



***Are you an older person caring for your partner, family member or friend?***

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Do you assist a member of your family or whānau, or a friend, who needs support because they are disabled, have a health condition (including mental health or an addiction), or an injury?

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You may be providing care for a life partner, a sibling, a child, a grandchild, another relative, or a close friend.

Your family member or friend may be living independently in their own home, and require your help to continue doing so, or they may be living with you.

You may be retired, or still in the workforce and juggling work commitments with your role as a carer.

You may be finding it difficult to get the services and funding you need to care well.

As an older carer, you may also be dealing with your own health and wellbeing concerns.

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**Caregiving is not easy.**





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*"I care for my grandson, who is 23 and has disabilities. His mother can't manage his support needs. I find getting him in and out of our car really hard now. I am going to need some more help soon."*

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**Margaret**



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*"My brother has multiple sclerosis. I'm always on call for him. I have some issues too. Sometimes I wonder who cares for whom!"*

ANDREW

## THE POSITIVES

**Most family carers say they feel positive about contributing to the safety and wellbeing of someone they love.** It is a commitment they value, and they wouldn't have it any other way. Many find the situation brings them closer to that person and strengthens their relationship. Many also see that their caring helps the whole family, whānau, or aiga.

## THE CHALLENGES

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As well as being rewarding, caring can bring pressures:

- **increased stress** – ‘rollercoaster’ experiences and emotions
- **feeling exhausted**
- **it’s physically demanding** when you’re not as physically strong as you once were
- **less time to meet your own needs** – physical, emotional, and mental health
- **being more prone to care-related injuries** (e.g. back strain), higher anxiety, getting sick more often, or depression
- **feeling isolated** and less connected to others
- **increased financial demands**
- **relationship tensions** between relatives, or stepfamily complications
- **guilt** when expectations of yourself, or by others, can’t be met
- supporting someone whose health is declining quickly or whose condition (such as dementia) can result in **challenging behaviour**
- if you’re working, **pressures from juggling employment and care commitments**



*“My husband has Parkinsons and has had numerous small strokes. I now help him with most things but find I get very fatigued, as I have arthritis myself. I worry about what will happen if my condition worsens.”*

## Get help

The following tips have helped other older carers. Which ones may be useful for you?

### **Pace yourself**

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Caregiving is more of a marathon than a sprint.

### **Take things day by day**

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Look for support that's available and use it whenever you can.

### **Get a needs assessment**

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A needs assessment is the way your friend or relative can be considered for all available community and government support. Their GP can arrange this, or contact a local Needs Assessment Service Coordination (NASC) service, funded by your DHB.

To contact your nearest NASC:

- ask your doctor or medical centre
- look on your DHB's website
- Search *Needs Assessment and Service Coordination Services* on the Ministry of Health website [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz) or visit [www.nznasca.co.nz](http://www.nznasca.co.nz)



*"I wish I had got extra help earlier, when it was first offered. My pride got in the way probably! But it's been a relief, because I get more tired now. I want to keep caring for my son for as long as I can."*

- Regularly check and talk with your relative or friend to see how they're doing. If they need or ask for more support, offer to help arrange another assessment. If this is urgent, tell their GP or NASC.
- Consider if you or your relative/friend may also have cultural or other needs. How could these needs be met to improve their wellbeing?
- Ensure your friend or family member is at the centre of all discussions and planning, where possible. Don't 'take over'. This can cause tensions and distress.

## What are your own needs?

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- As an older carer, you may have health and wellbeing support needs yourself. Think about how these affect your ability to care for someone else. How can you keep as well as possible and continue caring?
- Along with discussing a needs assessment for your friend or relative, you can also ask for your own needs to be assessed. This may mean you can access services or funding yourself. Getting some extra support makes good sense for older carers.

# Help available

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You don't need to do everything on your own. Protect yourself and the person you support by looking into financial, practical and general support options for carers.

## 1 A Guide for Carers

This handbook outlines the help offered by government agencies. It includes information about freely funded services and support, such as financial help, needs assessments (NASC), help at home, respite, making and resolving complaints, obtaining equipment and housing modifications, assistance with personal cares such as showering, access to daily living aids, transport and more. You'll find the *Guide* at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz)

Request a free print copy - phone 0800 777 797 or email [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz)

## 2 Work and Income

If you are caring full-time for a friend or family member in their own home, who would otherwise need to receive hospital or residential level care, you may be eligible for the Supported Living Payment.

Phone 0800 559 009, visit your local office or visit [www.workandincome.govt.nz](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz)

### 3 Carers New Zealand

Carers New Zealand provides information, advice, learning and support for New Zealand's 400,000+ family, whānau, and aiga carers:

- **www.carers.net.nz**
- free advice at 0800 777 797 or centre@carers.net.nz
- helpful resources
- ways to link with other carers in similar situations
- networking through the Facebook community – search CarersNZ
- Twitter: @CarersNZ

### 4 The doctor and health professionals

**Develop a good relationship with your relative's doctor and other health professionals, and your own.** They can answer your questions and guide you to support options.

### 5 Share the care

**Consider who else can help you support your family member or friend, and how.** Have a meeting of family, whānau, aiga and close friends to talk honestly about what care is needed. Meet again whenever needs change. Include the person you help in all discussions if possible.



*"My son and his family live with us and help to care for my wife, who has dementia. This is normal in our culture (Chinese)."*

CHEUNG

## 6 Know your limits

**It's wise to be realistic about what you can and can't do.**

Nobody is superman or superwoman. We all have limits. Let others know what those limits are – your family, your doctor, and others involved in supporting your friend or family member.

## 7 Have regular respite and time out

**Try to have short breaks often, and organise longer respite breaks so you can continue to care safely without burning out or experiencing an injury.**

See [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) for some great tools!

- See our *Time Out Guide* and be sure to ask your doctor or NASC about your respite funding and planning options. Being proactive about respite will help you cope with caring over the long term.
- See our *Weekly Time Out Planner*. You're more likely to have regular breaks if you plan them.
- Check out our articles and *Take 1 Minute, Take 5 - Bite-sized virtual breaks for carer wellbeing*, designed for those who can't easily have time out away from home. Choose from video, audio, or other options to suit your mood.

## 8 Helplines

Phone helplines at times of crisis or hardship.

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- Lifeline **0800 543 354**
- Healthline **0800 611 116**
- Samaritans  
**0800 726 666** or  
**04 473 9739**
- Depression Helpline  
**0800 111 757**
- Suicide Crisis Helpline  
**0508 828 865**  
**(0508 TAUTOKO)**
- Alcohol and Drug  
Helpline **0800 787 797**
- Are You OK family  
violence helpline  
**0800 456 450**
- Women's Refuge  
**0800 733 843**  
**(0800 REFUGE)**
- Family Services Helpline  
– **0800 211 211** See  
what health and support  
services there are in your  
area
- Skylight – **0800 299**  
**100** For support through  
trauma, loss and grief;  
9am-5pm weekdays
- Supporting Families In  
Mental Illness - **0800**  
**732 825** For those  
supporting a loved one  
who has a mental illness
- Citizen's Advice Bureau  
**0800 367 222**

## 9 Note it down

Keep a notebook for all key information and contacts.

Keep the notebook handy to refer to and to update if things change.

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## 10 Connect with other carers

Phone 0800 777 797 to find out what's available in your area or visit [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz). Check out the *MeetUps Toolkit* to arrange get-togethers with other carers in your community for learning, sharing, and enjoyment. And join Carers New Zealand Facebook's community – search CarersNZ.

## 11 Learn about the health condition of your friend or family member

This can help you understand their situation and get an idea of what to expect. Contact support organisations linked to your friend or family member's health condition/s and tap into their information and services. **Does the person you assist have any cultural or other concerns** related to their condition which need to be addressed? Offer to arrange a visit to your family member's doctor and other members of their support team.

*"I have cared for two disabled grandchildren from birth, but am getting older myself. There are funding options for someone in the wider aiga to be paid to care for the young ones but we aren't sure how to find out about these. I would like to spend some time in Samoa with other family members when my caring time ends."*

## Have an emergency plan

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**What's your strategy if there's a crisis or disaster and your friend or family member has to be moved? Or what if you get called away, fall ill, or are suddenly injured? What if you die? Having a plan in place will give you peace of mind.**

Develop your own plan, or use Carers New Zealand's emergency planning tools, found at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) Phone 0800 777 797 for advice or email [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz)

Carers New Zealand's tools include a medications plan, an important papers checklist, an emergency carer ID card, and a comprehensive alternative care plan.

Complete these tools and share them with anyone who should have copies. Include your friend or family member when filling out these tools if possible. Update the documents whenever important details change.

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## Other Support

Organisations and websites relating to the health of older people. Visit **[www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz)** and search for *Older People Organisations*.

Support organisations and services around New Zealand. Visit **[www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory)** to see what's available in your region.

## Is English your second language?

Citizen's Advice Bureau Language Link offers community advice on these matters in other languages.

Phone 09 624 2550, 0800 78 88 77  
or email [language@cab.org.nz](mailto:language@cab.org.nz)

# Making decisions

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*"My daughter, who has disabilities, is now 64 and we both have support issues. I want to make arrangements for us both but have no idea where to start. We have no close family living nearby so could really use some advice. Should we move closer to other whānau ?" IRIS, 87*

## Good communication is vital

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**Who are the people around you who are important to your caring role?** Keep in regular touch with family members, friends, neighbours, volunteers, government agencies, paid care providers, service providers, and health professionals.

## Find out about your family member's / friend's wishes

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**Talk with your family member or friend about their preferences regarding important choices, in case you wind up with the legal power and responsibility to make decisions for them.** This conversation may be uncomfortable for both of you, but it is essential. For example, how long does your friend or family member want to stay in their current home? Have they made a will? Do they have opinions about any future medical treatment, or about their funeral? This information can help you a lot when it comes time to make difficult decisions.

Download our ***When Caring is Changing or Finishing*** resource at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) or request a print copy by phoning 0800 777 797 or emailing [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz)

**Gather good information.** Talk with your relative or friend, or use any records of their personal wishes. Get professional advice, if needed, and consult with others in your family, whānau, or aiga. Older friends who have had to make similar decisions can be a good sounding board. Take the time you need to make informed decisions.



## Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPA)

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**An Enduring Power of Attorney is a legal document identifying who can take care of someone's personal or financial matters if they no longer can.** It's often a family member, close friend, or lawyer. Encourage your relative to put this in place, as it makes arranging their ongoing care easier if they become incapacitated, and supports your own decision-making as their primary supporter. There are two types of EPAs: one for property and assets, and one for personal health and welfare. Good information about these is important.

## A Living Will

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**A Living Will sets out instructions which clarify what type of medical treatment a person does or doesn't want, in quite a specific manner.** Your relative may appreciate being able to do this. Carers New Zealand can advise how to organise a Living Will. Phone 0800 777 797 or email [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz)

## Take care of yourself.

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Carers often feel torn between relationships and responsibilities especially if they are working while also caring for others.

Remember that your life still needs to be about you.

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# Depression

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Older carers are more likely to experience depression

**Older adults face many significant life changes which can be difficult to adjust to.** These make them more prone to depression. Older people who are caregivers for others may experience higher stress levels. Caregivers can also be vulnerable to depression if they put their own needs second to those of others. It's important to take good care of yourself and to be aware of the signs of depression if you are a carer.

## What is depression?

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**It's an illness that impacts the brain. It causes thoughts and feelings of unhappiness which are intense and ongoing.** A depressed person often says they feel flat and lifeless. It affects mood, energy levels, appetite, sleep, and a person's interest in things. It makes daily life hard to cope with. Depression can be treated, and recovered from.

## Recovering from depression

People recover from depression best when they get help and support from others.

- **See your doctor.** Talk to them honestly. Work with them to make a recovery plan.
- **Find out about depression.** Ask your doctor for information or visit [www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)
- **Use the Depression Helpline** on 0800 111 757 to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling, or to ask any questions.
- **Get some exercise** – this helps to lift mood.
- **Eat healthy food.**
- **Get enough rest** and sleep.
- **Keep in touch** often with friends and your family, whānau, or aiga.
- **Talk with a counsellor**, or someone else you trust.
- **Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.**
- **Find some new ways to reduce your stress.**
- **Take regular breaks** and plan opportunities for time out.

time  
for  
you

rest  
and  
sleep

slow,  
deep  
breaths

unwell?  
see the  
doctor

drink  
water  
often

go for a  
walk

build a  
support  
circle

eat  
healthy  
food

create  
something

have  
fun

# Make self-care a priority

Your own safety  
and wellbeing is  
important too.

plan  
regular  
breaks

meditate

get  
into  
nature

stretch  
exercise  
relax

write a  
journal

organise  
time out

laugh

take a  
nap

listen to  
music

Find more self-care ideas and tools at  
[www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) or phone 0800 777 797

## Still working?

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**Juggling work and caring can be tricky.** If you're still in paid employment, find out about working while caring by phoning 0800 777 797 or email [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz) for advice.

## Consider using paid help or volunteers

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**Your family member's house maintenance, such as gardening, lawns or cleaning, can become a problem.**

Check with your relative's doctor or needs assessor to ask if their Disability Allowance could assist with funding these things.

Get *A Guide for Carers* for information about how to access support funding and arrange a needs assessment for your friend or family member if this is needed (and for yourself, too, if you have support needs of your own). See it online at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) or request a copy by phoning 0800 777 797 or emailing [centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz). This resource is also included in Carers New Zealand's online and printed infopacks for carers.

Order one via the freephone number or download an infopack at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz)

## Find out about available day programmes and respite options in your area. Ask your GP for information about this.

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**www.eldernet.co.nz** This nationwide database and information site covers community groups and organisations, retirement and lifestyle villages, home help services, respite care and short-term options, aged care services, rest homes, residential care, private hospitals, dementia care, public hospitals and other services for older people.

**www.mycare.co.nz** An online way for older people and their families to find helpers (paid or voluntary), organise, and pay for care.

**www.seniorline.org.nz** A site to help older people navigate the health system with advice about services at home, support for carers, and rest homes and hospitals.

## Talk to someone when you need to

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**You may feel anxious, worried, angry, frustrated, irritated, resentful, overwhelmed, or guilty.** Such reactions are common amongst carers. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, counsellor or family worker can help to relieve strong feelings that may have been building.

## Is it time to stop caring?

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**The time may come when you can no longer provide day to day support for your family member or friend.**

Transitioning to formal care is a common experience and one you should not feel guilty about.

If you can no longer provide the level of care required, talk to your friend or family member, if possible, and make this decision together. Include the GP and needs assessor (NASC). Together you can plan this change so it happens smoothly.

If your family member or friend needs to enter residential care you can look forward focusing on the quality of your relationship rather than the hands-on care that perhaps you can no longer provide at home.



*"In dealing with those who are undergoing great suffering, if you feel burnout setting in, if you feel demoralised and exhausted, it is best for the sake of everyone to withdraw and restore yourself. The point is to have a long-term perspective."*

DALAI LAMA



*Beryl & Effie, copyright Terry Winn.*

*From the Caring Moments collection, a project with Carers New Zealand.*

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[www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz)



EMAIL US  
[centre@carers.net.nz](mailto:centre@carers.net.nz)

