



# **Caring for You**

## **A Wellbeing Toolkit for Unpaid Carers**

**May 2024**

# Before using this Toolkit...

Before looking through this Toolkit, take a moment to pause.

Whether you are using this Toolkit because you are interested in learning about maintaining wellbeing, or looking for specific exercises regarding an emotion you are currently feeling, take a few seconds to breathe.

Take a big deep breath in through your nose and hold for a few seconds. Exhale through your mouth for a few seconds. Repeat this a few times.

## Go through this Toolkit at your own pace.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to read it. Make a cup of tea or get a snack. Play some relaxing music in the background. Whatever works for you.

## About Carers Trust Scotland

Carers Trust works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. It partners with its UK-wide network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, raise awareness, and influence policy. Carer's Trust vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

Carers Trust Scotland  
The Boardwalk  
105 Brunswick Street  
Glasgow  
G1 1TF

[scotland@carers.org](mailto:scotland@carers.org)

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# About this Toolkit

This Adult Carer Wellbeing Toolkit can be used as either self-directed support for unpaid carers to work on themselves, or can be adapted by organisations and support workers to carry out wellbeing sessions. Unpaid carers may also want to work through the Toolkit together within peer-support groups.

We have split this Toolkit into two sections:

## Section 1 – Dealing with emotions

## Section 2 – Maintaining wellbeing

Within the dealing with emotions section of the Toolkit, there are a range of different emotions which unpaid carers may experience. Within each emotion, there are some activities you can do, as well as tips on managing the emotion and some useful links. This is not an exhaustive list of emotions, and there may be others felt that are not within this Toolkit.

The maintaining wellbeing section of the Toolkit includes some ideas of how an unpaid carer can adapt wellbeing activities into their everyday lives.

There is no right or wrong way to use this Toolkit. It has been designed so that unpaid carers, organisations and support workers can choose the way they want to use it. The activities can be completed alone or in group settings.

**We would like to thank all the unpaid carers and support staff who took the time to share their experiences and ideas to help create this Toolkit.**

This Toolkit is designed to maintain good mental wellbeing. **It is not a tool to be used in crisis.** If you or someone you work with are experiencing acute mental health difficulties or crisis please contact:

**Samaritans: Call 116 123 (open 24/7)** <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/how-we-can-help/if-youre-having-difficult-time/>

### **Breathing Space:**

Call 080083 85 87 (Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am Fri-Mon 6pm-6am)  
<https://www.breathingspace.scot/how-we-can-help/need-to-talk/>

### **NHS24:**

Call 111 (24/7)  
<https://www.nhs24.scot/check-your-symptoms/get-help-with-your-mental-health/>



# Section 1:

## Dealing with emotions



# Stress

Having a caring role can lead to varying levels of stress and worry. It can be stressful to look after someone else as well as yourself, and be difficult to switch off from worrying about them and the future.

Stress is how we react when we feel under pressure or threatened. It usually happens when we are in a situation that we don't feel we can manage or control. Your body releases stress hormones which can create that 'flight or fight' response.<sup>1</sup>



## Tips on how to handle stress

### Breathe in and out

Try to relax and focus on your breathing, breathing deep down to your stomach. Breathe in through your nose for the count of five then slowly breathe out through your mouth for the count of five. Don't worry if you can't get to five, just breathe.



### Talk to someone

Talk to someone you can trust. They could be a friend, a relative, a support worker, or a colleague. If you feel like you don't have anyone to talk to, reach out through an online support service.

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<sup>1</sup> © Mind. This information is published in full at [mind.org.uk](https://mind.org.uk) [What is stress? – Mind](#)

## Find a moment of joy

Have a go at something you enjoy. This could be something creative like painting or drawing, or watching your favourite TV show or film, or cooking. Try to find some time do something you love even if it is a temporary distraction from feeling stressed.



## Clench your fist

Clench your fist for three seconds, then unclenched for three seconds. Keep repeating this for a minute or so. If you have a stress ball, you can use this too, but if not, try with just your fist.

## Spend time in nature

This doesn't have to be a big hike (although if you can, go for it!). A walk around the block, standing in the garden, even opening the window and looking out has its benefits. Take deep breaths of fresh air and notice the different plants or structures around you.



# Grounding

There are many different grounding techniques, this 5-4-3-2-1 exercise is just one. Take a few deep breaths if you can, and then engage your five senses.

- Notice five things you can see, paying attention to small details like colours or unusual shapes
- Identify four things you can feel (e.g. clothing, sun on your skin)
- Listen for three sounds you might usually ignore
- Recognise two scents in the air or nearby objects
- Focus on one thing you can taste (carry chewing gum or a snack)



This technique helps anchor you in the present moment by shifting attention away from distressing thoughts or memories.

## Useful links

[Managing stress and building resilience – tips – Mind](#)

[Understanding and dealing with stress | British Red Cross](#)

[What to do if you are struggling with stress \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)

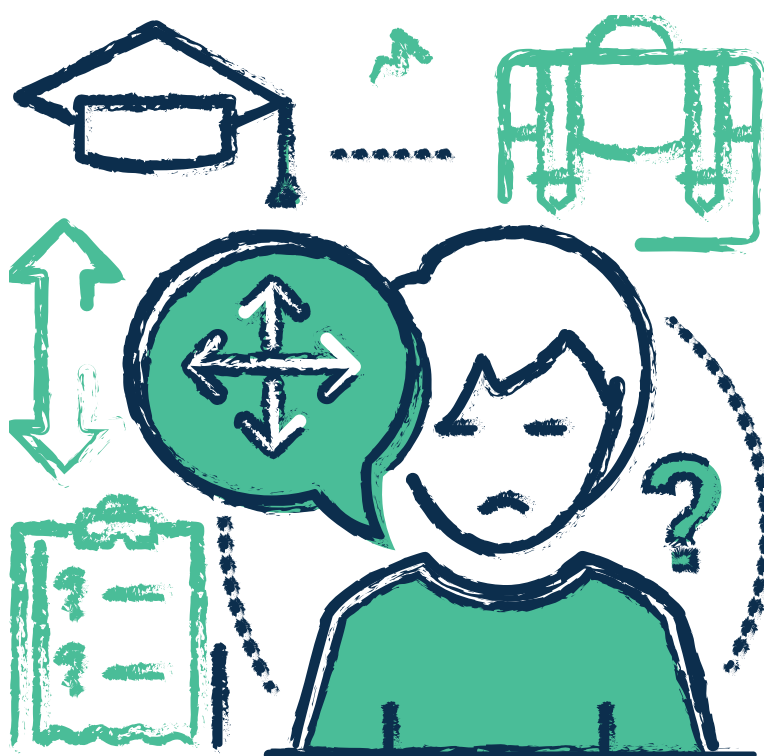
[Steps to deal with stress: A simple guide to stressing less and enjoying life more \(healthscotland.com\)](#)

# Anxiety

There can be a lot of uncertainty when caring for someone which can often lead to feelings of anxiousness. It is important that when we feel anxious we are able to try identify what has caused, or triggered, this emotion.

Anxiety can show up in lots of different ways. Some people experience shortness of breath, sweaty palms or feeling a bit light-headed or sick. Others may experience anxiety differently. These physical symptoms are a normal reaction to your body feeling under threat.

Anxiety can be incredibly scary and overwhelming. In the moment, using breathing techniques and grounding can help our bodies to feel safe and then we can calm the anxious thoughts.



## Circle of control

Worrying about something can lead to feelings of anxiety. This activity helps us to think about breaking worries down into more manageable chunks. They can then seem easier to overcome.

Think or write down things which generally worry you and put them into the following categories:

- Things you don't like but cannot be changed by anyone
- Things you have some influence over, and can perhaps be sorted out by others
- Things that are within your control, and can be changed and improved by you.

You may wish to write an 'action plan' to map out the changes you want to make. It can be helpful to put a deadline on these. Focussing on the things we can control may help us to feel empowered, safe and calmer.

## Coping skills for anxiety

Deep breathing is a simple technique that is excellent for managing emotions such as anxiety. Not only is it effective, but it can be done at any time or place.

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly through your mouth with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw.

Go slow: inhale for four seconds, pause for four seconds, exhale for six seconds. Repeat this a few times.<sup>2</sup>

For more examples of breathing techniques, please see the [second section](#) of this Toolkit.



## Anxiety triggers

When we can identify what triggers our anxiety, we are able to learn strategies to cope with it better. Only take part in this exercise when you are not feeling anxious.

Read each of the items and rank them 0-10 of how anxious each trigger makes you.

### Scale 0-10 (0 calm – 10 extremely anxious)



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with your family, friendships or relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Any kind of disruption to routine                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being in a large crowd of people                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Going anywhere or doing certain things by yourself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trying to make other people happy                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Loud noise or raised voices                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having to confront or approach someone                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial concerns                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having too much to do                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of support                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being away from the person or people I care for         | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of understanding.                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not knowing what will happen in the future              |   |

## Useful links

[Stressed and anxious \(breathingspace.scot\)](https://breathingspace.scot/)

[Understanding and dealing with anxiety | British Red Cross](#)

[Stress and anxiety support | Shout 85258 \(giveusashout.org\)](#)



# Isolation and loneliness

Having a caring role may often feel lonely and isolating. You may feel that people around you cannot relate to your life, don't understand what your caring role entails, or your caring role prevents you from being able to socialise.

You may feel you do not have the energy to connect with people, or concerns what they will think if you share how you're feeling.

## Tips on isolation and loneliness

### Get in touch with your local carer organisation

Your local carer organisation will be able to help you find support near where you live. Many of them run groups for unpaid carers where you can get a chance to meet people in a similar situation. Other unpaid carers may understand how you feel and may be able to share some of their own experiences.

Find your local carer organisation here: [Help & Info – Find Local Carer Services | Carers Trust](#)

### Talk to friends or family

See if your family or friends can help out a bit more, particularly if they know how you feel. It can be challenging to open up about how you are feeling, especially if you are worried someone will not understand.

Try writing down your feelings before speaking to someone and be as honest as you can with them and tell them what they could do to help. They might be able to provide support over the phone and/or online. Arrange a time each week dedicated to speaking to them, even if you don't have anything special to tell them.







## Useful links

[Loneliness Guide | Marmalade Trust](#)

[15 things to do if you're feeling lonely | Mental Health Foundation](#)

[5 tips to tackle loneliness and isolation \(redcross.org.uk\)](#)

[Tackling Loneliness | Age Scotland \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)



# Burnout

You may be experiencing extreme tiredness due to your caring role. Balancing looking after yourself and another person(s) can be exhausting and impact the level and quality of sleep you can get. When you are not getting proper sleep and feel like you are constantly on the go, it is possible to experience burnout.



## Tips for burnout

### Start with you

Try to make small, simple changes to help take care of yourself. Try to drink at least two litres of water and have five pieces of fruit and veg each day. Try to do some light exercise, meditate or yoga from home.



## Sleep

Improving your sleep can be incredibly difficult when you are an unpaid carer. If you are struggling to fall asleep, try listening to white noise, relaxing music, or do a sleep meditation before bed. Try to avoid screen time for an hour before bed, and instead read a book or magazine.

You can also find that due to your caring role, you are being woken up multiple times throughout the night which disrupts your sleep cycle. Try to remain consistent with a regular bedtime and wake-up time as this can help your body's sleep rhythm. Again try listening to calming sounds when you are trying to get back to sleep.

## Delegate

Unpaid carers often end up being the people who carry the physical and mental load for the whole household. While it can be challenging, pulling others in to support can make a difference.

If you are able to, speak to friends and family about whether they are able to help out with your caring role to relieve some of the pressure. Be specific and identify which tasks others may be able to help out with.



It may be helpful to write a list of the tasks that need to be done in a day/week and then go through asking yourself “does this have to be me?”. If the answer is no, then consider who else might be able to support.

If it is possible and appropriate, also think about which tasks the person(s) you care for are able to help out with. Have a conversation with them about how you are feeling and whether you can share some tasks between you.

Another thing to consider in this situation is external support which may be available to help ease the load. Having an Adult Carer Support Plan through your local carer organisation can help, as well as looking into Self-Directed Support options. Please see links below to learn more:

**Adult Carer Support Plan –** [Adult Carer Support Plan – Health and Well-being \(nhsinform.scot\)](https://www.nhs.uk/information/adult-carer-support-plan/)

**Support –** [Self Directed Support Scotland \(SDSS\) – Self Directed Support Scotland \(sdssscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.sdssscotland.org.uk/)



## Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation which helps you to be present in the moment and manage your thoughts and emotions. It does take practice, so don't be disheartened if you don't have instant success! Even one mindful minute per day can make a big difference to your wellbeing.

We have included some ideas on mindfulness in the [second section of this Toolkit](#).

## Useful links

[Top tips for managing stress and burnout – National Wellbeing Hub](#)

[How to Identify and Prevent Burnout \(healthline.com\)](#)

# Anger and frustration

Anger is a natural emotion that everybody experiences at points in their life. It is not 'bad' and is there to keep us safe. Anger presenting itself can often indicate that you feel unsafe, and it is worth listening to that. An important thing to think about when we are angry is the behaviours this may trigger.



## Anger warning signs

Often we can feel we are about to snap. Sometimes this can be instant, going from having no anger to having a full-blown outburst.

The first way to recognise anger is to understand our warning signs. Anger warning signs are the earliest symptoms of anger, which can often go unnoticed, but can be used to alert a person when their anger is growing.

How do you react when you feel angry? Some of these warning signs might start when you feel a bit irritated, and others may start when you are feeling really angry. Circle or write down the signs which apply to you.

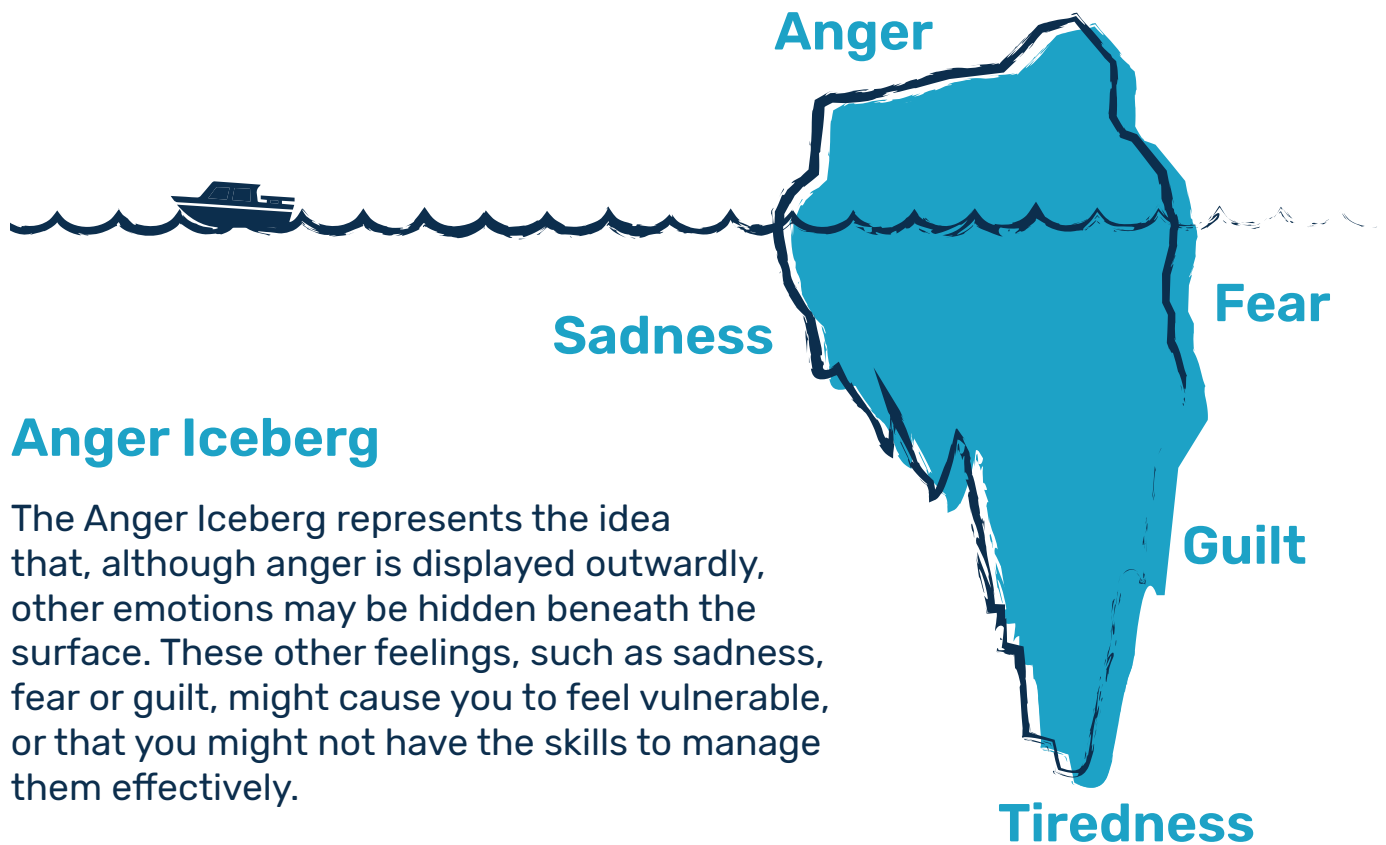
<b>Mind goes blank</b>	<b>Insult the other person</b>	<b>Face turns red</b>
<b>Body or hands shake</b>	<b>Start sweating</b>	<b>Throw things</b>
<b>Heavy or fast breathing</b>	<b>Stare at the other person aggressively</b>	<b>Scowl or make an angry face</b>
<b>Scream, raise voice or yell</b>	<b>Clench fists</b>	<b>Feel sick to the stomach</b>
<b>Punch walls</b>	<b>Feel hot</b>	<b>Become aggressive</b>
<b>Become argumentative</b>	<b>Go quiet and 'shut down'</b>	<b>Crying</b>
<b>Pace around the room</b>	<b>Headaches</b>	<b>Can not stop thinking about the problem</b>

## Anger flowchart

An anger flowchart is like a map which shows how your feelings and reactions unfold when you are angry. It can help to calm feelings of anger and create solutions to situations which have made you feel angry, as well as helping you think of coping skills to calm yourself down.<sup>3</sup>







## Anger Iceberg

The Anger Iceberg represents the idea that, although anger is displayed outwardly, other emotions may be hidden beneath the surface. These other feelings, such as sadness, fear or guilt, might cause you to feel vulnerable, or that you might not have the skills to manage them effectively.

By trying to explore what is beneath the surface, you might be able to gain insight into your anger and be able to develop coping strategies.

This Anger Iceberg worksheet can be used in multiple ways. You can do this activity alone where you can circle your own emotions, or use it as a tool as part of a group discussion piece. Try to answer the following questions to get started:

- Imagine a friend is facing a situation that is similar to one of your own anger triggers. What emotions do you think they might feel, other than anger?
- Imagine a person who handles difficult emotions – such as sadness, fear or hurt – effectively. How do they show these emotions? What do they do to cope with them?
- Anger is sometimes used to mask emotions that make a person feel vulnerable, such as hurt or shame. Can you think of a time you expressed anger in order to conceal another emotion you were thinking?

## Useful links

[Problems with anger self-help guide](#)  
[NHS inform](#)

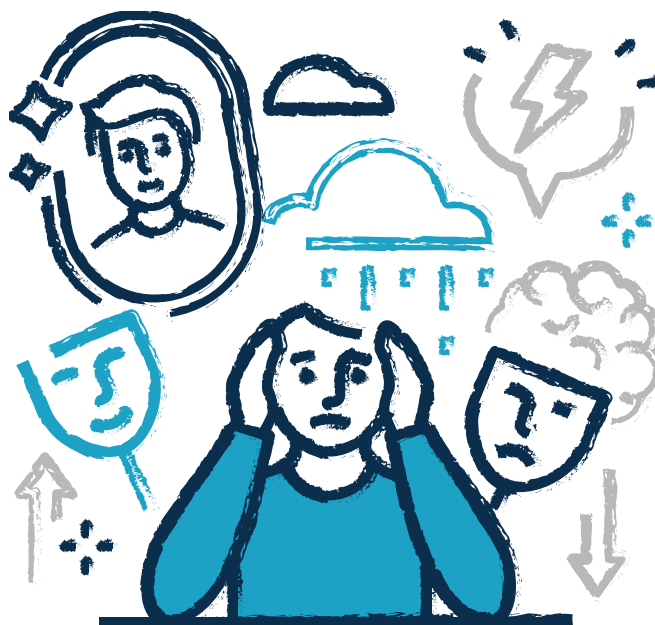
[samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/mental-health-problems/anger](https://samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/mental-health-problems/anger)

[Treatment and support for anger issues – Mind](#)



# Guilt

A caring role can bring out a varying range of emotions. Sometimes you may feel like you are not doing enough or that you are not doing a good enough job, which can lead to feelings of guilt. You may also feel anger or resentment about your caring role, which you then feel guilty about. All of these feelings are normal.



You may not feel comfortable sharing your feelings with others, due to concern of not being understood. It could also be that you feel frustrated with your caring role, and feel guilty for feeling this way.

It is really important to take a step back and know these feelings are normal.

## Activity

Make a list of good qualities you think you have. These can be related to your caring role, or simply personal qualities you possess. Keep this list in a journal, on a piece of paper, or on your phone, and reflect back on your qualities when you experience feelings of guilt to remind yourself of positive qualities.

If you struggle to see your own qualities, ask someone close to you to write you a list of the qualities they see in you.

The feelings you have are responses to your experiences. They do not define who you are as a person.

## Useful links

[Coping with guilt, resentment and other difficult emotions | Carers UK](#)

[Guilt and shame – Stop It Now](#)

[10 Tips for Dealing with Guilt | Psych Central](#)

# Relationships

Relationships are at the core of any caring role and you may feel at times that your relationship with the person(s) you care for can be impacted by the situation. It may be that you find it challenging talking to the person you look after about how you feel, or feel that you are no longer able to do things together, which do not revolve around looking after them.



## Activity 1

You can do this activity alone, or with the person you are caring for. Write down some of the qualities you normally find in a healthy relationship. Once you have done this, write down some of the qualities you find in an unhealthy relationship.

Pick out the top three suggestions from each side (for example: communication, compromise and respect, and dishonesty, manipulation and lack of support). Think about how each of these can strengthen or weaken a relationship.

Reflect on these examples from your own experiences with relationships, what has gone right or wrong? Having healthy relationships will contribute towards positive mental health.

This activity can be done in relation to any relationship, not just with the person you are caring for.

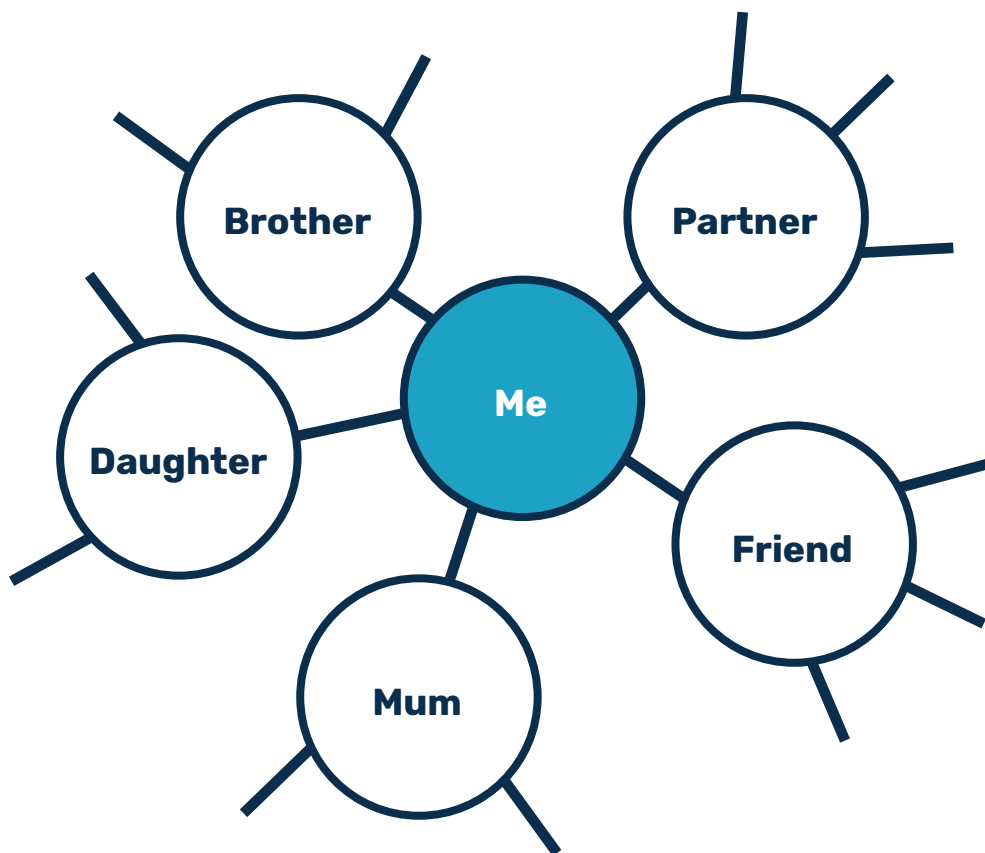


## Activity 2

### Create a worksheet with a circle in the middle

Place your name in the circle in the middle of the sheet. Identify important people in your life e.g. parents, partner, siblings, friends – and draw circles round each one. You could include a small list for each person as to why they are important to you. This could be what support they offer you, or things you have in common.

Draw a line between your name and each person.



Keep this piece of paper in a safe place and reflect back on it if you ever need a reminder to yourself of people you can turn to for support.

### Useful links

[Healthy Relationships – Ten Top Tips – Publications – Public Health Scotland](#)

[Relationships Scotland – Counselling, mediation and family support \(relationships-scotland.org.uk\)](#)

[Top tips on building and maintaining healthy relationships | Mental Health Foundation](#)

# Section 2:

## Maintaining wellbeing

**This section of the Toolkit will give examples and suggestions on how to maintain good overall wellbeing.**

When undertaking a caring role, it is of equal importance to be prioritising your own health and wellbeing in order to provide the best care you can for someone else.

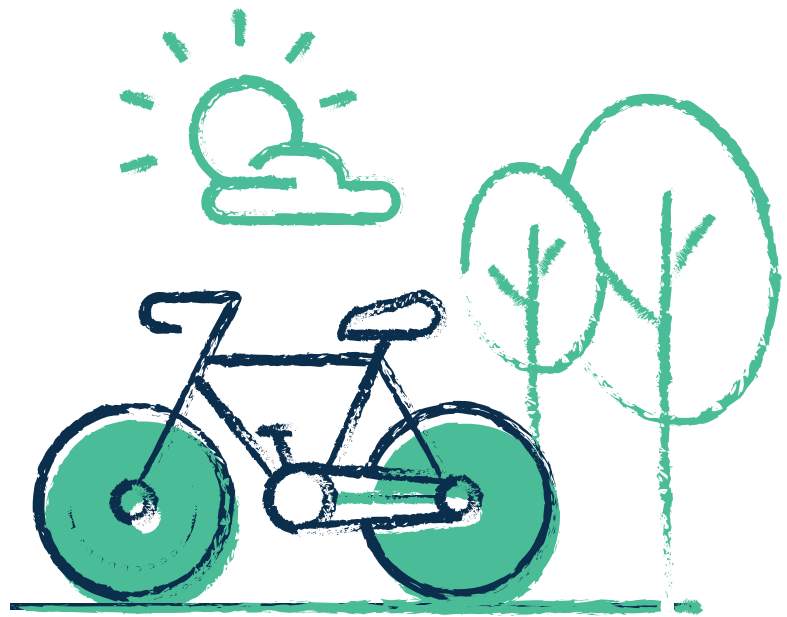
This section will have some ideas of activities you can adapt into your everyday life to help support your wellbeing.



# Physical wellbeing

## Exercise

It can be difficult to find time to exercise when life is busy. Often it can be one of the first things you neglect when you are busy or tired. However, adding in exercise into your everyday life can really improve your physical and mental wellbeing.



Adults are recommended to be physically active each day to stay healthy (at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity every week). This may be easier to achieve some weeks compared to others. Some ideas of how to incorporate exercise into your routine could be:

- **Take yourself out on a walk.** This could be with the person(s) you look after for a change of environment.
- **Get a gym membership.** Your local carer organisation may be able to contribute to paying for one. For example, you could attend a weekly exercise class. Try weight training or swimming.
- **If you don't live near a gym or are not able to find time to go, look up exercise videos online, for example on YouTube.** This could be follow-along Pilates, yoga or body weight exercise videos. You can do them from home without needing equipment.



## Nature

Being outside does wonders for your wellbeing. It can help improve your mood, reduce stress and improve your physical health.

If you are able to, take yourself on a walk. This could be a quick brisk ten minute walk around your area, or a longer walk around a park. If you are able to go alone, listen to your favourite music or podcast, or try walking meditation (mentioned on [page 31](#)).

If you are not able to get outside for a walk, look up any images, videos or sounds of nature (birdsong, water etc.) to help relax instead.

Try gardening or planting flowers. If you don't have access to a garden, you could buy a small indoor plant or indoor herb garden.

## Diet

Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of developing diet-related diseases such as heart disease, stroke, type two diabetes and some types of cancer.

Aim to eat at least between five and seven portions of a variety of fruit and veg each day.

It is really important to remain hydrated throughout the day. Aim for between six-eight glasses of water each day (approx. two litres). Try to limit intake of caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, energy drinks, as these can have an impact on your mood, sleep and cause your energy levels to crash.



## Limit alcohol use

Adults are recommended to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, spread across three days or more. This is equivalent to six medium glasses of wine or pints of beer.

In the short-term, cutting back on alcohol can improve your energy levels and how you are feeling. Longer-term benefits include lower blood pressure, risk of stroke, cancer and liver disease, and better quality sleep, memory and mood.



## Sleep

Sleep plays an important role in maintaining good health and wellbeing.

During sleep, your body works to support healthy brain function and maintain physical health.

The average adult needs between seven and nine hours of sleep each night. Fewer than six hours sleep a night is considered not enough for most adults under the age of 65.

By not getting enough sleep, there can be obvious impacts such as fatigue and tiredness. However, other impacts can be:

- poor memory and concentration
- mood changes
- poor mental health
- obesity
- compromised immune system.





## Some tips on how to improve sleep:

### During the day

- Get some natural light
- Exercise
- Cut back on caffeine-based drinks, especially in the afternoon
- Avoid napping during the day
- Get up at a regular time each morning, even if you didn't sleep well

### At night

- Be consistent. If you are able to, go to bed at the same time each night
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and as relaxing as possible
- Remove electronic devices such as TVs and computers from your bedroom
- Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime
- Avoid any screens one hour before bedtime



## Useful links on sleep

[Improve your sleep – Sleep Action](#)

[Sleep problems and insomnia self-help guide | NHS inform](#)

[S24 destinations 16x9 30s \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Getting enough rest and sleep | Carers Wales \(carersuk.org\)](#)



# Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique which involves noticing what is happening in the present moment without judgement. The aim is to help you become more self-aware, feel calmer and less stressed, and be kinder towards yourself.<sup>4</sup>

Incorporating mindfulness activities into your daily routine can be incredibly simple, but have great impact on maintaining good wellbeing. We have included some ideas here of ways to introduce mindfulness into your life.

This is not an exhaustive list, some of these may or may not work for you but give them a go – there is no right or wrong way to practice mindfulness, it is about finding what works for you.

## Gratitude list

Writing a gratitude list may help to improve wellbeing and promote positivity. It helps you to focus on the things in your life you are happy and grateful for.

Try adding three to five items to the list each day (this could first thing in the morning, or just before you go to bed). Try stay consistent by doing this each day – it is also nice to look back on when you are having a bad day.

### Some ideas of gratitude prompts:

- What are three things I'm grateful for, no matter how small?
- What has made me smile today?
- What simple thing has brought me joy recently?
- List three qualities you admire about yourself.
- What three things make your home feel safe and special?
- What do I appreciate about myself?
- What is one thing that I often take for granted?
- Who has supported me during difficult times?

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<sup>4</sup> What is Mindfulness? Mind 2021 What is mindfulness? – Mind

## Meditation

Meditation is the practice of intentionally spending time with your mind. Find some time each day to sit, breathe and try to remain focused on your breath. By doing this, you are able to become more aware of your thoughts and connect with the present moment.

Meditation is something anyone can do – anytime, anywhere. It is easy to learn – you can either learn to meditate on your own, or you may prefer to follow a guided meditation.

Here are some examples of types of meditation.

## Body scan

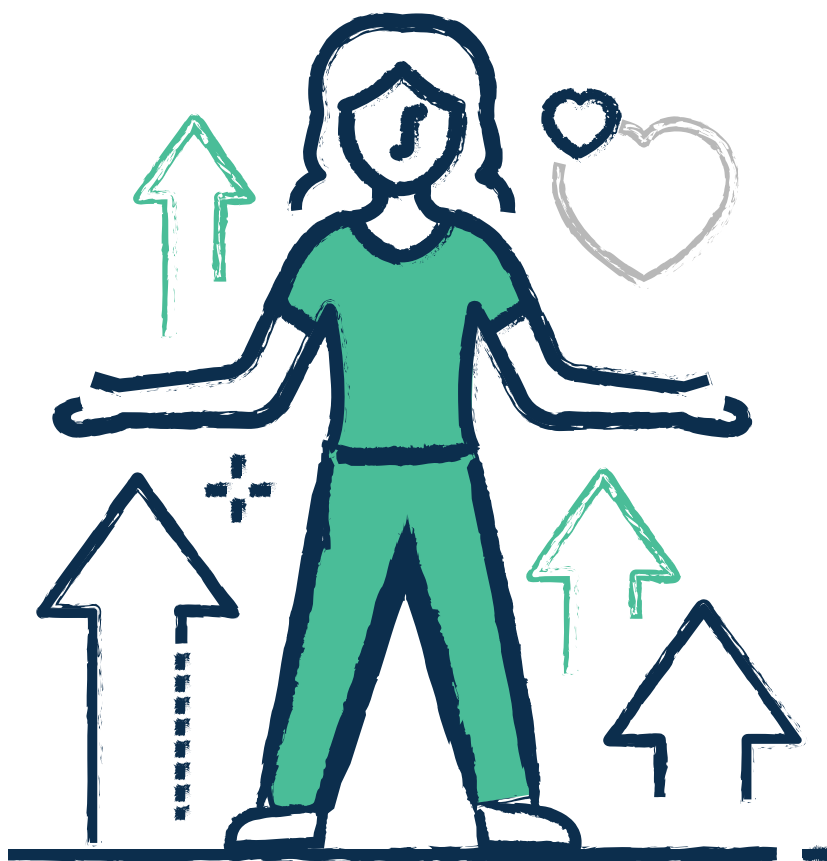
This is where you move your attention slowly through different parts of your body.

Closing your eyes can be helpful to allow you to focus.

Start from the top of your head and move all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation on different parts of your body.

You may want to spend around 20 seconds noticing how each part of your body feels, and then move on to the next.

Each time your mind wanders, simply notice that this is happening, and gently direct your attention back to feelings in your body.



## Walking meditation

This exercise is in the name – it is a form of meditation in action whilst out walking and being mindful of your experience on the walk.

You become aware of the movements of your body, bring attention to your feet for example, or your senses (sight, sounds, smells, touches). You become aware of your feelings and any thoughts which may arise. You become aware of your surroundings on the walk, maybe the weather (feeling of sun on your face for example) and also be aware of your breaths.



## Useful links

[Headspace | Meditation Tips | Elephant: Slow and Steady \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Headspace | Mini Meditation | Let Go of Stress \(youtube.com\)](#)

[5-minute meditation exercise for beginners! Sounds and breath – Flow \(youtube.com\)](#)

[10-Minute Meditation For Beginners \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Audio Practices – Mindfulness Scotland](#)

[Meditation For Beginners – Headspace](#)

[Mindfulness exercises and tips – Mind](#)

# Breathing exercises

Breathing exercises are designed to relieve stress and relax your body and mind. They can take just a few minutes to do and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do them regularly as part of your daily routine.

You can do them standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying in bed. Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes which restrict your breathing.



## 4-7-8

This breathing technique involves breathing in for four seconds, holding the breath for seven seconds, and exhaling for eight seconds. Repeat this for a few minutes.

## Box breathing

**Step 1:** Breathe in, counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.

**Step 2:** Hold your breath for four seconds.

**Step 3:** Slowly exhale through your mouth for four seconds.

**Step 4:** Repeat steps one to three until you are feeling calm.



## Belly breathing

In this exercise, it might be helpful to place your hand on your stomach so you can feel how it rises and falls when you direct your breath there.

Slowly breathe in through your nose and feel your belly push out.  
Slowly exhale through the mouth and feel your belly draw inwards.

## Alternate nostril breathing

Take your right thumb and close your right nostril. Inhale slowly and fully through the left nostril, and hold your breath for a few seconds.

Use your right ring finger to close the right nostril. Then release the thumb and exhale through the right nostril. Pause for a few seconds.

Leaving your fingers exactly where they are, breathe in through the right nostril and pause. Use your right thumb to close off the right nostril. Then release the right finger and exhale through the left nostril. Pause for a few seconds. That is one full count.

# Self-care

Self-care means taking care of yourself so that you can be healthy, can look after others, and can do all the things you need and want to accomplish in a day.

Self-care looks different for everyone. All it means is taking time to do something that prioritises looking after yourself. It can take a few minutes, a few hours or even a few days (if you can!).

The suggestions in previous pages regarding practising mindfulness are examples of self-care, as well as exercising, eating healthy and getting enough sleep.

Below there are some more suggestions on ways you can look after yourself, but again, this list is not exhaustive.



## Acknowledge your own needs

It is important to recognise that your wellbeing is as important as the person(s) you care for, and understand that taking care of yourself is not a selfish but necessary step to maintain your ability to provide care effectively. Acknowledge your own needs and emotions without guilt or judgement.

## Utilise respite care

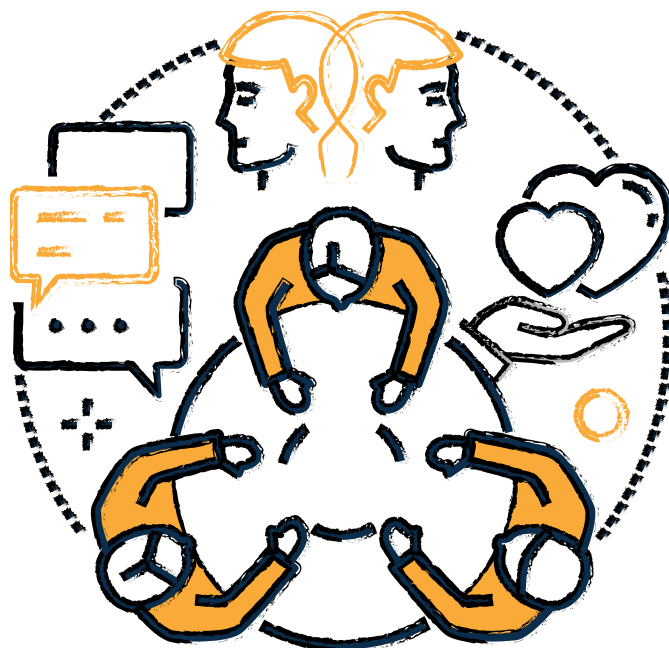
Look into respite care options available in your area. Take advantage of these services to recharge, engage in activities you enjoy, and restore your energy and mental wellbeing.

Respite care means taking a break from your caring role while the person you care for is looked after by someone else. It allows you to take time out for yourself and helps stop you becoming exhausted and burnt out.

There are many different respite options, but some examples include a paid carer visiting your home, day centres or organising replacement care so you can go on holiday.

## Stay connected

Maintain social connections and relationships outside your caring role. Engage in activities that allow you to connect with others and create a sense of community. Isolation can intensify the challenges of a caring role so be sure to make an effort to maintain relationships which provide you with support, understanding and companionship.



## Create a self-care box

Get a box and fill it with small things which can help you feel better when you are feeling low, upset or distressed. It can be filled with things that bring you comfort and can become your 'go-to' place for when you are not feeling your best.

Some ideas to include in the box could be

- Photographs
- Journal
- Your favourite snacks
- Book/puzzles
- Face masks
- Bath bombs
- Stress balls

Remember, your self-care box is for you and there to meet your needs so fill it with anything which can potentially help turn a bad day around.



# Self-compassion

It can be difficult to show yourself the same amount of love and care you show to others, and is easy to be self-critical.

Compassion is the opposite of self-criticism. It means giving yourself the same compassion you would naturally give to a friend when you are struggling or feeling badly about yourself, by being kind and caring.<sup>5</sup>



## Four self-compassion exercises

- 1.** Treat yourself as you would your friend. How would you help a friend through a hard time? What language would you use to encourage them to be kinder to themselves?
- 2.** Write a letter to yourself. Either on paper, on your phone, or mentally. You could reflect on a situation which causes you stress or anger. Acknowledge and validate your emotions without blaming yourself or others.
- 3.** Start a self-compassion journal. Start writing down difficult thoughts in a journal and balance this by writing out kind and supportive responses.
- 4.** Positive affirmations. Create a list of positive affirmations and say them out loud to yourself (you could do this whilst looking in a mirror). If you do not want to say them out loud, you can mentally repeat them to yourself – however you feel most comfortable.

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**5** What is self-compassion? Dr Kristin Neff [Exploring the Meaning of Self-Compassion and Its Importance](#)



# Final thoughts

Making time for yourself and prioritising your wellbeing can be challenging at the best of times. You can often find yourself prioritising others and their needs before your own.

It is important to remind yourself that looking after yourself and your needs is not selfish, but necessary to ensure you maintain good physical and mental wellbeing.

Hopefully some of the suggestions in this Toolkit have been helpful. These suggestions only scratch the surface of advice and support available. Please use the links provided in the different sections for more information and support.

Please see the [Carers Trust](#) website for more information about support available for unpaid carers.

For information about finding a local carer organisation near you, please [click here](#).

This Toolkit is designed to maintain good mental wellbeing. **It is not a tool to be used in crisis.** If you or someone you work with are experiencing acute mental health difficulties or crisis please contact:

**Samaritans:** call 116 123 (open 24/7) [If you're having a difficult time | Samaritans](#)

**Breathing Space:** call 080083 85 87 (Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am Fri-Mon 6pm-6am) <https://www.breathingspace.scot/how-we-can-help/need-to-talk/>

**NHS24:** call 111 (24/7) <https://www.nhs24.scot/check-your-symptoms/get-help-with-your-mental-health/>

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## SCOTLAND

Carers Trust Scotland  
The Boardwalk  
105 Brunswick Street  
Glasgow  
G1 1TF

[scotland@carers.org](mailto:scotland@carers.org)

0300 772 7701

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