



# LOOKING AFTER YOU



**Saint Joseph's Shankill**  
*Dedicated to Dementia Care*



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## Looking after YOU

We know that being a carer for a loved one living with dementia is a life changing experience. Each day brings new demands, often you can experience a reversal of roles within the family, there can be great days but let's be honest being a carer brings many stresses.

The Saint Joseph's Caring for Carers programme gives you the opportunity to take a little time out and reflect on how best to manage the daily stresses you are coping with and all the demands on your time.

### #Dontforget about YOU

Each day make a pledge to yourself that you will give time to you and you alone. It is very common for people who care for a loved one living with dementia to put their own needs to one side. Yet becoming a carer has an emotional, financial and physical impact.

**# Dontforget** to take time out and treat yourself, because if you can't cope then it is difficult to look after your loved one. Your stresses and frustrations will be felt by the person you care for and their behaviours will reflect this too, and this only perpetuates the cycle.

Looking after yourself is not selfish. When you look after yourself, everyone benefits. **You feel better.** You are able to be there for your loved one. You are able to be part of the lives of your family and friends.

**# Dontforget** the person living with dementia is not being difficult, or forgetful or repetitive on purpose; their emotions and behaviours are affected by their dementia. It is not their fault and it is not personal to you.

**You and your loved ones can live well with dementia together.**



This is your worry page – write down your worries and stresses below

Lined area for writing, consisting of 20 horizontal blue dotted lines.

Now please turn the page



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You have written down all your stresses and worries, now they are out of sight, (yes they are still all there!), but for now, let's focus on you and how to relax and get a break to ensure that you are equipped to cope with each new day.

**There are many things that stop carers taking a break:**

- Putting your own wellbeing last
- Feeling that a break is not deserved
- There is no one else to help you
- Not knowing what is available, or how to get help organising a break
- Being too tired to make the effort
- Wanting a break, but the person being cared for doesn't
- Feeling that it's all too much trouble
- Believing that it is your responsibility to provide all the care, all the time
- Guilt, guilt and more guilt

**STOP – everyone needs a break**

**#Dontforget** You are not alone

When you are caring for a loved one, it is likely that your schedule is hectic. But you do need to get a break. Who can take over from you.....? Why not write down a few names of people, friends or family members or any other agencies you could ask for help below?

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**Support Groups**

There are a large number of carer support groups you can access. Many people find comfort and practical assistance by attending these meetings with others who know what it is like to care for a person living with dementia.

Contact the Alzheimer Society of Ireland Helpline for further information. 1800 341 341 or any of your new friends from Caring for Carers Programme.

## Managing stress

Everyone has different ways to manage stress. Managing stress improves your wellbeing and will positively impact on your role as a carer, so it can be useful to learn some better ways to deal with it.

### Watch out for the warning signs of stress which include:

- Strong, unexpected emotional changes such as being quick to become angry or frustrated or easily moved to tears
- Loss of appetite or uncharacteristic over-eating
- Interrupted sleep or insomnia
- Racing heartbeat
- Confusion or loss of memory
- Difficulty making decisions
- Developing new health problems or worsening of existing chronic conditions
- Frequently catching colds, lowered immunity

### What you can try to avoid getting stressed:

- A daily / weekly routine can make life a little easier when living with a person with dementia
- Learning as much as possible about dementia
- Talk things over with family, friends and other people in a similar situation
- Look after yourself by looking after your diet, get regular exercise and maintain your social contacts and lifestyle
- Be realistic about what you can expect of yourself, and recognise that taking care of yourself is better for everybody
- Getting out and about is very important, try and continue with activities and hobbies that you enjoy.
- Laugh out loud and often!

Some people say they feel guilty when they leave the house, or enjoy an activity without the person living with dementia. Everyone has the right to follow their own interests outside the role of a carer. If you take regular breaks you will be a better carer.

If you are having trouble coping **#dontforget** it's good to talk



Take as many of these **#dontforget** mantras that you feel would be useful to you and use them EVERY DAY – put them on a post it note in the bathroom or on the fridge, or read this page each morning, whatever works for you...

### **#dontforget...**

- To be open to learning more about what you can do to help you in your role as carer
- To laugh and smile
- To focus on what is possible, on the thing you and your loved one can still do
- To be nice to yourself.
- Remind yourself of all the things you do well
- To eat a piece of chocolate or even buy yourself a box of chocolates and look forward to having one as a reward after a stressful task
- To hum, sing or whistle one of your favourite songs
- To visualise yourself in a peaceful surrounding and BREATH!
- To acknowledge how you are feeling and the impact on your life and relationships
- To keep a journal and talk to trusted family members, friends or a counsellor about how you are feeling
- To make a conscious decision to include your needs in your daily and weekly routine
- To keep up your social contact, plan outings and keep in touch with family and friends
- To eat a well-balanced diet
- To take regular exercise
- To see your GP regularly, particularly if you are feeling low, stressed anxious or not sleeping
- To pick up a phone and talk to someone
- To take deep breaths and think pleasant, peaceful thoughts
- Join a support group so you can meet other people caring for a loved one living with dementia

Write down the things you find difficult or would like some help with.

Talk to friends and family, tell them about things that are going well and things that are difficult.

Check out services and supports that are available in your area.

Take care of your Health.



Write down a few things that make you happy and that you are grateful for in life

Lined writing area for notes.



#Dontforget Look at this page often and keep adding things to it!



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Here are a few tips to try and use over short periods of time to mind and take care of yourself

### If you have a few minutes...

- Take deep breaths and think peaceful thoughts
- Visualise yourself in a peaceful place
- Hum, whistle or sing one of your favourite songs or tunes
- Reflect on all the things for which you are grateful
- Listen to a song or relaxation tape that uplifts you
- Sketch or doodle, let your creative side out
- Express your thoughts and feelings in a notebook
- Ask yourself what you really feel like doing right now, and then do it

### If you have an hour or more...

- Soak in a warm bath with aromatherapy bath gel/bubble baths surrounded by candles
- Go for a walk in the park, by the beach or in the woods
- Play a round of golf
- Take a nap
- Go down to the pub for a pint
- Drive or walk to a favourite spot
- Take your dog for a walk around the block
- Go to a bookstore and check out new books, listen to music and maybe have a cup of coffee
- Have coffee or a meal with a friend
- Get your hair done, or nails painted, or have a hot towel shave (gender specific!!)
- Go to bed an hour early: put on your favourite pyjamas, make a cup of tea and read a good book
- Go watch a match with friends

**#Dontforget you are doing an amazing job**

