

Carers Information Sheet 5

Looking After Yourself Whilst Caring

Caring for someone can often be very physically tiring and emotionally draining. It is important then, that you take steps to look after yourself whilst you are caring. If you do not it may be that you become unwell yourself and have difficulty caring for someone else. Here are some things you can think about for yourself.

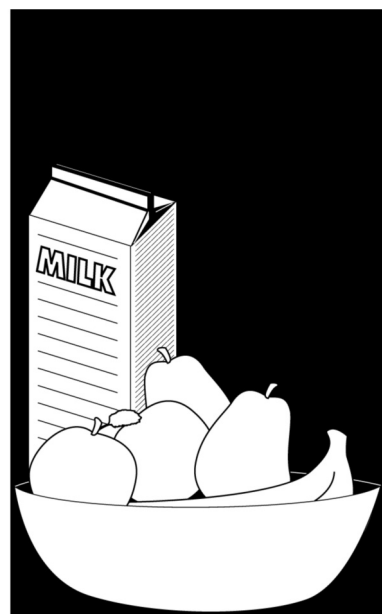
PHYSICAL NEEDS

It is important that you look after your physical health whilst caring. For example, you should attend any clinic and hospital appointments that have been booked for you. If you have problems leaving the person you care for, contact Carers Lewisham or Social Services and ask for a sitter or help with transport.

You could ask your GP or Practice Nurse for a basic health check once a year. In particular, it is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked to see if there are any signs of stress. If you are constantly feeling tired it may be worth asking for a blood test.

If you have to help your cared for person move around, by lifting and handling them, ask your local District Nurse to visit you to advise you on the best ways to do this to minimise any back or other muscle strains you may develop.

You could also ask for a Social Care and Health 'Community Care Assessment' and a 'Carers Assessment' (see leaflet 3) to see if there are some practical measures which could help you physically



with the caring. For example, someone to help you dress and undress your cared for person.

You could also contact the Occupational Therapy Service to see if there are any pieces of equipment which could help you physically care such as grab rails, bath aids, a ramp, etc.

If your cared for person falls down at home, do not pick them up, particularly if you are alone in the house. Make the person as comfortable as possible and call 999 for an ambulance. They are very happy to help. If you fall as well there would be nobody to help either of you!

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

As much as you may want to care for someone it can be an emotionally exhausting experience. Carers often need more than just practical help.

You may be feeling very much alone; you may have mixed feelings of guilt, sadness, frustration, resentment, anger. It is often a surprise and a relief for a carer to find that other carers have had similar feelings, and that talking to someone, and being LISTENED to, really can help.

There are a range of support services available to help you meet your emotional needs. For example, Carers Lewisham are happy to be available as a 'listening ear' if you need someone to talk to occasionally. We can also provide one to one counselling for carers if you feel you would like someone to talk to on a regular basis.

MEETING OTHER CARERS

Many carers find it very helpful to meet with others in the same or similar position to themselves. Carers find they can share their experiences and gain information and mutual support from meeting together. This can either be by attending a regular Carers Support Group, by attending a one off Workshop on a particular topic such as those organised by Carers Lewisham which give information about the needs of the person you care for. Carers Lewisham also organises regular 'Look After Yourself' courses and Pamper Days where carers can meet together to learn simple exercises, healthy living and relaxation techniques.

There are short term and long term groups in just about every Health Centre in the Borough. Carers Lewisham facilitates or supports a range of Support Groups. We run Groups which meet in the evening particularly for carers who may go out to work during the day. Carers Lewisham also runs one off events and workshops at the Carers Centre in Forest Hill and at other venues around the Borough.

TIME FOR YOURSELF

Having some time for yourself is essential when you are caring for someone. It gives you some time to collect your thoughts and regenerate your energy. Some carers can feel guilty about leaving their cared for person and sometimes the cared for person finds it hard to let the carer go or they are a danger if they are left alone. Despite this, time to yourself is important. **If you don't look after yourself and have occasional breaks away from your caring responsibilities, you may become ill yourself and find it difficult to continue to care.**

USEFUL ADDRESSES:

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT

CARERS LEWISHAM

Provides counselling, advice, information, a listening ear, support groups, courses and occasional respite. Open to all carers.

Tel: **020 8699 8686**

CONTACT A FAMILY

Provides support to families who have a child with special needs. Runs play groups and sessions where families can meet others in similar situations.

Tel: **020 8297 8056**

SAMARITANS

Provides someone to talk to day or night. Not only for people who feel suicidal.

Tel: **08457 90 90 90** available 24 hours.

SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH (Social Services)

Practical services based on an assessment of the needs of your cared for person and of you the carer.

Tel: **020 8314 6000**



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