

*This document is a compilation of extracts from the 'Caring for YOU!' series of magazines for caregivers. Our thanks to AbbVie for permission to share this content.*

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## **Health & Wellbeing**

### **Looking after yourself**

Keeping active and healthy is always important and especially so if you are caring for others. See the practical advice in this section on what you need to keep you in shape and why.

### **Your physical health**

#### **Eating well**

When you're caring for someone else, it can sometimes be easy to fall into the habit of worrying about what they're eating, but forgetting to eat well yourself.

However, eating a well-balanced diet is essential for good health. A diet rich in vitamins and minerals helps ensure your body has the energy it needs to get you through each day, and to fight infection and poor health.<sup>1</sup>

A good diet can also help maintain good mental health.<sup>2</sup> This may be challenging if you're trying to maintain your own weight, whilst ensuring your loved one gets a high-energy diet.

Eating well doesn't have to be time-consuming. Try and prepare healthy meals that both you and the person you're caring for can eat, so you can avoid having to cook twice.

'If the person you care for has problems chewing, consider healthy soups that provide you both with the vitamins and minerals you need, or foods that can be blended for them, but eaten as they are by you,' says Health Psychology Specialist Clare Moloney.

Also consider simple recipes that can be varied using similar ingredients. For salads, add more complex or difficult-to-eat foods to your serving.

Having a good supply of fresh fruits and vegetables – such as apples, carrots and berries – can provide you with regular, quick and easy-to-eat healthy snacks alongside nuts, yoghurts and fresh fruit juices.

#### **Looking after your body**

Caring for someone can put a lot of pressure on your body, in particular your back, neck and shoulders. This can lead to repetitive strain injuries, back problems or pulled muscles.<sup>3</sup>

Your physiotherapist or occupational therapist will be able to offer tips and advice on the following points to help you look after your body:<sup>3</sup>

- Use safe lifting techniques to avoid injury. Also think before you lift; be realistic in what you expect of your body
- Encourage the person you care for to be as mobile as possible so you can avoid unnecessary lifting
- Watch your weight – being overweight can increase the chances of getting lower back pain, or make existing pain worse.

### Exercising regularly

Caring for someone else is a physical job and the chances are it keeps you active already.

However, taking some time out for some planned exercise can help guard against heart attacks and strokes among other conditions.<sup>4</sup> Regular exercise in green spaces, such as parks or gardens, can also help your mental wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

Regular exercise can also help you to keep build up the core muscles that support the back. This can help reduce the chances of back pain, and also help manage any existing stiffness or pain.<sup>3</sup>

### Top tip

Why not also ask a family member or a friend to prepare some healthy meals you can freeze and use at the end of a long day?

### Why not...

- Cycle to the shops for bread and milk
- Spend an hour gardening when the person you're caring for is resting
- Take the person you're supporting for a walk in the park.

- 1 World Health Organization, 'Healthy Diet Fact Sheet N°394.'  
<<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs394/en/>> [Accessed August 4 2015].
- 2 Royal College of Psychiatrists, 'Eating Well and Mental Health'  
<<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/eatingwellandmentalhealth.aspx>> [Accessed August 6 2015].
- 3 European Parkinson's Disease Association, 'Looking after Yourself (Back)'  
<<http://www.epda.eu.com/en/pd-info/caring/looking-after-yourself/>> [Accessed 17 August 2015].
- 4 World Health Organization, 'Physical Activity Fact Sheet N°385', (WHO, 2015).
- 5 J. Pretty, et al., 'The Mental and Physical Health Outcomes of Green Exercise', *Int J Environ Health Res*, 15 (2005), 319-37.
- 6 Mayo Clinic, 'Adult Health (Sleeping Tips)' <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379?p=1>> [Accessed August 4 2015].

- 7 I. N. Fossum, et al., 'The Association between Use of Electronic Media in Bed before Going to Sleep and Insomnia Symptoms, Daytime Sleepiness, Morningness, and Chronotype', *Behav Sleep Med*, 12 (2014), 343-57.
- 8 Eurocarers, 'Carers in Europe', (Dublin: Eurocarers, 2009).
- 9 L. Transtrom Narum, N., 'Caregiver Stress & Coping: The Journey through Caregiving', ed. by North Dakota Family Caregiver Project (North Dakota State University, 2003).