

# Caring

Your members'  
magazine

NEWS • CAMPAIGNS • SUPPORT • EXPERIENCES

Issue 53 | Spring 2020

A photograph of a man and a woman smiling together outdoors. The man is on the left, wearing a dark jacket, and the woman is on the right, wearing a blue top. They are standing in front of a brick building with a window. The sky is blue with some clouds.

## Staying connected

Finding new ways to care for our mental wellbeing

**Campaigning latest**

*Caring behind  
closed doors*

**Educational opportunities**

*Carers' Scholarship Fund  
from the Open University*

 **carersUK**

## Membership survey

Thank you to everyone who took part  
Here's a preview of the results – see more on page five



**1,662** members *responded* (up from 756 in 2016)



2016

2019

**65%** have been *caring for some time* while **23%** are *new to caring*

**45%** of members are caring for a *husband, wife or partner*; *almost a third* are caring for a *parent or in-law*. Many members told us they were caring for someone with more than one condition



**Over half**  
are caring for  
someone with a  
physical disability

**32%** told us they *have a disability*, twice the rate of the general UK adult population

**1 in 3** members are caring for someone with a *mental health condition*



**75%**  
are caring for  
**35 hours**  
or more a  
week

**56%** of members told us that their main reason for joining Carers UK was to *access information and support*

**31%** said *being part of a national movement of carers* was the most important part of membership.

**27%**  
are caring for  
their child



Since the previous issue of Caring, it seems the world has changed for all of us. But for many of you as carers, immediate additional challenges have been created, needing to be rapidly addressed

The outbreak of COVID-19, here and abroad, has fundamentally changed the ways in which we live our lives. And it's been of the highest importance to make sure that the impact that this is having on unpaid carers is demonstrated and understood - and that action is taken to provide immediate support, alongside campaigning for recognition of the needs of carers for the future.

As the situation has been unfolding, day by day, our teams have been working together to provide the most up-to-date information, relevant wherever you are in the UK. And by securing additional funding from Centrica, the Department of Health and Social Care and a Sun 50 grant, we have been able to extend capacity of our Helpline services, including the Carers UK Helpline now being available

## In this issue...



6

**The Carers behind closed doors report**



11

**Staying safe online**



17

**Keeping calm and well**



Monday-Friday, 9am-6pm on 0808 808 7777.

One of our greatest strengths as a membership organisation is our ability to turn to you and hear exactly how coronavirus is affecting your daily lives - and then be able to use your experiences to influence government decision making. Thank you to everyone who took part in our recent survey. You can read more about the report that was created, as a result, and how we are using this to campaign for the Government and the NHS to take urgent action to support carers. So now, more than ever, we need to 'Make Caring Visible' and we'll be coming together (virtually) with other organisations, this Carers Week, to ensure that carers are recognised and supported and that together we can make it through these challenging times.

*Stay safe, best wishes  
Helen*

Our mission is to make life better for carers:

We give expert advice, information and support 

We connect carers so no one has to care alone 

We campaign together for lasting change 

We innovate to find new ways to reach and support carers. 

### CARERS UK HELPLINE

T 0808 808 7777

Opening hours:

Monday-Friday, 9am-6pm

E [advice@carersuk.org](mailto:advice@carersuk.org)

### KEEP IN TOUCH

Carers UK  
20 Great Dover Street,  
London SE1 4LX

T 020 7378 4999

E [info@carersuk.org](mailto:info@carersuk.org)  
[carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)

Carers Scotland  
T 0141 445 3070  
E [info@carerscotland.org](mailto:info@carerscotland.org)  
[carerscotland.org](http://carerscotland.org)

Carers Wales  
T 029 2081 1370  
E [info@carerswales.org](mailto:info@carerswales.org)  
[carerswales.org](http://carerswales.org)

Carers Northern Ireland  
T 028 9043 9843  
E [info@carersni.org](mailto:info@carersni.org)

# Benefits changes and COVID-19

On the 6 April, the new tax year brought with it the expected annual benefits and rates changes. As always, these have been reflected in our online information and in the *Looking after someone* guide for 2020-21, available at [carersuk.org/LAS](https://carersuk.org/LAS)

The arrival of COVID-19 and resulting Coronavirus Act has meant that there have been further changes to many of these benefits and the legislation around them. Here we summarise some of the key changes and provide sources of further information.

### Assessments

Face-to-face assessments for most benefits have been put on hold – check [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) for an update on when these will be reinstated and see our A-Z guide for information on specific benefits: [carersuk.org/covid-19-a-z](https://carersuk.org/covid-19-a-z)

### Carer's Allowance

You will continue to receive Carer's Allowance if you are already claiming this. As a result of COVID-19 changes, the government has confirmed that providing 'emotional support' will count towards the 35 hours needed to claim. You will still be entitled to receive Carer's Allowance if you have a temporary break from caring because you, or those you care for, get coronavirus or have to self-isolate because of it.

### Overpayments

The government has decided to stop recovering overpayments for three months during this period. This includes benefit overpayments, tax credit debts or social fund loans. Although most deductions will be stopped automatically, if you have a standing order set up with your bank, you will need to contact them to stop the payments.

### Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

During this period, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) can be paid from the first day of sickness absence, rather than the fourth day, for people who have the coronavirus (COVID-19) or have to self-isolate.

SSP has been extended to cover people caring for those within the same household who display coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms and have been told to self-isolate.

For more information visit [carersuk.org/covid-19-a-z](https://carersuk.org/covid-19-a-z)

## Two sides of the story - Best Charity Film Charity Film Awards 2020

In late April, we know many of you were huddled around your computers watching the drama of the Charity Film Awards unfold, where our short film, *Two sides of the story* was a finalist. And the last award given was for the Best Charity Film of the Year, voted for by the public and a panel of charity and film industry experts... and we won! A big thank you to everyone who took the time to vote; we really appreciate it.

The film was created with British Gas as part of the *Share That You Care* campaign and launched during last year's Carers Week - the feedback we have received as to how moving it is means so much - and has been reflected by winning the grand prize in these awards. If you haven't yet seen it, please visit <https://youtu.be/gHQ6hQ3SQUM>

# Your membership survey

Thank you to the 1,662 members who responded to the membership survey. The results reveal a diverse membership united by a shared experience of caring.

Members are generally positive about their membership experience; 79% say they would recommend Carers UK to a friend or family member who is caring. 47% say membership has helped them become more knowledgeable about practical support, and 37% say it has helped them understand their rights as a carer.

Carer information is the main reason for becoming a member, with 56% joining

to access information and support. 31% say being part of a national movement of carers is the most important part of membership, followed by regular email updates (26%) and *Caring* magazine (15%).

Whilst the majority of members haven't used the Forum recently, those who do find it helpful. 83% would recommend the Forum to a friend or family member and 40% say it has helped them feel that they are not alone: [carersuk.org/forum](https://carersuk.org/forum)

"Every time I ask a question, I get a quick answer. I would be lost without Carers UK."

Member  
in Scotland

Overall, our survey showed positive views of membership and Carers UK, but there is always room for improvement. During the coming months we'll be introducing new activities to engage with our members and will also be taking further steps to connect with carers from diverse communities across the UK. Thanks again to all who contributed and provided your valuable feedback.

## Mindful Chef

### Healthy eating made easy

Delicious, healthy recipe boxes

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\*Offer for new customers only, one per household. T&C's at: [mindfulchef.com](https://mindfulchef.com)



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**4 recipes boxes**

Use code  
**CARERSUK**

## Caring behind closed doors



On 23 April, Carers UK released a new research report, *Caring behind closed doors*, which shows the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on carers.



**87% of carers are worried about what will happen to the people they care for if they have to self-isolate or become ill**

It's based on what 5,000 carers and former carers told us in our recent survey, so a big thank you to our members who took the time to fill it in. Carers told us they are providing more care as well as spending more money than usual, on top of worrying about what might happen to the person they care for if they get ill. Issues such as difficulty accessing food and medicine, the impact of local services closing, and not feeling their role is recognised also featured heavily as challenges for carers.

The survey found that:

- 70% of carers are providing more care due to the coronavirus outbreak
- over a third (35%) of carers are providing more care as a result of local services reducing or closing
- carers are, on average, providing 10 additional hours of care a week
- 69% of all carers are providing more help with emotional support, motivation, or keeping an eye/checking in on the person they care for
- 81% of carers are spending more money at the moment. 72% are spending more on food and 50% are spending more on household bills
- 38% of carers are worried about their financial situation
- over half (55%) of carers feel overwhelmed and are worried that they're going to burnout in the coming weeks
- 87% of carers are worried about what will happen to the people they care for if they have to self-isolate or become ill.

Helen Walker, Chief Executive of Carers UK said:

*“Unpaid carers are fighting the same battle as care staff and many of our NHS workers: yet they do it behind closed doors and with far less recognition. Unlike our fantastic frontline workers they are unable to clock off from their caring responsibilities. Many are overwhelmed and incredibly anxious about how they will manage in the weeks ahead. Unpaid carers are just as vital in the national effort to keep vulnerable people safe yet many fear that continuing to care around the clock will lead to them burning out”.*

In response to the report findings, Carers UK has launched a new campaign to ask the Government to take urgent action to support carers during the pandemic as it is simply unfair that carers are feeling ignored and invisible at this time.

In particular, we are calling on the Government to:

- raise awareness and recognition of unpaid carers
- increase the level of Carer’s Allowance
- increase the availability and delivery of testing and PPE to paid care workers and carers
- make care a priority.



**This crisis needs to be a turning point in how we as a society treat carers**

Carers UK has already worked with Government to try to improve legislation changes, encouraged Government guidance for carers, improved some of the rules around Carer’s Allowance, constantly called for increased testing and PPE, and secured a commitment to develop an identification letter for carers. But there is more change that carers want to see happen and we will use carers’ experiences to press for that change.

This crisis needs to be a turning point in how we as a society treat carers and Carers UK is committed to campaigning for carers’ rights, both during the pandemic and beyond.

If you would like to read the report, please visit [carersuk.org/closeddoors](https://carersuk.org/closeddoors)

## Carers Week 2020 8 – 14 June

Carers Week is an annual campaign to raise awareness of caring, highlight the challenges carers face and recognise the contribution they make to families and communities throughout the UK. It’s made possible by Carers UK working together with five other national charities.

This year’s theme is ‘Making Caring Visible’. As carers across the country face new challenges every day, it’s more important than ever that they are not isolated, but are seen, understood and supported. At work, in healthcare settings, with friends and family and in their local communities, making caring visible will help carers get the information and support they need.

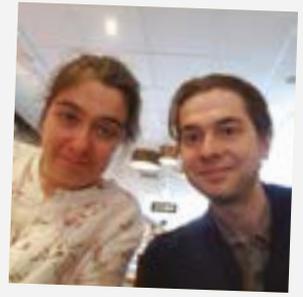
This year, Carers Week will be held virtually, with people from across the UK organising activities to support carers and raise awareness of the contribution they make.

Find out more at [carersweek.org](https://carersweek.org)



If you would like to join our campaign, please visit [carersuk.org/campaigns/closeddoors](https://carersuk.org/campaigns/closeddoors)

# We need to look after one another's mental health during this pandemic



Social distancing can easily lead to social isolation, says Carers UK member Antony Pinol who cares for his sister Maria.

“I have been the ‘official’ carer of my older sister, Maria, for three years now. However, I have been doing my bit as her brother for as long as I can remember. I am 28, my sister is 30, and from around 13 I was aware enough of the difficulties my sister faces (she has a learning disability and epilepsy) to be able to help my mum out with caring for her. When I reached a crossroads in my life at 25, unsure of which career to pursue, I decided to become my sister’s full-time carer.

“Over the past three years, caring for Maria has been as fulfilling as I expected it to be. It warms my heart to see her quality of life drastically improved

through my help. Small things like taking her out to her favourite coffee shop, or helping her buy a new notebook that she adores – all these little things make me feel that I am having a positive impact on another person’s life and that I made the right choice to become a carer.

“However, there have also been things I have struggled with as carer, specifically my mental health. I have suffered from depression intermittently since my days at university. Now, several rounds of medication and therapy later, I am much better at coping with the feelings of sadness when they come, but my struggle against the black dog continues. When things are particularly hard I start to question whether being a carer is really what I’m meant to be doing with my life.

“Recently, due to the pandemic that we’re all living through, I’ve been asking myself these

questions more often, as the periods of darkness have become more frequent. I have been unable to help my sister do the things that make her happy – taking her out for lunch, going to toy shops, window shopping for cute rabbits in pet shops – and the absence of such things has undoubtedly had a negative impact on Maria’s mood. She seems more distant and harder to connect with. I feel powerless to help her, given the quarantine measures that are in place. My mum and I do what we can to keep her happy and stimulated at home so she doesn’t just sleep the day away. But it is a struggle and I feel like a pretty inadequate carer at times.

“To compound these problems, I can’t do the things I would normally do to keep my own mental health on an even keel, all of which involve going out and socialising.

“Going to public places every day and mixing with other people, striking up conversations with strangers, smiling at people I walk past,



chatting with the barista who makes my coffee, befriending homeless people in the town centre.

“All these activities help me to feel connected to other people, which is essential for my mental health.

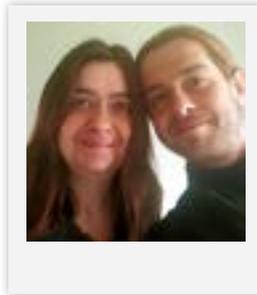
Instead, I’ve had to think of new ways to stop the dark feelings overwhelming me, and it hasn’t been easy. I can’t deny that social distancing is the logical approach to suppressing this pandemic and savings lives. But the trouble with logic is that it doesn’t take into account emotions, and emotions play a big part in mental health.

“Today, I ventured outside to buy groceries and my local town was eerily quiet. I could hear the wind whistle loudly in the empty space between shops that used to be filled with people going about their day. The few people I saw were at a distance and they were mostly faceless, wearing scarves or masks. I looked through the glass windows of the coffee shops I used to frequent: tables were piled on top of each other, chairs stacked, the barista was on his hands and knees disinfecting the floor. He caught me looking and we shared a smile before he got back to work. It was a small moment, but enough to make me feel connected to something beyond my own struggles.

“I feel selfish and slightly ashamed for worrying about my mental health when everyone’s physical health is at risk. I feel even guiltier for lamenting the very thing – social distancing – that protects us.

“But then I suspect that there are others concerned about their mental health during these times. And when I think of these people, I don’t want them to feel ashamed of their worries. Being ashamed of your feelings nearly always leads to suppressing them, and suppression can have disastrous consequences.

**We need to look out for one another emotionally, as well as physically.**



“It wouldn’t be much good if we reduced the strain on our health services through a reduction in the cases of COVID-19, only for the strain to then be increased by those suffering from the consequences of mental illness. People with mental

health issues can need hospital beds too. Sadly, I know this all too well.

“We have to try our best to stop this pandemic from spreading by social distancing, but that doesn’t mean we should neglect our mental health in the process. We need to look out for one another emotionally, as well as physically.

“If you phone a friend to ask how his physical health is, ask him how he’s feeling emotionally as well. Has he been feeling low? I certainly have. Try to be emotionally available to people through phone calls, texts, and emails, and have empathy for what they are feeling. Anything is better than isolation when your mind is in a dark place.

“Social distancing does not mean social isolation; we still have many ways to communicate. It is ironic that the same technology that has been accused of putting distance between human beings – smartphones, tablets, perpetual email checking – is now keeping us close to one another.

“We must use our ability to stay connected virtually to support one another with love, compassion, and empathy. That way, we can look after each other’s mental health whilst doing our socially distant best to protect our physical health too.”

## Learning for Living

In February we launched Learning for Living, a free interactive e-learning programme designed to help carers recognise their valuable skills and experience.

Learning for Living is an online course that enables carers to explore the specific techniques they use to learn and communicate, as well as ways to develop assertiveness and confidence. We know that carers regularly carry out complex tasks, manage finances and communicate in a range of situations on a day-to-day basis in their caring roles, but often underestimate the value of these skills when job searching or looking at changing roles. Learning for Living helps carers develop greater understanding of these skills and knowledge and how they can transfer them to the workplace – whether that’s to get back into employment or to changes roles at work – or to new volunteering opportunities.

With five interactive modules, the course takes approximately two hours to complete. Once you’ve completed Learning for Living, you’ll receive a digital badge, which you can use to document your learning and which employers can recognise as part of professional development.

Learning for Living was developed with the insight of carers who provided feedback on the programme as it was being developed. To mark the launch of the programme, then Care Minister Caroline Dinenge met with carers at Carers UK’s London office to use Learning for Living and discuss the benefits of the course with carers.



### What carers say about Learning for Living

“Learning for Living puts the carer at the fore and centre and reminds us of our skills. It addresses a future without a caring role and options that might be available. It’s well laid out and easy to navigate and can be done in between caring tasks which will be important for most participants.”

Joanie

“This process would definitely make carers feel good about the skills and abilities they have acquired during their caring ‘careers’. One of the biggest challenges is convincing others you have been developing and exercising skills all the while. Learning for Living is very impressive, thorough, useful and fun.”

Yvonne

“Real life examples made the programme relatable and applicable to my caring role. I liked how I could complete the programme in my own time. The Envision Your Future module actually made me stop for a moment to think about what I want for my future.”

Jackie

### Try Learning for Living at [learning4living.org](https://learning4living.org)

You can complete the course with a guest login or by registering. We recommend registering so you can save your progress within modules and revisit and pick up where you left off. Registering also means you can be awarded your digital badge for the programme.

# Online safety for those you care for

**Ella Hendrix** shares her ideas on how to support people to stay safe online, including general tips and sources of support.



There is no doubt that the internet has had a huge impact on the way that the world works today. From online banking to keeping in touch with family and friends, there is little in life that has not been touched by the internet.

## Potential risks of going online

Whilst there are many positives to going online, the internet can also expose people to identity theft and financial scams. If you are caring for a vulnerable person, it is important to keep an eye out for signs that they might be putting themselves and their finances at risk. By regularly talking to the person you care for about potential security issues, you can help them stay safe, secure, and internet-savvy.

## Computer security

Firstly, make sure the computer is protected:

- ensure suitable firewalls have been set-up and turned on
- install reliable and up-to-date antivirus software
- make sure accounts are protected with secure passwords, and that passwords are regularly changed.

For more information on keeping your computer safe, visit [ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security](https://ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security)

## Six tips to help them stay safe

- 1 Highlight the importance of not giving anyone their password details. Banks, for instance, will never ask directly for passwords.
- 2 Remind them that if it seems like it's too good to be true, it probably is.

- 3 Stress how important it is to verify who people are. A common online scam is the impersonation of a family member – a grandchild, for example – who asks for money to be transferred to them.
- 4 Online dating scams often work in a similar way, whereby people can be 'befriended' and coerced (often over the course of many months).
- 5 Make them aware that everything posted on social media could potentially be seen by anyone, so they should be careful about what they share, e.g. photos indicating personal information.
- 6 Remind them to check with someone they trust if there's anything that doesn't look right. If necessary, a phone call to the institution can help them check it is legitimate.

## Trust

If you are caring for someone who is vulnerable, it is important that they are able to come to you if they think that something is wrong. This way you can hopefully sort out a problem in the early stages.

If you find that details have been unwittingly passed to people, don't panic. Contact the institution to freeze accounts and then follow their instructions.

## Further help

If you suspect online fraud, call the national cybercrime reporting centre Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or visit [actionfraud.police.uk](https://actionfraud.police.uk) Friends Against Scams, run by National Trading Standards, offers short online courses on scam awareness: [friendsagainstscams.org.uk](https://friendsagainstscams.org.uk)

## Physical activity and caring

Carers often tell us that they worry about the impact of caring on their own mental and physical health, and this is something we focus on throughout our campaigns as well as our advice and information work.

Our research found that 6 out of 10 people (61%) said their physical health has worsened as a result of caring, while 7 out of 10 (72%) said they have experienced mental ill health.<sup>1</sup> Previous research also showed us that 54% of carers have reduced the amount of exercise they do because of caring.<sup>2</sup>

This led us to partner with Sport England on an exciting project funded by the National Lottery to look at ways to support carers to take part in more physical activity as a way to improve health and wellbeing.



# 6 in 10

carers say their physical health has worsened as a result of caring

<sup>1</sup> Carers UK (2018) State of Caring 2018

<sup>2</sup> Carers UK (2017) State of Caring 2017

The specific subset of carers we've been funded to research into is those aged over 55 living in England but the research results will be used to campaign for better support for all carers.

To kick off this research, we asked questions about physical activity in last year's State of Caring survey to start exploring the barriers carers face in taking part in physical activity. This was followed by interviews and focus groups in January this year to find out about what resources or support models could support carers to overcome barriers. The research has been led by carers' experiences throughout and those of you who attended last year's AGM and Members' Conference will remember having had the opportunity to share your opinions on this topic as well.

Early findings from the research indicate that 81% of all carers are not able to do as much physical



exercise as they'd like to do and, looking specifically at those aged over 55, there is a clear gap in the activity levels between those with caring responsibilities and the general population. This is a huge health inequalities issue for carers, given the well-documented benefits of physical activity that many carers are currently unable to access.

We are working towards releasing a report with full research finding along with carers' stories. We will be sharing this report with decision makers in local and national government as part of our continued campaigning work to draw attention to the health implications of caring and the need for better support.

If you have any questions about this research project or our partnership with Sport England, please contact our Policy and Public Affairs team by emailing [policy@carersuk.org](mailto:policy@carersuk.org).



**Royal Air Force  
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**SUPPORTING SERVING AND  
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RAF AND THEIR FAMILIES**



# SUPPORT FOR CARERS

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The RAF Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1081009) and Scotland (SC038109). CARERS\_ADVERT\_FEB20

# A new funding scheme for carers from the Open University

This year, the Open University have launched their first Carers' Scholarship Fund – enabling up to 50 unpaid carers to access full funding for an undergraduate qualification.



While studying may not be an option for all carers, for some like Jane, below, the mix of distance learning, remote contact with tutors and discussion groups – together with access to the OU's Student Support Team, who have been trained to understand the challenges that carers may face - can be of immediate benefit or help with their life outside or post-caring.

Carers UK Vice President Dame Philippa Russell DBE said of the scheme, "I am excited to endorse The Carers' Scholarship Fund. This is a huge opportunity for carers to progress their education and their careers. It also demonstrates to carers how valued they are, how vital they are to our society and how they are part of a community, not struggling alone."

Here, Jane tells of how studying with the Open University alongside her caring role felt like a 'second opportunity' for her.

### Would you like to apply for the Carers' Scholarship Fund?

The OU's Carers Scholarships Fund is open for applications until 31 July 2020.

It will provide 50 UK-based carers with funding so they can pursue higher education. Given the current circumstances the OU is flexing their study start dates so if applicants are successful, they can hold their place until the next academic year in September 2021.

The OU's unique flexibility means carers can study around their caring responsibilities and receive tailored advice and support. For more information visit [open.ac.uk/courses/fees-and-funding/carers-scholarship-fund](https://open.ac.uk/courses/fees-and-funding/carers-scholarship-fund)

## Jane's story

Jane is the prime carer for her son, who was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome at birth. Here she tells her remarkable story of being a mother, a carer and an OU student.

“I failed my A Levels as I struggled with formal learning and was fortunate enough to secure a position on a nursing course after finishing school. However, I quickly realised that nursing wasn't for me and decided to retrain as a typist. I went to the local college and did a Higher Diploma in Administrative Procedure, which eventually led to my role as a senior administrator in the Child Protection Review (CRP) team at Peterborough County Council – I held this position for 12 years.

“I gave birth to my first child whilst still working at CPR, and even though he was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome, I was able to go back to work after four months, as I had the support of a social worker, fantastic child-minder and extended family to help with care. Seven years later and my second son arrived – having two children was tougher, especially with my eldest's disability. I made the decision to become a full-time mother and carer, as two children in a child-minding placement



was not financially viable, especially when my son with Down's syndrome needed a separate specialist placement. My day was filled with hospital appointments and speech therapy, as well as all the other duties that come with being a parent.

**“I made the decision to become a full-time mother and carer, as two children in a child-minding placement was not financially viable.”**

“I desperately needed something for myself. My mother suggested I investigate The Open University (OU), as I had always liked art history. I settled on a BA Honours Degree in Humanities and History and was excited to start on this new adventure. It was difficult



to dedicate time to my course, especially trying to fit studies around school pick-ups, the children's homework and caring responsibilities, but the flexibility of the OU, meant that I was able to study when best suited me.

“In 2013, I suddenly lost my sister, shortly followed by my mother a year later. Whilst struggling with the aftermath of this devastation, my eldest son was diagnosed with Graves' disease, which is an autoimmune disorder that causes hyperthyroidism. He was desperately ill and had to have an operation to remove his thyroid, with lots of hospital visits and treatment. Studying took a backseat, as I needed to care for him and support his recovery. I discussed the situation with my tutor, who was able to grant me an extension on my upcoming TMA, which helped me catch-up on the module in time for my exam at the end of term.

“It was a long process, but a rewarding one. I graduated in 2015 and made sure I could attend a graduation ceremony in Birmingham, so that my sons, brother and best friend could join. It was a wonderful day.

“Since completing my OU studies, I've toyed with being a teacher, but



couldn't face the additional PGCE training to make this happen. So, in 2018 I began volunteering as a historical researcher with Nenescape, a landscape partnership team which brings together partners from along the River Nene between Northampton and Peterborough to celebrate, protect and conserve the natural and built heritage of the landscape. Through the team I was introduced to the British Museum-run, Portable Antiquities Scheme, which encourages the recording of archaeological objects.

**“I would recommend the OU to anybody, it's opened so many doors for me. Giving up was never an option, as I knew I wouldn't get a second opportunity like this”**

“I'm really proud of both of my roles and have even started volunteering with another charity called Light Project Peterborough, working with the local council to provide shelter and support for the homeless. This part of my work really inspires me and I'm now looking for a permanent role in this sector.

“I would recommend the OU to anybody, it's opened so many doors for me. Giving up was never an option, as I knew I wouldn't get a second opportunity like this. It's been something just for me, which in turn has kept my brain active and enhanced my CV. For anyone who is a carer and are wondering whether the OU is the right option, my advice is to just give it a go, and remember that you are a person as well as a carer.”

# Keeping calm and well during difficult times

Ask the expert



Looking after your mental wellbeing as a carer can be challenging. Here are eight tips to help you take care of yourself and protect your mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak.

## Set limits on coronavirus news

Combat any rising anxiety levels by setting a strict time limit on how much you read about coronavirus on social media and in the news. Only follow the advice of trusted sources, such as the government website [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://gov.uk/coronavirus) and NHS [nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](https://nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19). You can also find guidance for carers on our website: [carersuk.org/coronavirus](https://carersuk.org/coronavirus).

## Make time for activities you enjoy

Create a time slot in your day for an activity you enjoy – whether it's reading, writing, painting, cooking, gardening or knitting. Encourage those you care for to make time for activities they enjoy too.

## Find moments to yourself

Listening to a mindfulness exercise or relaxing music is a great way to find calmness and peace of mind. If you need a positivity boost, many people find seated exercises, yoga or dance helpful. Visit the NHS website for inspiration: [nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/easy-low-impact-exercises](https://nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/easy-low-impact-exercises)

## Create a routine

Finding a timetable, routine or structure can be a good way to keep your emotions in check. It may also be helpful to create a routine for the person you look after, if they need support to do so. If you're looking for online training courses, our Learning for Living programme helps carers refresh their skills: [learning4living.org](https://learning4living.org)

## Pay attention to sleep

We know getting enough sleep can be

challenging for many carers. Some people find meditation exercises before bed really help. Other tips include having a bath with lavender oil, drinking chamomile tea or reading before bed. Try to find ways to switch off, especially from online devices.

## Keep in touch with people who understand

Sharing your feelings with someone who understands can be a massive relief and release. Our Jointly app is one way carers can stay in touch: [carersuk.org/jointly](https://carersuk.org/jointly). If you're feeling really alone and stressed, call the Samaritans 24-hour listening service on 116 123 or visit [nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines](https://nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines) for other sources of help.

## Find sources of support

There are lots of supportive online groups out there, including our Forum, where you can connect with other carers facing the same challenges: [carersuk.org/forum](https://carersuk.org/forum). There are also local voluntary groups that may be able to help in practical ways, such as home deliveries: [covidmutualaid.org/local-groups](https://covidmutualaid.org/local-groups)

Keep in mind that some people may wish to exploit those in vulnerable circumstances. Most people offering support will be genuine, but be aware of scammers and trust your instincts.

## Get some fresh air if you can

Get some fresh air by opening your windows, walking round the garden or going for a walk or a jog. If you do go outside, remember to observe government guidance about going out and social distancing.

## Spring clean

In this third instalment from her diary, Dawn negotiates housework with her father-in-law and helps him reminisce about his bell-ringing days.



### The Hoover

*'I'm glad you've come,' says John from his seat in front of the fire. 'I've been waiting for you. If you didn't come, I was going back to bed.'*

When I arrive, John has the fire lit and the room is comfortably warm, though I don't think he's been up long.

*'How are you?' I ask, opening the curtains.*

*'Well, I've been a bit fed up. Dave said I wasn't looking after the place properly, and he had a right go at me.'*

*'Why would David have a go at you?'*

*'He sat there,' he says, indicating the chair I'd sat in on Saturday afternoon, 'and said the place was a mess. He was hoovering and things, making out I don't do anything. But I Hoover up.'*

I drag John's old Hoover in from the dining room. *'This thing's had it,' I tell him. 'I know you've been using it but honestly, when I last used this, it left the carpet dustier than when I started.'*

John tells me he's already emptied it. I don't contradict him, even though the air is full of dust just from wheeling the thing three metres from the next room.

*'I'm sure you have. I just thought it'd make sense to bring ours and have a proper go at it.'*

*'Well, Dave was going right into the corners.'*

I laugh. *'You can't be cross at him for that. If he's got a job to do, he does it properly. It's actually my fault because I asked him to do it.'*

*'Did you?'*

*'Yes. It's a while since we had a proper clean up and the room's bound to get dusty when you've got a coal fire isn't it?'*

John isn't convinced by my explanation. *'A lot of blokes who are like me and don't have a wife, especially if they like gardening - well you can't help it, you're bound to bring a bit of muck in.'*

*'Of course you are,' I say,*

*trying to reassure him. 'We're just trying to help you, John. It's easier for me or David to do things like vacuuming, rather than you wearing yourself out trying to do them. You said yourself your leg was hurting.'*

Since I spend so many hours sitting in this room with him, it doesn't seem unreasonable for me to want do a thorough clean once in a while.

**"Of course you are. We're just trying to help you, John."**



## Bell ringing

By the time I bring the tea in, John's perked up. He's studying a photograph from the mantelpiece: him in the centre, surrounded by a small group of white-haired people, all clutching wine glasses and smiling at him. There's a cake on the table.

*'When was that taken?' I ask, trying to prompt his memory.*

*'It must've been a ringing meeting or something.'*

*'It's the celebration they had for you when you'd been ringing seventy years,' I remind him.*

John turns the picture over to read his own writing on the back. 70 years bell ringing 1943 – 2013.

*'I wouldn't think they've ever had anyone ring for that long before you, John.'*

*'No,' he laughs. He points to a woman in a pink jumper. 'That's Pauline Kendall, my ex-girlfriend.'*

*'When was she your girlfriend?'*

*'Before I met Mary.'*

He puts the photo back and picks up another, older one, taken some years earlier and with many of the same faces, younger looking but wearing frumpier clothes.

*'I used to be one of the best ones,' he says wistfully.*



**I make him some lunch and we play Scrabble afterwards. John wins by eleven points.**

*'They wanted me to ring at the cathedral. When I go up in the belfry now, I'm like a spare part. They don't need me.'*

I make him some lunch and we play Scrabble afterwards. John wins by eleven points. Unusually, he knows it's Monday, and that it's History Club tomorrow night.

*'Do you know what it's about?' he asks.*

I do, because he's asked me the same question about twenty times, but I search for the programme so I can show him. *'It's Tales from the manse,'* I say, passing it to him.

*'Ah well,' he laughs. 'You know it better than me.'*

We have another cup of tea and a few more rounds of how David bullied him at the weekend. *'I forget things,'* John says, mid-moan. *'I forgot you and Dave were married.'*

*'I know you did, but you were there.'*

*'It was far, wasn't it? How did I get there? I don't think I was driving, was I?'*

*'You, Graham and Linda went in a taxi,'* I say.

*'That's right. I can't remember what you looked like.'*

I show him the picture of me and David on our wedding day, both laughing and holding hands. *'That's nice,'* he says, smiling at me.



# jointly

by  carersUK

A mobile and online app  
designed to help carers  
share and co-ordinate care

**FREE for Carers UK members, using the code DGTL9854**

Jointly enables carers to set up a ‘circle of care’ around the person they care for. Carers can then invite others involved in providing that care - family, friends, neighbours, professionals – to join the circle so everyone is kept in the loop.

“Looking after someone can be complicated. Jointly helps me stay on top of things and share information easily with everyone involved in the care of my son.”

*Julie, carer*

Jointly offers:

- A central place to store and share important information
- Simple, intuitive group communication to keep everyone connected.
- Shared calendar, task lists, categorised notes and a medication manager, viewable offline too, to help organise what needs to be done.



Accessible on: iPhone (iOS versions 9.0 and above); iPad (iOS 9.0 and above); Android devices (versions 5.0 and above); most web browsers



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