

Let us  
help you

Information  
for carers





We recognise the importance of supporting families and carers as well as the patients themselves. Caring for someone can be rewarding but it can also be a challenging, and at times, lonely experience. This information booklet is one of the many ways in which we would like to offer you some support – the booklet aims to offer practical advice and tips to help you, your health and your wellbeing.

## Carers and exercise

Everyone knows that physical activity is important for health and wellbeing. The emotional 'pick-me-up' and stress relief that exercise can bring can be such a vital release for carers.

You might see exercise as something that is enjoyable or you might see it as just one more thing to add to an already long list of things that need to be done! And how do you fit some exercise into the already busy and hectic schedule of caring for your loved one?

Exercise doesn't have to be regular long-distance runs or intense workouts at the gym though; it could be building some 'natural' exercise into your daily routine. You could start a regular exercise class or take up a new sport but here are some ideas to help you build some exercise into your already busy lives and gradually help you benefit from being active.

### Getting started is probably the most difficult part

- Begin small by doing some brief exercises at home – a few stretches or lifting weights
- Build up your confidence by following an exercise programme on TV, DVD or YouTube
- Set a time for yourself to do something active – start with 10 minutes a day and work your way up to 30 minutes or an hour
- Incorporate exercise into everyday activities – walk to the shops, climb the stairs, get into the garden or step up escalators instead of riding
- Listen to your favourite music and dance around the house while doing the housework – music can motivate!

If you are able to find time for more formal exercise, make sure you find the right programme for you.



**Walking** is one of the best and easiest exercises and is a great way to get started. Walking as little as 20 minutes a day, three times a week, can be beneficial. If you can't get away regularly, try to work walking into your daily routine - walk to the shops, to the station, around the block or in the park with a friend. Try walking a little faster than you normally do. If you work up a sweat and feel your heart working you have increased the benefit.



**Gyms** offer a wide range of classes to suit all ages and abilities - Pilates, aerobics, circuit training, or (for the more energetic) step classes or boxercise! Many gyms offer a fitness assessment and advice on the best programmes for your age and level of fitness when you take up a membership.



**Yoga** is designed for people of all ages and levels of fitness. Your instructor will help you to work at your own pace, listening to your body and gradually encouraging it to stretch and strengthen. Check out your local community centre, local directory or council to find out where classes are held. Many yoga studios have classes for all ages and abilities so you can find a group that suits you.



**Swimming** is a gentle exercise which you can take at your own pace. You can schedule time to swim laps by yourself, or your local swim centre or gym may offer classes like aqua-aerobics.



**Tai Chi** is a gentle form of exercise that can help maintain strength, flexibility, and balance, and could be the perfect low impact activity to help you centre your body and mind.



### Remember...

Most people find it difficult to put time aside for exercise but as little as 30 minutes of moderate activity every day will help you to sustain the physical and emotional demands of your caring role.

# Carers and eating well

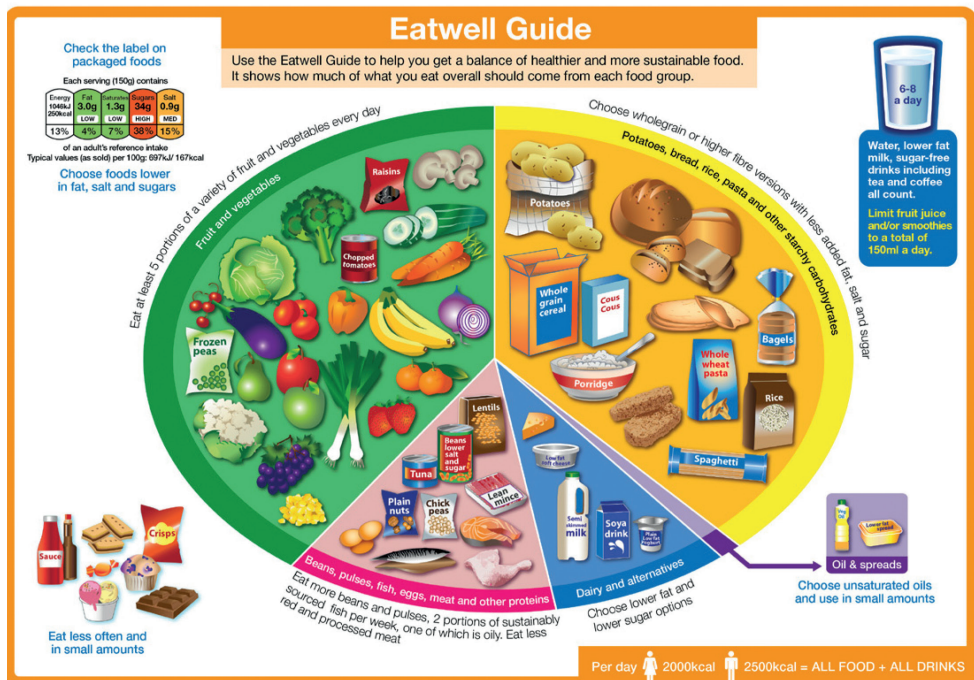
Malnutrition or inadequate nutrition is a common concern for many carers in relation to the person they are caring for. However, it is vital not to neglect your own requirements for adequate nutrition.

As a carer, eating a balanced diet is essential to provide your body with all the nutrients it needs. A balanced diet will keep your body strong, improve your immune system and give you enough energy to provide the best care for the person you are caring for and yourself.



## What does eating well look like?

The Eatwell Guide shows the different types of food we should eat and in what proportions to have a healthy, balanced diet. You don't need to achieve this balance with every meal but try to get the balance right over a day or even a week.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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# Eat Well plate tips

**Starchy food:** Bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes and pasta are a good source of energy. Try to choose wholegrain varieties where you can. High fibre varieties can help keep your bowels healthy but also keep you fuller for longer & help maintain energy levels.

**Fruit and vegetables:** Aim for five portions of fruit and vegetables per day to provide you with a good source of vitamins and minerals. Fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruit and vegetables all count. One portion is equivalent to: 1 apple, 1 medium banana, 7 strawberries, 1 handful of grapes, 150ml glass of unsweetened orange juice, dessert bowl of salad, or 3 heaped tablespoons of mixed vegetables.

**Protein:** Meat, fish, eggs, and beans are a good source of protein. Slices of meat can be a quick snack. Tinned oily fish is an incredibly nutritious store cupboard staple and can be used on toast as a simple, quick meal. Hard-boiled eggs are another quick nutritious snack that can be eaten on the go.

**Dairy or dairy alternatives:** Cheese, yogurt, milk or suitable dairy alternatives. Choose low-fat options if trying to reduce fat in your diet. A warm, milky drink e.g. milky coffee, Ovaltine, Horlicks or hot chocolate can be something you enjoy with the person you are caring for; it can be comforting but also nutritious.

**Limit the amount of high fat and high sugar foods:** Crisps, chocolate and sweets fall in to this category but are often described as 'empty calories' as they hold little nutritional benefit and can contribute to weight gain quite quickly. Reaching for that high sugar snack if you are having an energy slump is only a very short term solution and wears off quickly.

## Meals and snacks:

As a carer, you may find that much of your time and energy will be focused on the needs of the person you care for and, as a result, it may be difficult to prepare and eat healthy balanced meals.

You may find batch cooking helpful. Prepare a few meals and portion them out and freeze so there is always something quick, easy and nutritious to eat. Accept any offers of some meals, quite often people will want to help but don't know how to be useful. Getting them to provide you with meals for the freezer is a practical solution.

## Remember...



If you don't drink enough water you may feel sleepy, be less able to concentrate and get headaches. When you feel hungry you're often actually thirsty. Don't wait to feel thirsty to have a drink. Keep a filled bottle of water nearby, so that you're more likely to drink regularly. Add a fruit squash, cordial or slices of fresh fruit to water to add flavour and this may make drinking more appealing.



# Snack/light meal suggestions

For recipe ideas why not go online? Websites like [bbc.co.uk/food/collections/quick\\_easy\\_meals](http://bbc.co.uk/food/collections/quick_easy_meals) are a great source of inspiration for quick, healthy and tasty recipes.



- **Overnight oats** are super-easy to prepare, portable, inexpensive and a delicious way to get your day off on the right foot. It takes minutes to prepare and means you can have breakfast all ready to go the night before. That means one less thing to do in the morning
- Handful of **dried fruit and nut** mix
- **Banana** and a warm, milky drink
- Slice of **toast with peanut butter** and sliced banana
- **Cheese, a couple of crackers** and a couple of apricots
- Fresh or tinned **soup and a slice of cheese on toast** (if making homemade soup add barley or pulses to add extra energy and protein and it's a good idea to freeze some for another time)
- **Baked beans on toast** with a sprinkle of cheese
- Smoked or tinned **mackerel on toast**
- **Boiled eggs**
- A bowl of **porridge** with a handful of nuts and a drizzle of honey
- **Crumpet** or tea cake with some jam
- A handful of salad, some avocado, **sliced chicken** and a bread roll
- **Jacket potato** and a filling of your choice
- **Ready meals** can be useful if you are short of time; longer term these can contribute to a high fat and salt intake. Looking at labels will make it easier to choose a healthier option.



# Carers and emotional well being

Being a carer can be hard work both physically and emotionally. The experience of caring can be rewarding but it can also lead to feelings such as anxiety, anger and resentment, guilt and depression. You may find it helpful to talk about your feelings to someone you know well such as a family member, friend, work colleague or your GP.

Finding a little bit of time each day to do something that you enjoy or find relaxing can make all the difference. This might be something simple like reading a book, watching a favourite TV programme or listening to music.

Being a carer can sometimes feel like a very lonely experience. You may feel reluctant to accept help at first but former carers often say that they wish they had done this sooner as it made a lot of difference to their ability to keep on caring.



## Finances

Managing finances is a common worry expressed by our carers. You may be entitled to benefits relating to your caring role. Please visit the Carers UK website which has comprehensive list of resources or ask one of our team if you need help in this area: [carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/)

## Complementary therapy



As part of a holistic approach to treatment, we offer a variety of complementary therapies for carers, including massage, aromatherapy, reiki and reflexology, at no charge. Treatments are held in a tranquil, comfortable and non-clinical space at our Wellbeing Centre. Our supportive therapies are available to help you and your loved ones manage the effects of life-limiting illness and improve quality of life.

Visit [straphaels.org.uk/complementary-therapies](https://www.straphaels.org.uk/complementary-therapies) to find out more.

## Useful tips from a few of our carers:

“Try to accept all the help you are offered.”

“Accepting help with care allowed me to be his wife again.”



## Respite care

Respite care means taking a break from caring, while the person you care for is looked after by someone else. It lets you take time out to look after yourself and helps stop you becoming exhausted and run down.

Your local council or local carers' centre can give you information about local support: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/)

# Useful contacts

- **Carers UK Advice Line:** 0808 808 7777
- **Carers UK:** [carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)
- **Carers Trust:** [carers.org](http://carers.org)
- **Alzheimer's society:** [alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk)
- **Age UK:** [ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)
- **Sutton Carers Centre:** [suttoncarerscentre.org](http://suttoncarerscentre.org)
- **Carers Support Merton:** [csmerton.org](http://csmerton.org)
- **Sutton Uplift:** NHS Psychological therapies service:  
[swlstg.nhs.uk/sutton-talking-therapies](http://swlstg.nhs.uk/sutton-talking-therapies)
- **Merton Uplift:** Mental health and wellbeing support:  
[swlstg.nhs.uk/merton-talking-therapies](http://swlstg.nhs.uk/merton-talking-therapies)

## Recommended reading:

*'Selfish Pig's Guide to Caring'* by Hugh Marriott

*'The Carer's Handbook'* by Jane Matthews

*'Carers in the City'* – stories and poems by carers in Manchester

*'The Essential Carer's Guide'* by Mary Jordan

*'Keeping Mum'* by Marianne Talbot

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