

Foothold

WELLBEING ARTICLE 11

SELF-CARE FOR CARERS

There are approximately 6.4 million carers in the United Kingdom (UK) today, with around 3 million balancing ongoing care commitments with paid employment. These figures are rising and by year 2037, experts estimate there will be 9 million carers spread across the UK. In today's article, we discuss self-care for carers, with a view to helping those that generously provide life-changing support to friends, family and loved ones.



REWARDING & CHALLENGING



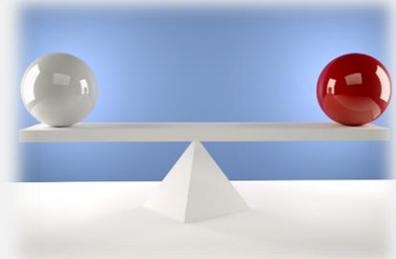
Caring is both rewarding and essential however, the pressures associated with doing such meaningful work is substantial, and certainly varies according to the type of challenges being faced. Disability, physical or mental illness, addiction and age-related conditions all create different obstacles that need to be overcome, so it's essential you access and utilise specialist support where it's offered and available.

THE COST OF CARING

Everyone cares; young adults sometimes need to assist their parents or guardians, mature citizens are found supporting their partners, and many middle-aged professionals, such as engineers, find themselves caring for relatives and family members. Regardless of the circumstance, when someone starts to become a regular carer, they often notice that the added responsibility has an effect upon their financial situation, relationships, physical health and sense of identity. This often leads to a lack of self-esteem, aches and pains and increased levels of long-term tension. In short, caring has a big impact on your physical & mental wellness and it will sometimes negatively affect your overall wellbeing. Caring is really about supporting another who's in need, and enabling them to feel better and live a satisfying life. The goal is never to damage your own health and wellness in the process.

SELF-CARE & FINDING BALANCE

Sacrificing your health and wellbeing to care for another is admirable, but mostly unnecessary and short-sighted. Remember, it's your current health that allows you to make a difference and provide essential support for another, so it's important you look after yourself too. Your own health will easily tolerate difficulty, tension and pressure when it's given an opportunity to rest, replenish and recover. It's absolutely essential that you recognise this necessity and take steps to ensure balance in your life, particularly when long-term care for is required. Do not forget, even soldiers in life-threatening situations recognise they still require adequate sleep and rest!



STAY PHYSICALLY HEALTHY

By staying physically strong and healthy, you're able to provide essential support and feel good inside. Here are four practical tips for positively influencing your condition;

1. **NUTRITION** – Aim to eat a balanced diet that's rich in nutrients, anti-oxidants and fibre. Your portion size and calorie intake should match your daily energy consumption (unless you wish to cut or gain weight) and your plate(s) should consist of around 50% vegetables, include protein, essential fats and some sources of carbohydrate. Include some low-fructose fruits each day and try to limit overly starchy food (white pastas etc) refined sugar and sweeteners.
2. **EXERCISE** – Your body is designed for movement and put simply, 'staying still can kill' Moderate exercise, such as walking briskly 30mins, 5 days per week, will support your health, keep you sharp between the ears, release a range of feel good chemicals and lower stress hormones. Adding some form of resistance training is good for keeping your core and that all important back strong. For more information, see Foothold Wellbeing Article No.10
3. **REST** – Wasting time is not wasted time! Everyone benefits from a break or change of activity, regardless of how much you enjoy doing what you do. Schedule moments of time during the week and month where you get do the things that nourish and recharge you. Depending on the level and intensity of the care you provide, it may be worth considering respite care options.
4. **SLEEP** – A continuous lack of sleep will negatively affect your mood, relationships, eating habits and health. So, enhance the quantity and quality of your sleep by ensuring daily activity, limiting caffeine intake, maintaining a regular bedtime, eliminating electronics and light from the bedroom, keeping cool and avoiding heavy meals and alcohol before bed. For more information, see Foothold Wellbeing Article No.5

SUPPORT YOUR WELLBEING

When you combine physical health & wellness, with a sense of satisfaction or contentment with life, your wellbeing will be high. And by following the advice noted below, you'll be on the path to feeling great;

A) BE SOCIAL – By engaging in a variety of social relationships, you naturally relieve tension and prevent feelings of isolation from surfacing. Where possible, get involved with events and activities where you share fun experiences, instead of just time. This will help you bond easier, increase the amount of regular enjoyable experiences in your life



and ensure a reasonable work-care-life balance is established. Remember, medical and social teams offer quality-assured help, support, and advice where necessary.

B) DO SOMETHING PERSONAL & MEANINGFUL – Decide what's important to you, then create or continue doing something that is uniquely yours and reflects your personal values. For example, if fitness interests you, consider joining a club (perhaps badminton) so you can pursue a skill and hit personal targets. If your interests are more orientated towards the acquisition of knowledge or reading, search for a local book club that you can participate in, either in person or at distance via technology. In short, by staying involved in something that's uniquely yours, you maintain your sense of self-identity, add purpose and meaning to your interests and create a life that feels personally satisfying.

C) BE KIND TO YOURSELF – When you dedicate a good quantity of your personal time to supporting a friend, family member or loved one, there will be times where you feel exhausted, frustrated or experience a sense of resentment. This can create feelings of guilt when you negatively judge yourself. So, don't fall into the trap of becoming your own worst critic, focus on everything that you are and do, rather on what you fear you're not. Accepting yourself and your circumstances will significantly reduce the potential for anxiety-based feelings.

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