

Caring for someone with a life-limiting illness



Taking care of yourself – how do you do this?

Caring for someone with a life-limiting illness requires an unusual and sometimes extraordinary effort from carers, but it's important for carers to remember that they must also take care of themselves and ask for support.

Many carers find it hard to ask others for help, as they feel they should be able to manage. However, a carer survey conducted by Carers NSW (2018) indicated that carers of people with a terminal illness showed a very high level of distress and a significantly lower level of personal wellbeing than the general population.

This information is designed to help carers take care of themselves. It was developed in partnership with carers who shared their experiences.

Why take care of yourself?

The carers we spoke to said they often felt too busy caring for someone to take care of themselves but on reflection, wished they had. Taking care of yourself will help you better care for another as it gives you more energy and capacity to care.

What do you need to do to look after yourself?

The answer will be different for everyone. What is helpful for one person may not be for another, so find what suits you best. Carers have suggested the following strategies:

Find ways to relax

- I just go out to the garden and take a few moments to enjoy it
- I go for a walk when paid carers come. It helps clear the head and I get a bit of exercise.

Seek support

- Get some help at home. This might be family, friends, volunteers or care workers
- I had a group of friends take turns to visit each day so I could have a break
- Organise some regular respite care for the person you care for. This could be for a few hours, overnight or for several days. Use this time to have a break for yourself.

Keep up connections with others

- I go to a friend's place to de-stress once a week
- Go out to social events. I found this hard to do alone at first but it was ok.

Look after your wellbeing

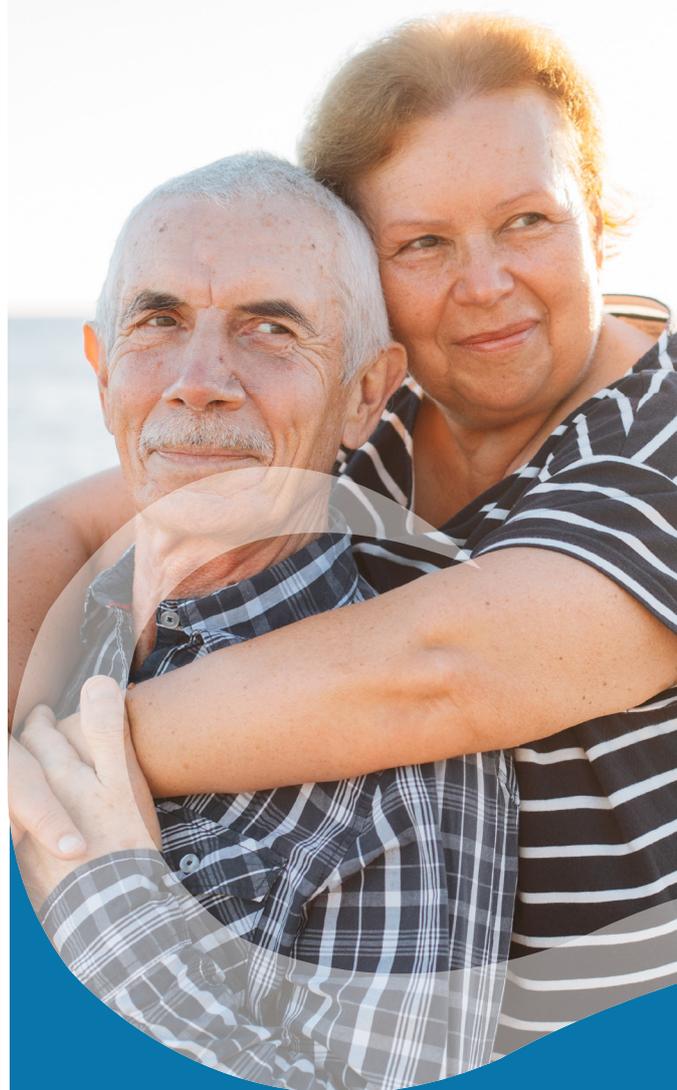
- Regular exercise and healthy eating can benefit your health and your state of mind, helping you to sleep better, increase energy levels and reduce anxiety and depression
- Listen to music, take up relaxation or meditation. I listen to my mindfulness app to help me silence my mind
- Make a self-care plan to ensure your best performance under difficult circumstances
- Be kind to yourself and don't judge yourself.

Talk to others who understand

- It's good to hear stories about other people's experiences and not feel so alone
- A support group for carers can be really helpful. They understand what you are experiencing
- Talk to a counsellor, psychologist or your doctor, they are available for carers as well as patients
- Talk to someone before things feel like they are falling apart.

Communicating with others

- Tell others how you prefer to communicate and what you feel comfortable with. Whether you prefer to talk about it, not to talk about it, to message, phone or talk in person
- Be open and honest with the person you care for
- Talk to your family and friends and keep them informed
- The path to harmony within families comes from not expecting more from individual family members than what each is capable of giving
- Embrace the good moments and celebrate life now. Create memories together.



“Doing something for yourself puts fuel in your tank so that you can keep on caring.”

Further information and support

- **Carer Gateway** – www.carergateway.gov.au or 1800 422 737
- **Carers NSW** – www.carersnsw.org.au
- Talk to your **doctor**