

**06**

**CONFIDENCE WITH HEALTH  
CARE TASKS**

# CONFIDENCE WITH HEALTH CARE TASKS

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In this section we will discuss some situations you may face as a carer of an older person. This information is a general guide and is not a substitute for medical care or medical advice. You should always call triple zero (000) in an emergency and consult the local doctor. Clicking on the underlined topic will take you straight to that page.

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## Disclaimer:

This module is designed to provide entry level content and more complex care/caring needs or specific issues should be addressed by a health professional.



Clicking this home button will bring you back to this page

# WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY?

## WHAT

An emergency is an unexpected, difficult or dangerous situation. It usually happens suddenly and needs quick action to deal with it.

Common emergencies in older people (See [page 4](#)) include chest pain, falls, breathing difficulties, stroke, bleeding, and confusion.

## WHY

Advances in medicine and technology mean people are living longer, often with more complex health problems.

Older people often have a number of health conditions and take a number of medicines. This can increase their risk of injury or illness.

## WHEN

If the person's condition appears serious, or if in doubt, always call an ambulance.

If the person has fallen, moving them could cause further harm or injury.

Any sudden or severe symptoms should be checked by a doctor.

If you want to learn more, St John Ambulance has first aid fact sheets, or you may wish to do a first aid course.

Read more [here](#).

# WHERE TO GET HELP

1. Remain calm. Take some deep breaths. Assess the situation. Ask the person how they are feeling.

2. If you are not sure an ambulance is needed, contact the local doctor

3. If the local doctor is unavailable, call healthdirect on **1800 022 222** for registered nurse advice 24/7

4. For all emergencies call triple zero (**000**) and request an ambulance. Stay on the line and follow their directions.



# HOW TO RECOGNISE COMMON EMERGENCIES

## Chest pain

The pain may be described as tightness, heaviness, fullness or squeezing. It may be mild, moderate or severe. Pain may be felt in the jaw, or neck, or arm/s, or shoulder/s, or between the shoulder blades.

The person may be short of breath, nauseous, dizzy, have cold sweats.



## Severe Bleeding

Signs may include a bleeding wound, weak and rapid pulse, pale and moist skin, nausea, faintness, confusion



## Stroke

**You need to act Fast**

Has the person's **Face** drooped?

Can they lift both **Arms**?

Is the person's **Speech** slurred? Do they understand you?

Call triple 000. **Time** is critical.

## Breathing Difficulties

The person may feel breathless, unable to get enough air, suffocated, chest tightness.

Call 000 if they are so short of breath they cannot speak in sentences; they also have pain in the chest, arms or jaw; they feel faint or sick.



## Confusion

A sudden onset of confusion may be from a medical event like a stroke or an infection. It is important to seek medical advice.



## Falls

Falls can be more serious in older adults as they are more likely to be injured. Call triple 000 if someone has fallen and cannot get up. See [page 5](#)



**TIP:** If you are unsure whether to call the doctor or an ambulance, call the ambulance for advice on triple zero **(000)**.



# WAYS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF A FALL

## WHAT

Falls are a common emergency in older people and often result in a serious injury. Around 30% of adults over 65 will have at least one fall per year.

In Australia, falls account for three quarters of hospital admissions for older people.

## HOW

Falls can be a complex problem with many contributing factors. There are many things we can do to reduce the chance of an older person falling, and the severity of injury if they do fall.

## HOW

We reduce the risk of falling by fixing problems like poor diet, poor

eyesight, dehydration, weak muscles, sore feet, trip hazards, poor balance and medication side effects.

## WHERE

The home in the first place to check in reducing the falls risk.

Read more about falls risk and how to get up from the floor after a fall [here](#).

Learn how to build your balance:



# THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Stay active – exercises can improve strength and balance. See more in [Module 3](#).

2. Eat healthy food for good health, strong bones and muscles. See more in [Module 3](#).

3. Have regular checkups to manage chronic health conditions that can affect mobility.

4. Have regular vision checks.

5. Seek professional advice – speak to a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or podiatrist about your mobility.

6. Take care of your feet and wear supportive footwear.

7. Manage medications – they can make you dizzy or drowsy. See [page 9](#).

8. Home safety – remove hazards in the home. See more in [Module 5](#).



# WHO CAN HELP YOU REDUCE FALLS RISK

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Reducing the risk of falls can be quite challenging and may include advice from a number of health professionals. See more below.



Speak to the doctor about any eye problems, dizziness, poor balance or confusion.



Check with the pharmacist about any medicine instructions to follow or side effects to watch for.



Make the home safer while waiting for professional advice. Read more [here](#).



Be aware of small changes in vision and have regular checks from the optometrist.



Arrange an occupational therapist to do a home safety check and a mobility assessment. See [Module 5](#).



Arrange a physiotherapist to create an exercise program to improve strength and balance. See [Module 5](#)



See a podiatrist for foot problems and wear stable, supportive shoes with good grip.



# WHY YOU NEED AN EMERGENCY CARE PLAN

## WHAT

An emergency care plan has all the information about the person you care for in one place, so you can get it quickly and easily.

It is also helpful to create a carer emergency card to carry in your wallet. This lets people know that you care for someone in the event you are unwell and unable to communicate.

## WHY

When you care for somebody who depends on you, putting your life on hold while you deal with sudden illness, accidents, family troubles or emergencies may be challenging.

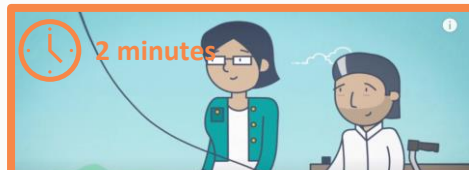
Having a plan makes it easy for someone to take over from you in a hurry.

## WHEN

Emergencies can happen anytime. It is a good idea to start today.

## WHERE

Hear about the benefits of an emergency care plan:



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)

Download a [blank emergency care plan and card](#) [here](#)

# CREATING A PLAN

1. Talk to the person you care for about the importance of a plan. Include them in the planning where possible.
2. Think about the best people to stand in for your caring responsibilities. Check they are willing to be an emergency contact.
3. Be sure the person/s chosen accepts the level of commitment and knows exactly **what is expected** of them.
4. Fill in the Emergency Care Plan. Check the details are correct – ask the person’s doctor, pharmacist, service provider/s. See [page 8](#)
5. Give a copy of your plan to each of your emergency contacts. Go through it with them and make sure they understand what is required.
6. Keep the original in a safe but visible place, like the top of the fridge. Let people know where. Add plan to your My Health Record if you have one.
7. Update your plan every year or sooner if there are significant changes to your caring situation, the person’s needs, or the emergency contacts



# THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR EMERGENCY CARE PLAN

Here is the type of information that is included in an Emergency Care Plan. Remember to update the plan when the person's need change, the emergency contacts change or your caring circumstances change.



1. Step by step instructions on how to care for the person



2. The person's medical history, medications, whether they have My Health Record.



3. Contact details of family and friends who can step into your shoes if needed



4. The person's doctor, pharmacist and other health professionals contact details



5. Service provider/s details, what they do, how they can assist and how to contact them



6. The permissions people have to make decisions on the person's behalf. See **Module 2**



7. Whether the person has an advance care plan or advance care directive and where it is located.



8. Consider packing a bag of essential items that person may need in an emergency.



**TIP:** Talk to your doctor about the benefits of My Health Record. Read about the benefits [here](#).



# SAFE USE OF MEDICATIONS

## WHAT

Medications help us live longer and healthier, but taking them the wrong way or mixing certain drugs can be dangerous. Often carers help the person they care for manage their medications and use them safely.

## WHY

Older people may have a number of health conditions and take multiple medications. This places them at increased risk of mistakes, side-effects and drug interactions.

## WHEN

See the doctor every 6 to 12 months to have the medications reviewed. Ask if the person you care for should stop taking any medicines or change the dose.

## WHERE

Always direct your questions to the local doctor or Pharmacist.

If you still have questions, or they are unavailable, call the Medicines Line **1300 633 424**.

Learn about a Home Medicine Review:



Learn about the MedicineWise App to help carers:



# HOW TO DO THIS

1. Know all the medication the person you care for takes and why.

2. Check with the doctor or pharmacist before the person you care for takes any new medications, even if bought over the counter.

3. Understand the instructions – medications only work if taken properly.

4. Ask questions. See [page 10](#)

5. Keep a Medication List.

6. Store medications away from children. Keep them away from heat and damp. Do not store in the bathroom or leave in the car.

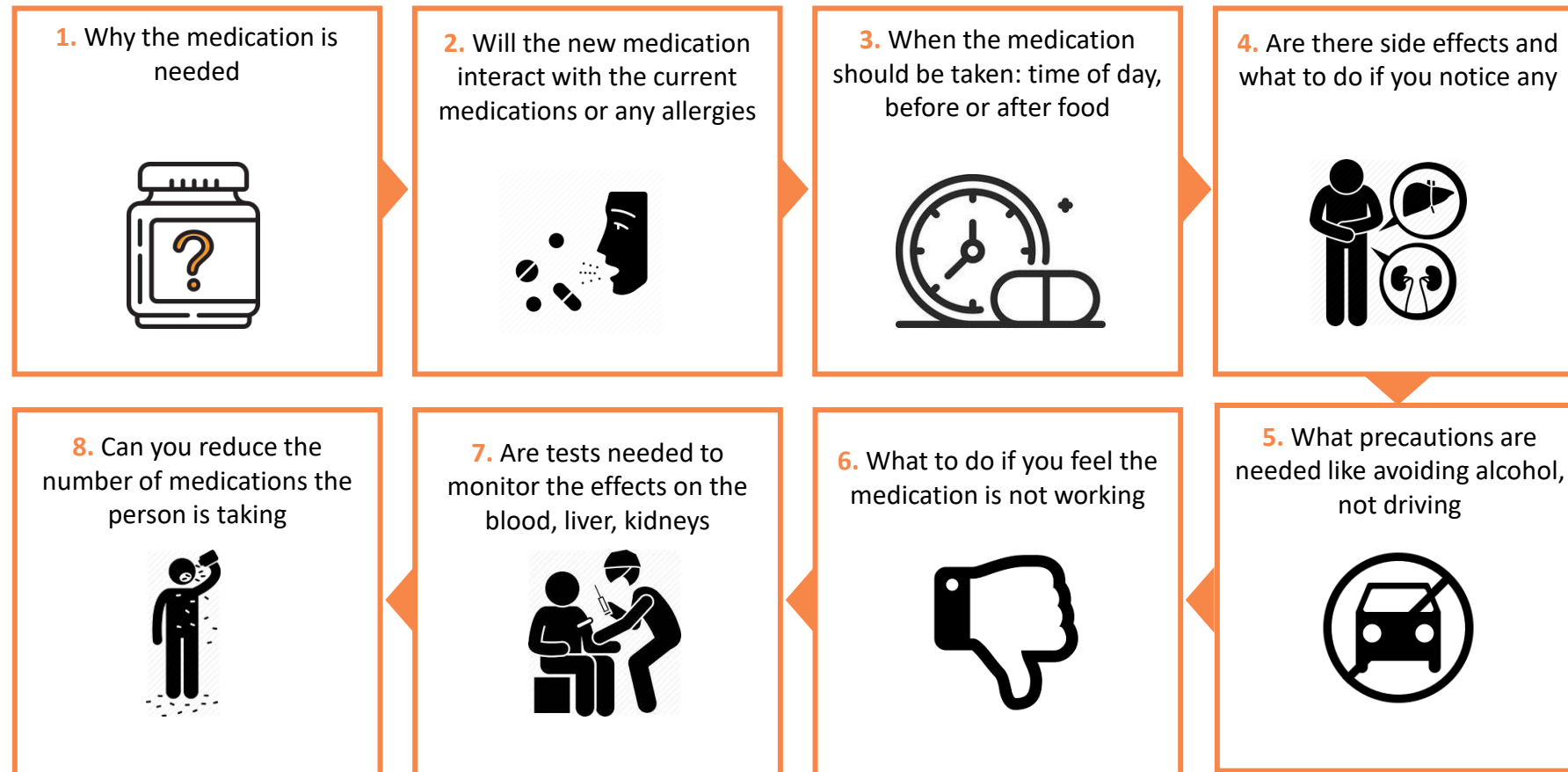
7. Take old and out of date medications in to the pharmacist for safe disposal.

8. Ask the pharmacist how to better manage medicines. See [page 11](#)



# SAFE USE OF MEDICATIONS – QUESTIONS TO ASK

Older people may be living with a number of health conditions and taking lots of medications. People taking multiple medications (5 or more) are at greater risk of side effects, problems or medications that disagree with each other.



# SAFE USE OF MEDICATIONS – EQUIPMENT AND AIDS TO CONSIDER

There are a number of medication aids and devices that can help you in your caring role. Talk to the doctor or pharmacist about the right options for the person you care for.



Medication organisers (dosette box) with separate compartments for days of the week and times of the day.



Medication organisers (blister pack, webster pack) that are packaged by the pharmacist for a small weekly fee.



A pill crusher for someone with swallowing difficulty. Only crush if directed by the doctor or pharmacist.



A locked box or cupboard to keep medicines away from children or people who are confused.



Electronic medication reminders.



An App to list the medicines used and important health information. Read more [here](#).



A pill cutter to carefully cut pills in half if prescribed that way.



# PALLIATIVE AND END OF LIFE CARE

## WHAT

Palliative care is the care that helps people live their life as fully and as comfortably as possible with a life-limiting or terminal illness.

End-of-life care is the last few weeks of life when the person with a life-limiting illness is rapidly approaching death.

## WHY

Good palliative care ensures the person you care for receives the care they need to live as well as possible and stay in control.

## WHEN

Everyone's experience is different, which is why it is important to talk to the person you care for about their wishes.

The person's doctor and health care team will help you access palliative care services.

## WHERE

In the meantime, there are lots of resources for you to look at to help you as the carer.

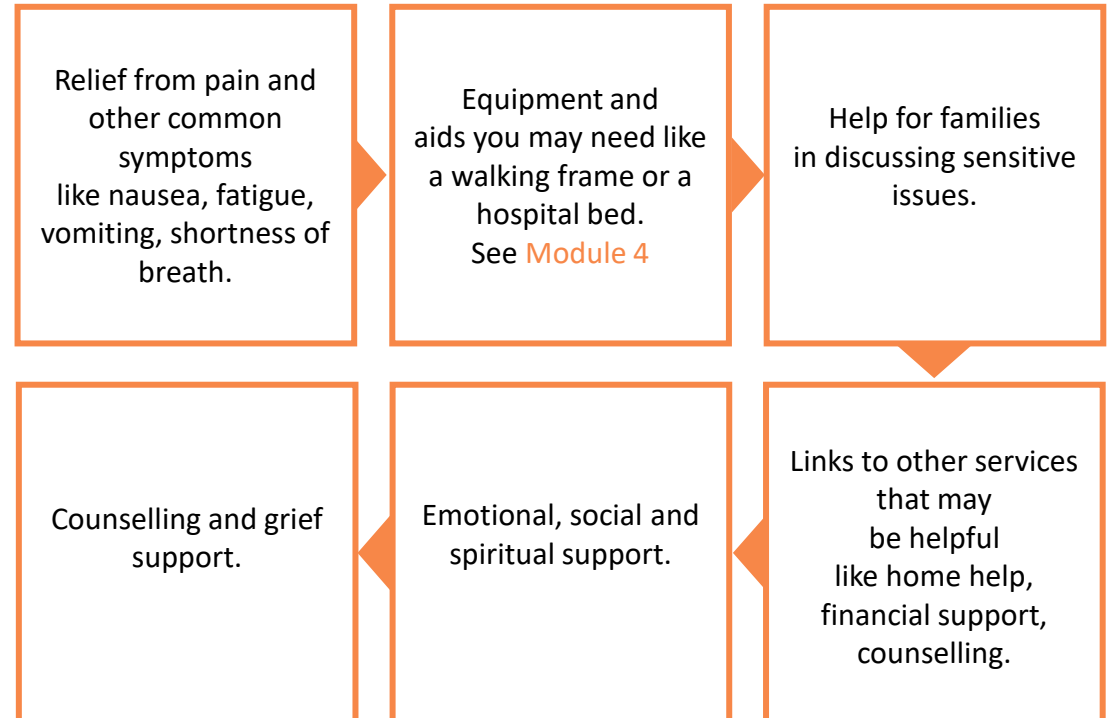
This video helps you start the conversation.



Palliative Care Australia has lots of information and tips [here](#).

Hear from other carers [here](#).

# TYPES OF SUPPORT YOU MAY NEED



See [page 13](#) for the people and services that can help you prepare.



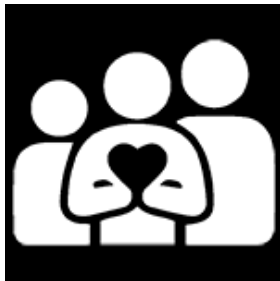
# WHO CAN HELP YOU PREPARE FOR END OF LIFE CARE

Palliative care services help people live their life as fully and comfortably as possible as well as supporting carers, who are valued members of the care team. From practical tips and support to symptom management, emotional support and financial support. There are a number of options for you to explore.

## Find a palliative care service

Talk to the person's **Doctor** about arranging support from the local **palliative care team**. They provide specialist support from managing physical, emotional, spiritual or social symptoms to emergencies, medicines, equipment.

There is also a directory of palliative care services in Australia [here](#).



## Find help for you as a carer

**Carer Gateway** is the national online and phone service to address your specific needs as a carer. Phone to discuss your specific needs **1800 422 737** or [read more here](#).

**CarerHelp** is a website with general information on physically caring for someone who is palliative. Visit the website [here](#).

**Carers NSW** is the peak body for carers and has resources and shared experiences from other carers. Read more [here](#).

**Palliative Care Australia** is the national peak body for palliative care and has fact sheets and video resources developed to support carers. Read more [here](#).

## Find help for the person you care for

Talk to **My Aged Care** about the person's situation and services that may be available. From CHSP services to Home Care Packages.

See more in [Module 2](#).

Phone **1800 200 422**

## Find financial help afterwards

**Services Australia** may be able to help with payments, information and support when someone close to you dies.

Visit the website [here](#) to read more.



**REMINDER:** Always call triple zero (**000**) in an emergency or call the person's doctor or palliative care team.

# LIFE AFTER CARING

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## WHAT

When the person you care for recovers, when they die, or when they leave your care you may need to adjust to changes.

After caring ends, you may feel anxious about what the future holds. You might feel intense loss, guilt and sadness. This is a natural reaction.

You may also find you have a lot more time on your hands.

## WHY

Being a carer can be an all-encompassing role which takes over your life. It can affect your friendships, employment and lifestyle.

## WHERE

Family, friends, neighbours, support groups and church communities are all important sources of support at this time.

You may also seek professional advice. Talk to the Carer Gateway about counselling services on **1800 422 737**.

Hear more about grief and life after caring [here](#).

# TYPES OF SUPPORT YOU MAY NEED

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1. Speak to your **doctor** about how you are feeling and whether you may benefit from specialist support like a psychologist.
2. The **Carer Gateway Counselling Service** can provide free confidential in person counselling. Available weekdays 8am to 6pm. See [page 16](#)
3. You may find it comforting to continue attending your **Carer Support Group** or a support group for former carers. See [page 15](#)
4. **Professional advice** from your local community health centre, hospital or palliative care service.
5. You may want to explore ways to **learn new skills and meet new people** through volunteering or joining a group. See [page 15](#)
6. You may want to seek help to **return to employment**. See [page 15](#)



# WHO CAN HELP YOU PREPARE FOR LIFE AFTER CARING

The time will come when you are ready to think about what to do next. Try to follow your interests, reconnect with family and friends, and make new friends. You might also consider volunteering, learning something new or going back to work.

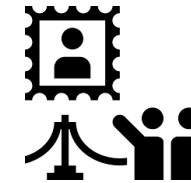
**Find a Carer Support Group** by calling Carers NSW on 02 9280 4744 or search our database [here](#).



**Find help with employment** through [Job Active](#) or [Career Transition Assistance](#)



**Find new interests** and meet people by going to free events like markets, museums, art gallery tours [here](#).



Think about your **hopes, dreams and aspirations**. Talk to Carer Gateway 1800 422 737 about life after caring.



Have your skills and learning recognised with a **qualification** that fits your interests. Visit Carer to Career [here](#).



Seek opportunities to **Volunteer** and share your knowledge and experience with others. See Go Volunteer [here](#).



# WHERE TO GET MORE SUPPORT

It can be a good idea to talk to Carer Gateway about your needs; and My Aged Care about the needs of the person you care for. The local doctor and health care team are important resources as well. See more below:

## The role of the local Doctor

The local doctor or general practitioner is the first point of call if you have a health issue. They have the broad knowledge and skills to treat you or direct you to a health professional or specialist.

- Minor injuries and illness
- Health screening and advice
- Medication prescriptions
- Ongoing care for chronic conditions
- Help with mental health
- Links to allied health services e.g. nurse, physiotherapist, podiatrist, dietician
- Referrals for specialist medical care like cardiologist, geriatrician, palliative care team

Learn more [here](#).

## The role of Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway offers a range of tailored supports and services to help carers manage challenges, reduce stress and plan ahead.

- In person and phone counselling
- Carer forum, information and resources
- Emergency respite
- Self-guided coaching and skills courses
- Carer support planning
- In person peer support
- Carer directed support
- In person peer coaching (from 2021)

Call **1800 422 737** weekdays 8am to 5pm to discuss your needs.

Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for emergency respite.

Visit [here](#) for online supports.

## The role of My Aged Care

My Aged Care offers a range of tailored supports and services to help older people access the right care and support to maintain their quality of life as they get older.

- Assessment of person's needs
- Help at home like personal care, domestic assistance, respite
- Help to stay well like nursing care, allied health services
- Help to stay connected like transport and social support
- Packages of care if more help is needed
- Help to move into an aged care home

Call **1800 200 422** or visit [here](#) to learn more.





# DISCLAIMER

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**All of the content in this resource is for informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for advice provided by a doctor or other qualified health professional. The information in this resource is true and correct at time of publishing.**

**Carers NSW thanks the many carers involved in the development of this information for sharing their experiences and suggestions for the benefit of other carers.**

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