

Accepting support for respite at home

Planning for the best for everyone



Photo:
Hollie Carmody

Caring for someone can have its challenges but it can also be extremely rewarding. Whether it is a family member or a friend, you are caring for, you want them to be as well looked after as possible. However, the caring role can become all-consuming and in order to keep going, it's important to ask for and to accept help .

The help or support you accept is up to you and can be as simple as having some milk dropped off or the bins taken out. Maybe you have children who need to be taken to sport, or a dog that could do with a run? Or maybe you would enjoy doing that yourself, while a friend sits with the person you are caring for?

This guide has been developed to encourage you to ask for and accept support, especially in-home respite support to allow you and your family to be supported and have quality time for yourselves.

That little bit of help...someone sitting with their loved one while they get their hair done, it's that sort of thing that doesn't cost of a lot of time but means the world to someone and gives them the opportunity to get out and go do something.

Jen Dodson, Carers WA

Taking care of yourself

It's important as a carer to look after yourself by doing things for your own wellbeing and staying connected with your friends, family and community. Accepting support can allow everyone in your family or household to keep doing things that are enjoyable and meaningful.

Organising a visit or catch up can be a helpful way to stay in touch and can free up your time to do things, not just tasks but things that you enjoy!

You may need to be proactive and invite someone to visit. People will usually be pleased you've asked as often they want to help but worry about intruding.

Being open to sharing the journey you are going through with others can lead to opportunities and choices for you and your loved one as well as for the people supporting you.

Assoc Professor Kirsten Auret

Carer and loved one reluctance

It's not unusual to worry about leaving the person you are caring for with someone else. Your lives have no doubt changed a lot and this can be confronting. In addition, the person being cared for might feel uncomfortable about having visitors. It may feel to them like an invasion of privacy or a loss of independence, or they may feel anxious about being without you.

Here are some tips to help everyone feel more comfortable about an in-home visit:

- It can help to have visitors early on, before the person you are caring for becomes really unwell and 'needs' support. It breaks the ice and can be less confronting for everyone when it's social.
- If the person you are caring for is reluctant, suggest that you would like some company, ask them if they mind. It can help knowing the visit is as much for you as it is for them.
- Try to understand what's behind their concerns, ask 'what's worrying you?' Asking and listening can help them maintain their sense of independence and dignity.
- Sometimes a professional opinion can be more acceptable. Say 'the doctor suggested it'.
- Explain that a friend would like to visit, ask 'when would be the best time?'
- It's okay to want to stay and enjoy your visitors' company too. It's important to everyone's quality of life to maintain your friendships and social connections.

Planning for a respite visit

Not all visits need to be for respite, but it can be helpful when you need time to take care of yourself or other family members. Planning can help make things run smoothly. Talk to the person you are caring for about what they'd like to do with their visitor.

Think about what the person enjoyed doing before they became unwell. They will still have the same interests, even if they don't have the same capabilities:



- Sitting outside, having a cuppa and catching up
- Going for a drive and looking at places they have a connection to
- Going up to their shed and hanging out, or finishing off some jobs together
- Listening to music
- Preparing lunch together
- Watching a movie or a sporting event, e.g. the footy
- For children, Lego, play doh and games they love can be fun.
- Looking at photo albums and reminiscing
- Reading from a favourite book
- Looking around the garden
- Craft activities
- Going for a walk, perhaps with the dog
- Gardening tasks e.g. potting up some succulents or watering the plants

- For some people touch can be important, often people avoid touch for fear of hurting someone who is unwell. It doesn't have to be massage, just holding hands, brushing hair, a hug etc.

Other preparations

- Ensure all medications, personal care and toileting tasks have been done before the visitor arrives
- Prepare the visitor for changes they may not expect such as altered consciousness or drowsiness (often a side effect of medication or illness)
 - » The person who is unwell may feel embarrassed about how they look, and the visitor may be shocked or emotional.
- Tell the visitor what sort of day you are both having e.g. bit distracted, tired, or has been looking forward to the visit because...
- The location of food and drinks
- Agree to a timeframe. Maybe make the first visit shorter and do something that you can leave should you be needed at home
- Explain what to do if the person becomes tired or uncomfortable
- Prepare the visitor for potential issues and reassure them about what to do
- Suggest strategies to try if the person being cared for becomes upset
- Agree to circumstances they should phone you for advice
- What to do in an emergency. Have an emergency Care Plan on hand. This can include medication/ allergy list and instructions, AHD etc
- If you are particular about the house being clean, plan your visit for immediately following the cleaner
- Have a cupboard or area where favourite/most used things are kept e.g. current book they are reading, rolled up jigsaw to work on, chess set, wheatbag etc.
- 'To Do List' on the fridge. Many visitors want to help but don't know how. This way they can choose, and you don't have to ask e.g. change light bulb in the laundry



Upon your return

Check in with the visitor and ask how the visit went:

- How did things go? Was it enjoyable?
- Were there any issues?
- How was the time? Was it too long or short?
- Let them know how valuable it was to have time to yourself
- Do they want to come again?
- If they offer, accept and let them know that you will get back to them about a suitable time

Check in with the person you care for

- Did they enjoy the visit?
- What worked well and what didn't?
- What could you change to improve the next visit?
- Let them know how much you appreciated it.
- If there are more positives than negatives, then plan another visit and work on the negatives.

Other options for support

Inviting your friends to share in activities such as renovating, gardening, cooking and eating together, celebrating important occasions and planning together to meet your needs is often thought of as a burden when in fact it can be a great opportunity for building memories and relationships.

There will be people who may not be comfortable providing respite support but are keen to help, so here are some other ideas, ask them to:

- Pick up groceries, drop off milk, take the bins out
- Keep in touch and call or text regularly
- Pick up the kids from school or take them to sport
- Take the car in for a service or offer to help with jobs around the house, mowing the lawn, cleaning etc.

It may be a case of trial and error, while you learn what works best. It is worth persisting as having quality time together means accepting support and continuing to stay connected with those around you.



This resource was adapted by WA Primary Health Alliance and Albany Community Hospice from a resource by Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, – part of the Australian Government national PHN program.

<https://albanyhospice.org.au>

For carer assistance, contact
Carer Gateway Contact Centre
1800 422 737

<https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>