



Physical Health for Carers

Keeping it Simple

When you are caring for others, it can be hard to give time to caring for yourself. It can also feel difficult to know what to prioritise and with all the various health advice available, it can be confusing and feel overwhelming trying to decide what would be helpful.

Hippocrates, the Greek Physician known as the 'Father of Medicine' kept it simple on physical health by saying, "If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health".

Keeping with the Greek theme, health can be viewed as requiring...

The Four Pillars of Health



- Movement
- Healthy Food
- Sleep
- Connection

We will be covering movement and healthy eating. Visit the PSPA website for separate information on sleep.

Movement

Every movement counts towards health, and some is better than none. Movement does not have to mean formal exercise. Getting up regularly and moving around home, walking upstairs, taking the dog out, carrying and putting away shopping and gardening are examples of the everyday activities that help to preserve our health. As carers you may be doing more or less than you used to or could have swapped different types of physical tasks for others, for

example, helping someone with washing, dressing or getting up, instead of playing badminton.

When it comes to care tasks it is important to remember and honour our limits, make use of paid carers, ease the pressure with moving and handling equipment issued by the Occupational Therapist. Follow good guidance for pushing wheelchairs. If your loved one has fallen, get assistance of others to help wherever possible so you are not putting yourself at risk of injury. It is important to find a balance between being active and resting, so wherever possible pace yourself and look at the 'Energy Conservation for Carers' for more ideas.

How much Physical Activity do we Need for Health?

UK Chief Medical Officers Physical Activity Guidelines (2019) are condensed into the following picture:



Carers UK Research with Sport England

Carers UK's report 'Carers and Physical Activity' found that unpaid carers over the age of 55 face significant challenges in being physically active, despite 87% wanting 'to be fitter than I am'.

Carers reported the main barriers are:

- Not having the time to take part in physical activity (88%)
- Not being motivated (71%)
- Not being able to afford the costs (67%)
- Not having anyone to go with (59%)

The report also shows that carers are less active than other adults over 55 (46% of carers over the age of 55 are inactive, compared with 33% of all adults in this age bracket) and that the barriers to being physically active are leaving carers in poorer health than the general population. Disabled carers, working carers, and carers who are struggling financially are particularly affected.

(Carers UK 2021)

Resources to help with moving

The internet is full of exercise videos and exploring You Tube will come up with millions of options. However, to make sure what you are trying is tried, tested and safe then the following may be useful if you are looking to do something more at home:

NHS Fitness Studio

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/>

Joe Wickes 'The Nation's PE Teacher'

<https://www.thebodycoach.com/>

Sessions for Carers

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/share-and-learn-online-sessions>

Some organisations run physical health-related sessions for carers. Carers UK's Share & Learn Online groups are free and can be found on this link and there are sessions such as Yoga, Bollywood Dance, Ballet and Salsa to try.

They also provide other activities such as photography, classical music and poetry. As well as nation specific groups for Wales and Scotland.

Healthy Food

Having nourishing, nutritious food can help you feel better, less sluggish, brighter and more energetic. Eating well can affect all the other pillars, feeling able to move more, sleep well and have the focus to connect with others.

‘Good mood food’ is a phrase being heard more and more. This highlights the relationship between what we eat and how we feel. These are foods or dishes designed to support us with good fuel, helping our bodies work the best they can, bettering our immune system to fight off bugs and bacteria.

- Eat regularly – to keep your blood sugar level and energy up
- Stay hydrated – it is easy to forget to drink when you are busy or concentrating on others
- Manage your caffeine – to the level that works best for you
- Eat the right fats – especially important for brain function and joint care
- Get enough protein – Important for slower release energy and helping your body repair itself
- Eat wholefoods – These are natural ingredients and contain more nutrients than processed food
- Have your 5 a day – Fruit and vegetables contain high levels of many vitamins and minerals

Resources to help with healthy food

BBC Good Mood Food Recipes

The website explains, “These recipes are rich in omega-3, vitamin D, Vitamin B12, folate, zinc, iron or selenium, all of which may help to put a smile on your face”.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/collections/good_mood_food

MIND

Overview of food and mood, including a 4-minute explanatory video, that is a useful watch.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/>