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### Feedback

We welcome any suggestions you have, please send your **comments, concerns, complaints and compliments** to: Cheshire & Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, **PALS, Complaints and Claims Team**, 1829 Building, Liverpool Road, Chester, CH2 1HJ

For more information see [www.cwps.nhs.uk](http://www.cwps.nhs.uk)

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## Early intervention carer well-being booklet

East Cheshire and Vale Royal Early Intervention Team  
Tel: 01260 292929

West Cheshire Early Intervention Team  
Tel: 0151 357 7600

Wirral Early Intervention Team  
Tel: 0151 488 7773

## Tips for self care

Looking after a family member at any time when they are unwell can be a stressful and worrying time. Not knowing what to do, lifestyle change and having limited social/relaxing time can all put increasing pressure on carers.

It is important therefore to not forget about your own health.

### Eat well

What we eat is important not only for our physical health but also our mental health. Being balanced in what we eat and drink is key.

- Avoid excessive use of sugar and salt
- Increase intake of fruit and vegetables
- Use alcohol in moderation
- It is recommended that we drink between 6 and 8 glasses of water a day
- Eat at regular intervals

Sometimes carers are so busy looking after everyone else they forget to look after themselves.

### Sleep

Sleep allows the body and mind to refresh and renew itself. If you are not getting quality sleep and enough rest you will feel stressed and irritable and this can flow into other aspects of your life. If you find it difficult to sleep, try to develop good sleep habits.

For example:

- Avoid stimulants like coffee and food high in sugar late in the evening
- Try some deep breathing exercises while in bed
- Use some lavender oil on the pillow to aid relaxation
- Don't have the room too warm or cold

If you find that your sleep pattern is erratic with difficulty getting off to sleep, fitful sleep or waking early and can't get back to sleep, talk to your G.P. for advice.

### Think positively

This is much easier said than done at times. If a situation arises try to look at what is positive in that situation instead of dwelling on the negatives. More than likely you will have experienced a similar situation before and coped with it.

Ask yourself:

How did I manage before? What coping strategies did I use? What did I learn from it?

Tell yourself that you can cope, you can make changes, there are others who can help you get through this. By acknowledging this you will maintain a sense of control over situations, you will feel more confident in situations and you will build your self-esteem.

### Manage time

Remember it is important for you as a carer to manage your time. Ensure that there is time put aside for you and your needs as an individual. Give yourself permission to continue doing things that you enjoy for example going to the hairdresser, having a night out with friends, spending time with other members of your family. The saying that "laughter is the best medicine" is true and will help to offset the effects of stress as well.

### Exercise

Exercise is an important part of self care. Regular exercise like walking, swimming, jogging can help to reduce stress and can improve the feel good factor. It helps if you have someone to exercise with as this will keep the motivation levels raised. Any amount of exercise will have positive effects on how you are feeling and your energy levels but it is good to build a small amount of exercise into your everyday activities.

### Space

We all need a private place we can go to when stressed. This can be your bedroom, bathroom, the garden shed or a small corner in the kitchen but it is someplace that we feel a sense of comfort and security. Identify where that place is for you and use as your space when you feel things are getting out of control.

### Relax

Relaxation involves giving yourself permission to take time out for you to let go of all the problems and issues going on in your world. A period of relaxation time every day will allow your mind and body a break to recover.

Types of relaxation include:

- breathing techniques
- listening to soft music
- yoga
- meditation
- massage
- reflexology

Carers again tend to be over vigilant and tuned into the needs of those around them and forget to give time for themselves to clear their minds and take time out. Remember if you're tired, have low energy, or are stressed you will not be able to support the person as you would like to and you are also putting your own health at risk. So allowing yourself 10 minutes a day can make a big difference to how we approach and deal with issues in our lives.

### Stress

Stress is something that we all encounter in our daily lives and we all respond to stress in different ways.

The symptoms include;

- anxiety
- rapid heart beat
- tension in muscles
- headaches
- upset stomach
- irritability
- depression
- fatigue
- difficulty in concentrating

One of the critical factors in dealing with stress is acknowledging that you are experiencing these feelings. Becoming aware of how your body responds to specific situations in your life is the first step to managing them. You can control the effects of stress by using some of the tips already spoken about. Allow time out for you because 'You are worth it'.

## Breathe

We all take breathing for granted because it is something that happens without us being conscious of it. However if you take a couple of minutes to concentrate on how you breathe you will be surprised at how your breathing comes very much from the top of your chest. When you are stressed, tired or feeling anxious you tend to breathe more quickly. When you are relaxed you breathe slower and calmer. Breathing techniques need to be learned and practiced. This is one such technique and it would be helpful to practice this and get used to doing it so that when things get stressful you are able to stop, take a minute and breathe. This will help your mind and body regain control of the situation.

Try this:

***Sit in a comfortable but supportive chair. Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your abdomen. Breathe as you would normally but notice where your breath is coming from in your body. Then concentrate on taking a deep breath and begin to notice how your abdomen rises and falls with each deep breath. As you get used to taking slow deep breaths, try holding the breath for a count of 4 and then exhaling to a count of six. This will encourage you to take deeper breaths.***

There are also free downloads that can be accessed on the mental health foundation website that can talk people through relaxation techniques and mindfulness.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts>

## Change

Embrace change - sometimes change can be viewed as something that brings a lot of stress with it. However, if you are open to change and view it as a way of improving things for yourself and the person you are caring for it can be very beneficial. Initially making changes may mean having to take more time learning to do something different which may be difficult, but if you persevere the rewards can outweigh the difficulties.

## Information

Knowledge is power and this is certainly true for helping you as a carer deal with various situations that may arise as you care for your loved one. Accessing information and education on the signs/symptoms and behaviours associated with the illness of a loved one can help with understanding the issues and working together towards recovery. This can bring with it the confidence to recognise your capabilities and strengths. It can help to manage your time and reduce the impact that the illness has on your loved one, your family and yourself. Accessing information also brings you together with people who are having similar experiences and can therefore become a huge resource for support.

## Express yourself

Try to express what you feel. Identify a person you are comfortable talking to and who listens without judging. This could be your partner, friend or local support service.

## Service to help support you

There are many services available to support families and carers, but the type needed will vary from person to person. You may feel that you need some emotional support such as someone to talk to who understands the pressures you are under. You may need practical help with financial benefits or attending carer support meetings. You may need both types of support.

Examples of the support services available include:

- A carers group which provides information on Psychosis and the chance to talk to others in similar situations.
- Counseling services.
- Financial support or advice and how to access it through the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).
- Help to look after your own health and well-being
- Internet resources- [www.openminded.org.uk](http://www.openminded.org.uk) hold a wealth of information on Psychosis. There is also link to other websites for more specific information.
- Making space- can be contacted via the Early Intervention Practitioner.

**People who access our services are welcome to talk to the Team Manager if they are experiencing any problems with their care.**