



Comprehensive guide to being a working carer

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When we talk about working carers, who are we talking about?

A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member, who due to illness, disability, mental health, or addiction, cannot cope without their support. There is no 'typical' carer and people take on caring responsibilities in all kinds of different situations. Responsibilities might cover things like attending appointments, shopping and housework, managing someone's financial affairs, providing emotional support or personal care.

It's estimated that carers make up 11% of the total UK workforce, or 1 in 9 employees (Employers for Carers). Some of these people will have caring responsibilities but won't identify as carers - we call this 'hidden carers'. Every year, over 2 million people become carers, some overnight, some more gradually. The reality is that most of us will take on a caring role at some point in our lives.

Myths vs facts of being an unpaid carer



MYTH: To count as a carer you must spend a minimum amount of time each week caring.



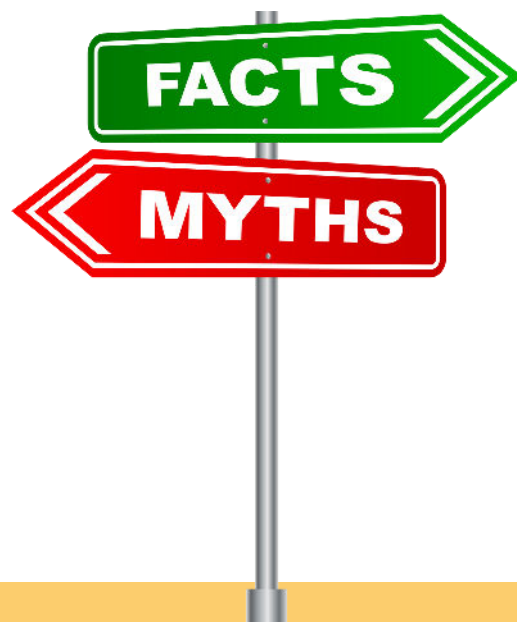
FACT: To be entitled to the Carers Allowance benefit you must spend at least 35 hours a week caring (amongst other eligibility criteria) however there is no minimum to be counted as a carer and be entitled to other forms of support.



MYTH: Carers must live with the person they care for, or at least in the same town.



FACT: Many people, especially in the workforce, are distance carers which means that the person they care for does not live with them or near them.





MYTH: You cannot be a carer if the person has another family member who does more than you, or if they have paid carers to support them.



FACT: You still count as a carer. The person you care for may have to name their main carer as a contact person for the GP surgery or hospital, but that does not mean that you are not also their carer.



MYTH: Carers choose to take on a caring role.



FACT: Some carers may choose to take on a caring role, but for many carers this decision can feel like an obligation or a duty.



MYTH: Working carers do not have any rights and are not entitled to support.



FACT: All carers are entitled to certain rights and support, although in reality many carers feel that the support available to them is not sufficient to meet their needs.

The impact of a taking on a caring role

Our society relies on the contribution of unpaid carers to function. Findings from Carers UK and the University of Sheffield in 2023 show that unpaid carers in England and Wales contribute a staggering £445 million to the economy in England and Wales **every day** – that's £162 billion per year. This makes the value of unpaid care equivalent to a second NHS in England and Wales, which in 2020/21 received an estimated £164 billion in funding.

Despite providing such an important and vital role in our society and to our economy, many unpaid carers feel invisible and unsupported. Many people can recognise positive aspects to caring, but overall we know that providing unpaid care can take a heavy toll. This is especially true when carers feel unsupported. The 2022 State of Caring Report (Carers UK) found that:

- Nearly a third of carers said their mental health was bad or very bad.
- 77% of carers said they felt lonely sometimes or often.
- Three quarters of working carers worry about continuing to juggle work and care.
- 42% of working carers said they were worried about not having time to prioritise their physical and mental health.

Carers rights at work

Carers have certain rights at work, both statutory and contractual. This means that all carers are entitled to certain things by law, but that your workplace may also have additional policies for carers. You can usually find these in your contract or staff handbook, or you can ask your HR department or manager.

The right to request flexible working

Currently, carers can request flexible working if they have worked for their employer for at least 6 months. They can only make one request a year (see [ACAS Code of Practice on flexible working requests](#)). From 2024 employees (in England, Scotland or Wales) will be able to request flexible working from day one of their employment and can ask for changes twice in 12 months (see [Employment Relations \(Flexible Working\) Act 2023](#)). Be aware that your employer is under no obligation to agree to your request.

The right to time off in emergencies/for dependants

The Carer's Leave Act 2023 (due to come into effect in Spring 2024) means carers can request 5 days of (unpaid) leave to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. This is a right from day 1 of employment and the leave can be taken flexibly. This will enhance the current rights that all employees have to a 'reasonable' amount of (unpaid) time off to deal with an emergency or unforeseen matter related to a dependent.

https://www.hr-inform.co.uk/employment_law/time-off-for-dependants-and-carers-leave



The right to parental leave

Parent carers with a disabled child aged up to 18 will also be entitled to 18 weeks' (unpaid) leave per child, if they have worked for the same employer for 12 months.

Note: Employees taking their carer's leave entitlement are protected from dismissal or any detriment as a result of having taken time off, in the same way as other forms of family related leave.

Protection from discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 protects carers in England, Wales and Scotland against direct discrimination or harassment. Whilst being a carer is not a 'protected characteristic', carers are protected through being associated with someone who is elderly or has a disability and cannot be treated less favourably than people who do not have caring responsibilities. In Northern Ireland, carers are protected under the Human Rights Act and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.



Talking to your manager and colleagues about being a carer

Many carers find it difficult talking to managers and colleagues about their caring role. There can be many reasons for this including:

- Not wanting to disclose the friend, partner or family member's health condition (this can be especially true for carers of people with mental health conditions or addictions).
- Fears of being passed over for opportunities and promotions.
- A belief that it won't make any difference, talking about it won't help.
- Worries that colleagues will resent you if you get any 'special treatment' such as more flexible working hours.

However, we know that employees who feel supported by their managers are better able to juggle the demands of work and caring. Feeling supported as a carer at work does not just benefit you, it also makes good business sense for your employer because it allows employers to retain valued and experienced staff, increase staff resilience, engagement and productivity and reduce recruitment costs.

It is your choice whether you tell your employer if you are a carer or not. If you would like to, you may find it helpful to consider the following:

1. Ask your manager to set aside time for the conversation so that you can speak in private and do not feel rushed.
2. Prepare for the conversation by thinking about what you are comfortable disclosing to your manager. You do not have to share the condition for the person you care for, but it may help your manager to understand the situation better if you do.
3. Think about what would support you better at work. You are best placed to suggest solutions as you will know what kinds of issues might arise and what would help in those situations. You may find that your manager's understanding is supportive in itself, but you might also consider asking for a change in your regular working hours, more flexible working hours, opportunities to work remotely, or time off to attend personal therapy or other forms of support.
4. Thank your manager for listening and allowing you to speak frankly about a personal situation, and bear in mind that it may take some time for your manager to get back to you regarding your requests as they may have to liaise with HR and senior management first.

Support available

The first port of call for support as a carer will be your local carers organisations (your local authority should have information on what organisations exist where you live, or where the person you care for lives). The services offered here will vary depending on location but typically include access to free benefits advice for you and the person you care for, carers support group, social and wellbeing activities, and access to free or low-cost counselling. Most will also offer Carers Needs Assessments, in which you will have the opportunity to talk about how your caring role is impacting you physically, mentally and financially.

All adult carers are entitled to receive a Carers Needs Assessment under the Care Act 2014, and your local authority has a statutory obligation to provide support to you if you have eligible needs.

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/practical-support/carers-assessment/>

More information can be found at:

[Employers for Carers](#)

[Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development](#)

[Carers UK](#)

[ACAS](#)

[Equality Advisory and Support Service](#)

You can also receive support through Wellness Cloud, which offers specialist carer coaching sessions and a regular carer meet up group, where you can meet other working carers to give and receive support on the issues that affect you.





Wellness Cloud and Parent Cloud give you easy remote access to experts and specialists, who can support you with being a carer, along with many other issues.

For further information, or to book a session online with one of our specialists, visit our website.

www.the-wellness-cloud.com



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