



Why taking care of yourself is important

Through times of stress, confusion, and grief, carers themselves may be overwhelmed by circumstances. It is important to take good care of yourself. Carers need support and professional help in their caring roles. If carers neglect their own self-care this can impact the care they provide to others which is why a carer's own wellbeing should be their priority.

Grief

Grief is an emotional response to loss; feelings may include sadness, sorrow and anger. Most people who experience significant loss will go through a unique grieving process. It is how we deal with grief that's important in re-establishing purpose and meaning in our lives.

Stress

Stress is a result of an imbalance between our demands and our resources to cope with those demands. This can be a result of external issues such as work or relationships or how we internalise those issues that can become stressful. Prolonged stress can lead to problems with anxiety and depression and has also proven to contribute to physical illnesses such as cardiovascular disease.

There are many ways a person can care and nurture themselves, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Benefits to overall wellbeing include:

- *Improved concentration and thinking*
 - *Feeling calmer, happier, more energetic*
 - *Improved coordination*
 - *Relief from pain and physical discomfort*
 - *Reduced risk of stress-related illnesses*
 - *Restful sleep*
 - *Improved creativity and enjoyment in life*
 - *Healthier relationships*
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It may be important to consult a GP or counsellor if you are experiencing prolonged or overwhelming grief and/or stress.

Tips for taking care of yourself

1 Live Healthy

Establishing healthy eating, exercise and sleep habits are crucial to your wellbeing. Don't discredit the importance of these to not only your physical but also emotional and mental wellness. Here are some good guidelines to follow:

- Try to have a varied diet containing lots of fruit, vegetables and whole grains - these foods are dense in nutrients and will sustain your energy through emotionally difficult times.
- Aim to fit in some light to moderate exercise most days of the week, like a bike ride.
- Establish a regular sleeping pattern by sticking to a bedtime and having a relaxing pre-sleep ritual. Between 7-9 hours of sleep is recommended for an adult.
- Avoid excessive drug and alcohol consumption - these substances just mask the real issues and substance dependency can make your problems worse.

2 Practise Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a self-awareness coping strategy developed from Buddhist mindfulness meditation.

'By focusing on the here and now, many people who practise mindfulness find that they are less likely to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past, are less preoccupied with concerns about success and self-esteem, and are better able to form deep connections with others.'



There are many places to practise mindfulness such as through private or group sessions with a psychologist. Mindfulness workshops are conducted at ARAFMI Hunter on a regular basis.

3 Relaxation

Taking time out to relax reduces our stress levels and reduces incidence of burn out. The following are some suggestions you might find helpful, however, everyone has their own preferred ways of relaxation that work best for them:

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Massages and beauty treatments
- Scheduling pleasant activities eg: catching up with friends for coffee, going for a walk along the beach, going to the movies
- Reading

4 Staying Connected

Being a carer limits opportunities for socialising, making new friends and maintaining relationships. Friends, family and your community make a large contribution to your overall health and wellbeing. Relationships can provide fun, support and human connection but even the best relationships can become a source of stress or displeasure - make sure you stay assertive in all your relationships, learn to say 'no' when necessary and always balance your own needs with those of your friends and family. Most importantly enjoy the company and support your friends and family provide.

5 Journaling

Take some time each day for reflection and write a journal. This helps us to get to know ourselves, maintain perspective and a positive outlook on life.

6 Join a Support Group

Support groups for carers offer an environment where carers can come to express themselves in a nurturing and understanding environment. ARAFMI Hunter provides monthly support groups for family and friends of people with a mental illness.

More information:

Counselling Services

Relationships Australia	1300 364 277
Interrelate	1300 736 966
Unifam	49256000

Mental Health Carers ARAFMI Hunter

22 Stewart Ave

Hamilton East NSW 2303

Phone 02 49 616 717

www.arafmihunter.org

- Free counselling
- Support groups
- Workshops
- Telephone support
- Information

Other Helpful Links and Numbers

Carers NSW	1800 242 636
Mental Health Association	1300 794 992
Mental health info service - support and referral and http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au for mental health fact sheets	
Carer Assist	02 4968 9268