



# Self Care For Carers

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**The best advice and information for carers often comes from carers themselves. Those who have experienced a caring role, have found ways of coping and adapting and have shared this information with others.**

**Carers coming together and sharing their experience can not only help inform other carers but also therapists and services.**

**Remember the work you do as a carer is invaluable.**

**In order for you to continue in your caring role it is critical that you firstly care for yourself. Maintaining your own physical and mental health and wellbeing is a priority. Learn to look after and pace yourself.**



# Self Care for Carers - Top Tips

- Eat well and keep well hydrated.
- Sleep well, get rest (seek advice if your sleep pattern is very disrupted).
- Connect with others - family, friends and support groups.
- Keep active.
- Be kind to yourself and if you are struggling, ask for help. If you can, be specific about the type of help that may benefit you such as practical, emotional, financial or other help.
- Do ask for a Carers Assessment if you feel you need more help.
- If you have any new health issues don't neglect them, speak to your GP.
- Involve the person you care for in your plans and in establishing new routines as much as you can. Try to create a few time slots each day/week that you can set-aside just for you as part of your routine.
- Think of things that you enjoy and can do if you are restricted to being at home, old or new hobbies e.g. read, bake, listen to music, knit, paint, dance, meditate, relaxation sessions.

Whilst it may be difficult to put this into practice especially when you are dealing with the sudden change that has happened to your loved one, it will really help you cope.

A stroke impacts greatly on the whole family and may change so many aspects of daily family life. This often requires families to temporarily or permanently adapt as a result. There may be many challenges to face. As a family, get as much information and support as you can from the medical and rehabilitation teams, and other established services for stroke, including NICHs.



# Staying Active as a Carer

Staying active as a carer is a very important part of self care.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Department of Health (DoH) highlight the importance of regular physical activity for everyone, and give specific guidance on the recommended amount for adults.

Don't worry if you struggle to achieve the recommended amount, engaging in any level of physical activity is beneficial.

Try and do some physical activity at least five times a week for 30 minutes. Always start small and gradually increase as your fitness improves.

If you are unable to free up a lot of time, even 5-10 minutes exercise at different stages through the day all adds together. All activity counts such as housework, gardening and using stairs. Variety and music while you exercise can keep it interesting and fun.

Being active not only helps your physical health but also your mood and may help you improve your sleep. Even if you feel exhausted because of the stress of caring, exercise can revitalise you and help with fatigue.

- Getting out to exercise can give you and your loved one some space away from each other
  - Going for a walk is one of the best exercises, by yourself or in a group.
  - You could find out what is available at your local leisure centre, swimming, gym or exercise classes.
- If it suits you better to exercise at home, you might try;
  - Step, march or jog on the spot
  - Yoga, Tai chi, Pilates or dance
  - You could choose an online exercise class you like that is suited to your ability
  - You could use equipment at home such as static bike, treadmill or light weights.



# Helping Your Family Member After Stroke

## Information

Information is vital; don't be afraid to ask questions.

It may be helpful to write down any questions you want answered or information you want clarified.

Talk to medical staff, the rehabilitation team, your GP, dedicated stroke services and charities, like NICHS and other carers.

This information will help you understand stroke and the specific effects it has had on your loved one, as each stroke survivor's problems are individual to them.

The rehabilitation team, with your loved one's consent, may give you information on;

- The teams' assessment of the specific problems your loved one has, as a result of their stroke.
- The key rehabilitation goals that have been identified and agreed to work on at different stages through the rehab journey.
- Practical advice and training on how you may safely assist and support your loved one to work to achieve their goals.
- Your loved one's progress and potential for recovery.

## Recovery

The best recovery can be achieved when there is a strong partnership between the stroke survivor, carer and the rehabilitation team.

Recovering from a stroke can be a slow process. The amount and speed of recovery will vary greatly from person to person. The biggest improvements often happen in the first 6-12 months, but change and recovery may continue for years.

It is important everyone tries to remain positive, patient and motivated. Look for progress. If your loved one is able to do any task with less support or assistance, or is able to complete it faster with less effort and fatigue these are all signs of improvement.

In the long-term continuing with the activities that have been learnt in rehab will help to achieve more independence. It is important that the stroke survivor continues to keep going and keep active as therapists reduce their involvement.

# How to Support Recovery - Top Tips

Follow the advice of the rehabilitation team to avoid risk of injury to yourself or your loved one. Only do what you feel comfortable and confident with.

- Try to be positive and whenever possible encourage your loved one to be involved in family decisions and take on some family responsibilities however small from the start.
- Focus on what they still can do and support them to be as independent as possible within their limitations.
- The amount of help your loved one needs to do an activity will vary, and they also may need extra time.
- Try to provide as many opportunities to practice activities. Repetition is essential to relearn skills that have been lost and improve stamina. This will help develop independence.
- Continue to adapt activities and the environment to support independence as the therapists have recommended such as raising a chair or getting handrails.
- Fatigue may be an issue for your loved one after their stroke. Managing fatigue may reduce their frustration, anger, and emotional distress and enable them to be more successful. It is important that their rehabilitation balances activity with rest.
- Try to establish a routine together that works for the whole family. You might list and prioritise what needs to be done such as completing their home therapy programme, attending an appointment, assisting with household chores, rest and relaxation.
- Keeping a diary or making short videos at different stages of recovery, can be useful records of progress and good for motivation.
- Try to make exercise fun perhaps doing the exercises together, with music or linked to a hobby such as practice standing balance while potting plants on a raised surface.



# Safety Considerations

## During Exercise

Whilst you will encourage your loved one to be as active as they can, it is really important they do so safely.

STOP EXERCISE IMMEDIATELY if your loved one feels or looks unwell.

- Phone 999- if they report chest pain or have new signs of further weakness in their face, arm or have altered speech
- If they have any other difficulties that you are concerned about, get them to stop and rest. If you remain concerned and it is an emergency phone 999, if it is a non-emergency get medical advice and contact their GP.
- If during exercise your loved one has discomfort or pain as they do an activity, stop that activity and get advice from their therapist.

Please remember your loved one may have other conditions in addition to their stroke that can impact on their level of activity such as angina, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, low mood or others.

It is always important to ensure they have taken their prescribed medication and it is the most suitable time to carry out an activity.

## Reducing the Risk of Falls

Please consider the following;

- Wearing good fitting supportive footwear is essential (not slippers)
- Attending podiatry for foot care
- Getting regular eyesight checks
- Removing trip hazards such as mats, leads, trailing clothes and pets
- Avoiding slips especially in areas with possible spills and wet surfaces such as bathrooms and kitchens
- Decluttering walking areas and ensuring good lighting
- Using walking aids and splints if they have been provided
- Wearing a falls alarm if the person is at risk and unsupervised

# Remember

Being a carer can be difficult but comes with great rewards as you support someone through their rehabilitation. Being a carer requires a lot of energy and patience so take time out for you.

Try not to stress or feel downhearted, as there will be days that things don't go to plan.

You may find one routine may work for a while and then it has to be changed. Try to be flexible and adapt with any new changes.

Always ask for help if needed, and take help if offered.

Please link in with your NICHS Stroke Family Support Coordinator for ongoing support and advice.



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