

looking after yourself (your emotional and physical needs)

Being a carer can be **immensely rewarding**. It is also extremely demanding, and can take its toll, both physically and mentally. Carers are often so busy coping with the demands made upon them that they neglect **their own needs** and may become stressed and feel unable to cope.

It is essential to remember to **look after yourself**, as well as the person you are caring for. Being continually stressed can lead to overtiredness, insomnia, headaches and muscular weakness, and can make you more prone to colds and flu, which may then make you even more stressed. Even if you feel you don't have time to slow down, your body may force you to. It may be hard to let go, but don't be afraid to ask for support, either emotional or practical.

This factsheet includes suggestions about **ways of coping** with emotional stress you may experience and gives sources of further information and advice. The factsheet *Time for yourself* looks at ways of taking a break and having some leisure time,

Social services includes information on accessing **practical support** with your caring responsibilities.

You may also find the Carers UK booklet *New to caring?* helpful. It can be downloaded from www.carersuk.org/Information/Newtocaring



Dealing with stress

TALKING

There are many ways of coping with stress. One of the most effective is to talk about it.

Talking can help you:

- release and sort out your feelings and emotions, such as frustration, resentment, guilt, anger, fear, loneliness and depression
- make decisions
- find solutions.

You could talk to your GP, a close friend, a member of your family, a social worker, another carer, a counsellor or a trained volunteer. There are also a number of telephone helplines – some which operate 24 hours – that offer support. Some organisations also provide e-mail support.

You may prefer to speak to someone you don't know about your feelings. A counsellor may be more objective than a friend or relative, and can help you to look at your circumstances in a new way.

You may be able to find a suitable counsellor by talking to your GP. Some practices include a counsellor or can refer patients for counselling on the NHS.

VOLUNTARY GROUPS

A number of voluntary groups provide counselling, for either no charge or a small fee. These include groups working with specific minority ethnic communities, for people with disabilities, or relating to particular physical or mental health problems. Some are listed below; contact **Brent Carers Centre** (020 8795 6240) for details of others.

- **Brent Mind** (020 8451 3200, info@brentmind.com, www.brentmind.com) – services include stress counselling for carers.
- **Careline** (0845 122 8622, www.carelineuk.org) – confidential telephone counselling; also some face to face counselling; operates Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm.
- **Muslim Women's Helpline** (020 8904 8193/ 020 8908 6715) – confidential telephone counselling and, where appropriate, face to face counselling.
- **National Drugs Helpline** – also known as **Talk to Frank** (0800 77 66 00 – freephone, <http://talktofrank.com>) – information, advice and support, including details of local services; available 24 hours every day of the year. Telephone support is available in 120 languages.



- **Relate London North West** (020 8427 8694, relate-cm@ukf.net, www.relatelondonnw.org.uk) – counselling for anyone with problems in a relationship, past or present, married or unmarried, heterosexual or homosexual; couples or individuals are seen; ring for an appointment. Community languages spoken. It is also possible to email a counsellor via the main Relate website www.relate.org.uk
- **The Samaritans** provide 24-hour telephone counselling on 08457 90 90 90 (local call rate) every day of the year, www.samaritans.org.uk. You can also write to them at Chris PO Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA or e-mail them at jo@samaritans.org, if you don't mind your identity being known. If you want to send an anonymous e-mail, visit www.hotmail.com or www.yahoo.co.uk to create a free e-mail address, which will not identify you. **Brent Samaritans** (020 8961 6181) also offers face to face counselling; ring for an appointment.
- **Sexual Health Helpline** (freephone 0800 567 123, textphone 0800 917 8765, www.condomessentialwear.co.uk) – for anyone concerned about sexual health, including HIV and AIDS; available 24 hours every day of the year.
- **SIRI** (0800 018 2144, info@siricounselling.com, www.siricounselling.com) – a local, low cost counselling service available to everybody.
- **wpf** (020 7361 4800, counselling@wpf.org.uk, www.wpf.org.uk) – provides counselling for individuals who may be lonely, anxious or depressed, or have difficulties in relationships, find life a struggle or have other emotional difficulties. Clients pay between £15 and £50, according to their financial circumstances.
- **Willesden Centre for Psychological Treatment** (020 8438 1770) – provides psychotherapy services, which could include counselling for carers. Referral is usually through a GP; no self-referral.

For a list of local **private counsellors** contact the British Association for Counselling (0870 443 5219, info@bacp.co.uk) or see www.bacp.co.uk. Private counselling can be expensive, so always check the fees before making a booking.

The Admiral Nurse Service

Admiral Nurses support people caring for people with a dementing illness, which can include Parkinson's disease and AIDS, as well as Alzheimer's and multi-infarct dementia.

The Nurses provide emotional support, as well as practical advice and information. The service is free, operates on the basis of self-referral, and Nurses can visit your home or another venue of your choice. For further information and to put your name on the waiting list telephone 020 8830 4459.

Mutual support

Talking with other carers can be extremely helpful. Carers' support groups offer carers the opportunity to come together and share their experiences.

Some groups invite speakers, some include relaxation sessions and organise social activities. The format of the group meetings will be determined by the carers themselves.

Brent Carers Centre (020 8795 6240) runs several support groups and has details of others. It is worth checking any organisation you are in contact with to see whether it runs a group. It may be possible to get help with transport and respite care to enable you to attend the groups.

Looking after your health

You will find it easier to cope with stress if you are physically healthy. Information about local health services is given in the factsheet *Health issues*, but it will also help if you eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep and take exercise.

There are a number of **healthy living initiatives** in the borough. Contact Brent Carers Centre (020 8795 6240) for details.

Complementary therapies can be particularly suitable for carers, as therapists use a holistic approach, which looks at the whole person, rather than concentrating on a particular symptom. Therapies include homeopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture and aromatherapy.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Aromatherapy Council** (0870 774 3477, info@aromatherapycouncil.org.uk, www.aromatherapycouncil.org.uk)

- **British Acupuncture Council** (020 8735 0400, info@acupuncture.org.uk, www.acupuncture.org.uk)
- **British Chiropractic Association** (0118 950 5950, enquiries@chiropractic-uk.co.uk, www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk)
- **British Homeopathic Association** (0870 444 3950, info@trusthomeopathy.org, www.trusthomeopathy.org)
- **General Council for Massage Therapy** (0870 850 4452, info@gcmt.org.uk, www.gcmt.org.uk)
- **General Osteopathic Council** (020 7357 6655, info@osteopathy.org.uk, www.osteopathy.org.uk)
- **Institute for Complementary Medicine** (020 7237 5165, info@i-c-m.co.uk, www.i-c-m.co.uk)

Relaxation

Relaxation can also help relieve stress. The following breathing exercise is taken from Carers UK's booklet

When caring becomes a crisis (no longer available).

1. Sit or lie comfortably on the floor (or in bed or the bath if it's the only time you get to yourself).
2. Breathe in, count one, then breathe out, counting one. Breathe in, count one, two, then breathe out, counting one, two.
3. Keep going slowly and regularly until you get to five (or even ten if you can manage it).

The aim is to empty your mind of everything but your deep and regular breathing. Saying the numbers means that your brain can't focus on anything else. If you find unwanted thoughts start to creep in, start breathing again at 'one' and try again. With enough practice it will eventually become second nature and you will be able to relax whenever you need to.

Brent Carers Centre runs a **massage project**, which offers massage sessions to carers. Telephone 020 8795 6240 for details.

A number of **adult education classes** cover relaxation techniques, including yoga, aromatherapy and meditation. Contact Brent Adult and Community Education Service (020 8838 2882, guidance.baces@brent.gov.uk, www.brent.gov.uk/baces or pick up a prospectus from a One Stop Shop or library. For details of courses in other boroughs see *Floodlight*, available in libraries and from newsagents and on www.floodlight.co.uk.

Regular exercise, such as swimming, jogging, cycling or keep fit can also help you relax by unwinding tight muscles. For details of local keep fit classes contact Brent Adult and Community Education Service (see above). For details of sports facilities in the borough see the factsheet *Time for Yourself*.

Getting a break

Taking a break – however short – may help relieve your stress and relax you.

Information about opportunities for respite care and holidays is given in the factsheets *Time for yourself* and *Social services*.

Employment

You may feel stressed because you are combining caring with paid employment and, in effect, doing two full-time jobs.

If you have not already done so, it may be beneficial to tell your employer that you are a carer. Some employers operate family-friendly working practices, which include flexible working hours, compassionate leave and unpaid leave. Some have a policy specifically relating to carers. If you are not sure about your employer's policies talk to your personnel officer, union representative or another staff member.

ANNUAL LEAVE

All employees are entitled to 20 days' paid annual leave (24 from October 2007) (pro rata for part-time workers), and have the right to unpaid time off work to look after dependants and to deal with family emergencies.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Parents of children aged under six, or disabled children under 18, and carers of adults* with at least 26 weeks' service, have the right to apply to work flexibly. This could include, for example, changing working hours, or working from home.

**A carer is defined as an employee who is, or expects to be, caring for an adult who is married to, or the partner or civil partner of the employee, or a near relative of the employee, or who falls into neither category but lives at the same address as the employee.*

PARENTAL LEAVE

Anyone who has worked for an employer for at least a year and is responsible for a child (whether by birth or adoption) is entitled to 13 weeks' parental leave (per parent) before their child's fifth birthday. If you have a disabled child for whom you receive Disabled Living Allowance, the leave increases to 18 weeks, and can be taken up to the child's 18th birthday.

You can usually take a maximum of four weeks' parental leave in a year. If your child is disabled you can take the leave as a day or multiples of a day; if not you must take the leave in weekly blocks.

Parental leave is usually unpaid, but some employers offer paid leave – check your employer's policy.

MATERNITY/PATERNITY/ADOPTION LEAVE

All pregnant employees, regardless of length of service or number of hours worked, are entitled to 52 weeks' maternity leave. This is made up of 26 weeks' ordinary maternity leave, during which time the contract of employment continues, and the employee must receive all her contractual benefits except (unless agreed otherwise) wages or salary and 26 weeks' additional maternity leave, during which the contract of employment continues, but only certain terms apply.

Fathers with 26 weeks' service by the 15th week before the baby is due are entitled to two weeks' paid leave, which can be taken from the date of birth or up to eight weeks from the birth. Adoptive parents with 26 weeks' service are entitled to 26 weeks' paid and 26 weeks' unpaid leave. The couple can decide who takes adoptive leave and who takes paternity leave.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about balancing caring and employment see *An employees' guide to work and caring*, available from CarersUK on 0845 774 0969 or www.carersuk.org/Information/Workandcaring.

Working Families (0800 013 1313, office@workingfamilies.org.uk, www.workingfamilies.org.uk) can advise on flexible working and produces a number of publications and factsheets.

The website of **Employers for Carers** (www.carersuk.org/Employersforcarers) includes information for carers who are looking for work or are in work, or are caring and not in paid work.

Bereavement

The death of someone close to you can bring on a range of feelings – from sadness, to numbness, to anger. If you had been caring for them for a long time you may feel a loss of sense of purpose.

You may prefer to cope on your own, or with support from family or friends. But if you need someone to talk to – about either the emotional or practical aspects – there are a number of organisations that can offer counselling and support and give practical advice.

Brent Bereavement Services (020 8459 6818, brentbs@btinternet.com, www.brentbereavement.org) – offers a free counselling service to any Brent resident. It provides a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural service, with



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counselling in a number of languages, and can offer home visits. It operates a drop in on Wednesdays between 2pm and 4pm at Willesden Centre for Health and Care, Robson Avenue, London NW10 3RY.

Cancerbackup (0808 800 1234, www.cancerbackup.org.uk) – information, emotional support and counselling to people who have been bereaved through cancer.

The Compassionate Friends (helpline 08451 23 23 04, 10am -4pm and 6.30pm-10.30pm, every day of the year, info@tcf.org.uk, www.tcf.org.uk) – a national service for parents whose child has died. Operates a national helpline, staffed by bereaved parents, local telephone support or visits, one-to-one and group support. Publishes a number of leaflets, available from 0845 120 3785 or the website.

Cruse Bereavement Care (bereavement line 0870 167 1677, helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk, www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) – free help, support and advice to bereaved people. Publishes a number of booklets, leaflets and audio cassettes.

Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service

(020 8457 9710, jbcsc@jvisit.org.uk, www.jvisit.org.uk/jbcsc) – bereavement counselling and support by professionally supervised and trained voluntary counsellors.

The National Association of Widows (0845 838 2261, info@widows.org.uk, www.nawidows.org.uk) – advice and information and a network of self-help groups, including a younger widows contact list that puts widows up to the age of 50 in contact with one another.

SSAFA (0845 1300 975, info@ssafa.org.uk, www.ssafa.org.uk) – advice, help and support to families of servicemen and women who have died.

Terrence Higgins Trust (0845 12 21 200, www.tht.org.uk) – publishes the booklet *Dealing with Death and Bereavement*, which provides practical guidance for people who are dying, their carers, partners and relatives. It is available from THT Direct on 0845 12 21 200, or can be downloaded from www.tht.org.uk (click on 'Information Resources').

Remember that other factsheets in this pack may also include information useful to you



The Princess Royal Trust **Brent Carers Centre**
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