work commitments with your caregiving responsibilities is crucial. It will help reduce the stress that comes with the role and establish a level of consistency for you and your loved one. Consistency is key. The routine could include set times for essential tasks such as meal preparation, administering medication, and providing transportation as needed. Time management is a significant factor in developing a routine that works. It can be easy to get held up in spending too much time as a caregiver, sacrificing your personal time.



Financial support as a caregiver

Based on your current income, you could be entitled to receive benefits from the government, known as a carer's allowance. If you meet the requirements of caring for someone in need, you could receive a weekly payment to help offset financial obligations.

While there is an earnings limit, some basic eligibility requirements for the payment include being at least 16 years old, not enrolled in a full-time educational institution, and dedicating at least 35 hours a week as a caregiver. You'll be required to provide supporting documentation about yourself and the person you care for to receive government financial support. To learn more about this or apply, visit your local government's website to submit an application online.

Communicate with your employer

As a carer, lots of employers recognise the importance of this role and the demands it can have on your time. Some employers offer flexible work arrangements that enable you to work from home as needed, or can help reduce your workload. Additionally, an increasing number of organisations provide counselling and support programs to support your mental health and wellbeing, as you balance being a caregiver with your job.

Depending on the flexible work policies in place, your company may have additional assistance programs such as elder care referrals, to help you save time with finding transportation services, setting up meal deliveries, medical support, and more. Don't wait until an emergency to arise before having a conversation with your manager or HR. Let them know about your situation and you might be surprised by the amount of support they can provide to help you with your caring role. And if not, at least they will be aware of your situation in case any emergencies arise.



Looking after yourself

While you could be great at juggling all the responsibilities of caregiving, working, and running a household, everyone has limitations. If you're not taking care of your well-being, this could negatively impact your ability to care for your loved one. Respecting and recognising that you will need extra support is important, so listen to your mind and body.

Looking after your mental, physical, and emotional health will ensure you are in the best condition to continue doing what you do best. Here are some ways to look after your health and wellbeing, whilst continuing to be productive:

- 1 Build self-care into your weekly routine.** Whether waking up 30 minutes earlier each morning to get a stretch in, taking a longer mid-day break for a stroll in the park, or scheduling some reading in your night time routine, take some time to do something relaxing for yourself.
- 2 Find your support system.** As your loved one's caregiver, they will lean on you for support. As a result, you may feel a lot of pressure and stress, potentially impacting your mental health. You may find yourself needing a support system of your own, and that's okay. Caregiving can be an isolating experience, so connecting with others going through similar experiences can be enlightening. Whether you decide to join a local caregiver support group or have someone you trust that you can go to in any time of need, it's crucial that you build a support network that not only encourages you, but empowers you to feel confident in yourself and other aspects of your life.



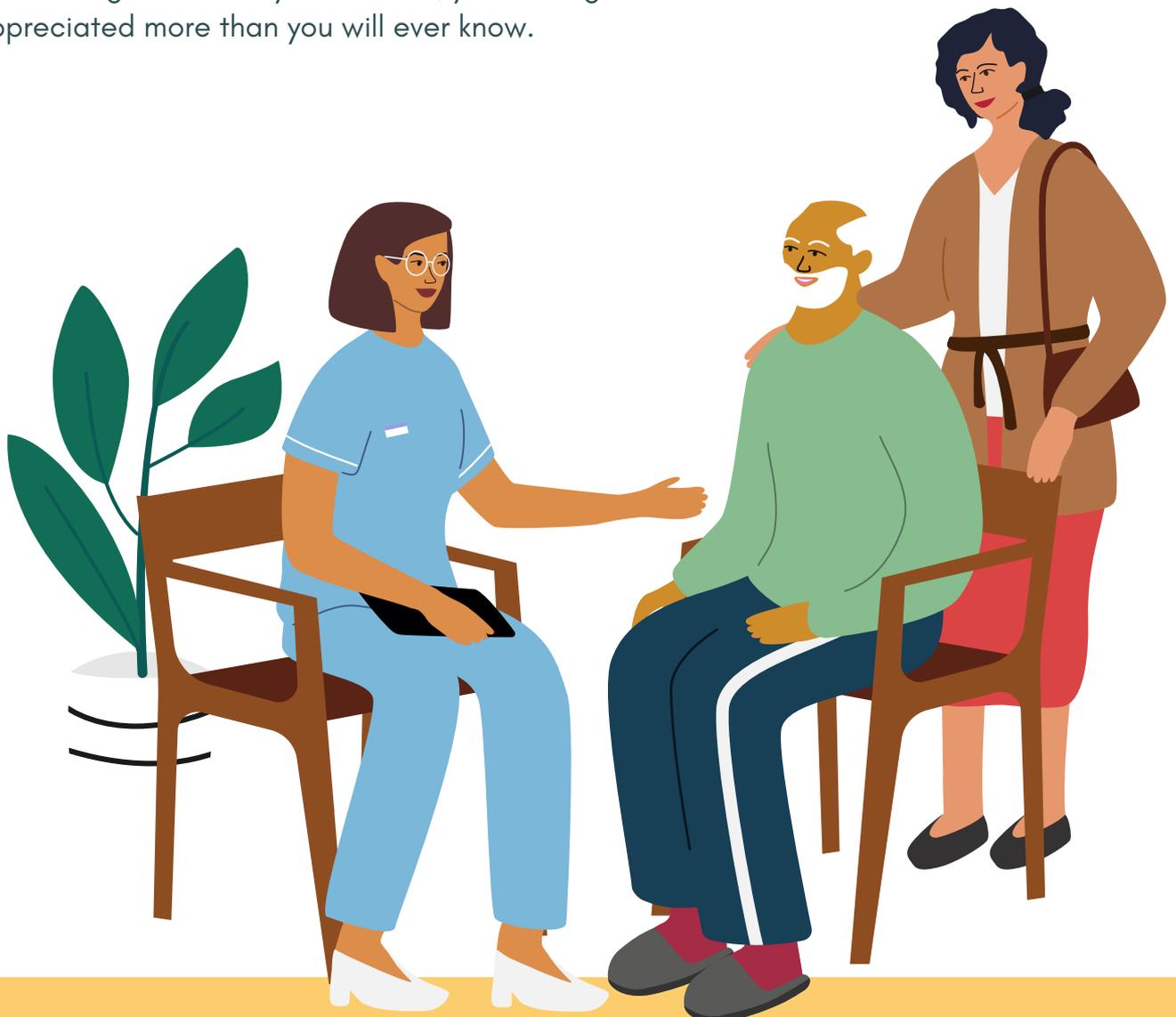
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Pair a balanced diet with regular movement. A balanced meal plan will ensure you receive sufficient nutrients your body needs to stay alert and energised. There's a reason why people say breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Skipping a meal and a lack of regular exercise is detrimental to your overall wellbeing and decision making, so try to make healthy choices where possible.

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Find a hobby. Engaging in hobbies helps keep your brain stimulated. Hobbies are a great way to provide some separation from your daily stresses, as well as boost your serotonin levels, which is critical for caregivers. Having interests and hobbies of your own will help maintain your identity, preventing you from getting lost in the shuffle of managing a working job and the role of a caregiver.

In this role, no two days are alike. There might be days where you feel overwhelmed or exhausted from looking after someone else. It's important to remember to ask for help when you need to. While it might not always feel like it, your caring contribution is appreciated more than you will ever know.





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