



## Caring for someone is hard – what it's really like and where to get help

There are nearly **6 million unpaid carers across the UK**. Many are looking after family while juggling everything else. Some give up work. Some are on duty round the clock – **1.7 million people in the UK provide over 50 hours of care a week**.

Chances are, if you haven't been a carer yet, you will be. **Two out of three adults in the UK will take on a caring role at some point.**

Caring for someone can take over your life. **And most people don't see it coming.**

You start by helping out here and there. But before long, you're the one managing everything: meals, meds, appointments, daily care. It's **draining, both physically and mentally**. And it's easy to forget about your own needs along the way.

This guide looks at the **hidden strain of caregiving**. We'll talk about what it does to your health, how to know when you're stretched too thin, and simple things that can make a real difference.

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## The unseen challenges of caregiving

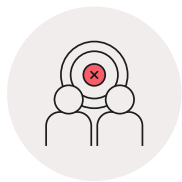
Caring takes more out of you than people realise. You might not complain, **but that doesn't mean you're not struggling.**

The pressure builds over time. One day you're just helping out. The next, **it feels like your own life's been put on hold.** Here's what often goes on behind closed doors.



### You're always tired

Early mornings, broken nights, no real rest. Even when you do sleep, you might wake up just as drained. Over time, that constant tiredness affects your memory, your mood, and your focus.



### You don't see friends anymore

Social life often disappears. You might cancel plans, avoid calls, or stop reaching out. Even if you're surrounded by people, it's easy to feel on your own.



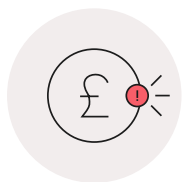
### You feel guilty all the time

Guilty for not doing enough. Guilty for needing time off. Guilty for being snappy or short-tempered. It's a lot to carry.



### Your body is feeling it

Helping someone dress, move, or get in and out of bed is physically demanding. Add in stress, poor sleep, and skipped meals, it takes a toll.



### Money's tighter

You might be working fewer hours or have stopped altogether. At the same time, you're covering new costs: transport, equipment, food, heating. It adds up fast.



### There's no time for you

When you're always 'on,' self-care slips. You stop doing things you enjoy. You might not remember the last time you did something just for yourself.

## How to spot the signs you're reaching your limit

It's easy to miss the **warning signs**. You get on with things. You push through. But your body and mind usually know before you do that something's not right. Here's what to watch out for.



### You're running on empty

You're always tired, no matter how much you sleep. You wake up already worn out. Coffee doesn't touch it. Every task feels harder than it should.



### You're snapping more than usual

Little things set you off. You're more impatient, more emotional, more on edge. You don't feel like yourself, and you don't know how to shake it.



### You're zoning out

Some days, you go into autopilot. You get through it, but you're not really present. It's like you've gone numb. That's a sign of emotional burnout.



### You're always feeling ill

You're picking up colds. Your back aches. Your stomach's off. Stress does that, and if you're not looking after yourself, your immune system takes the hit.



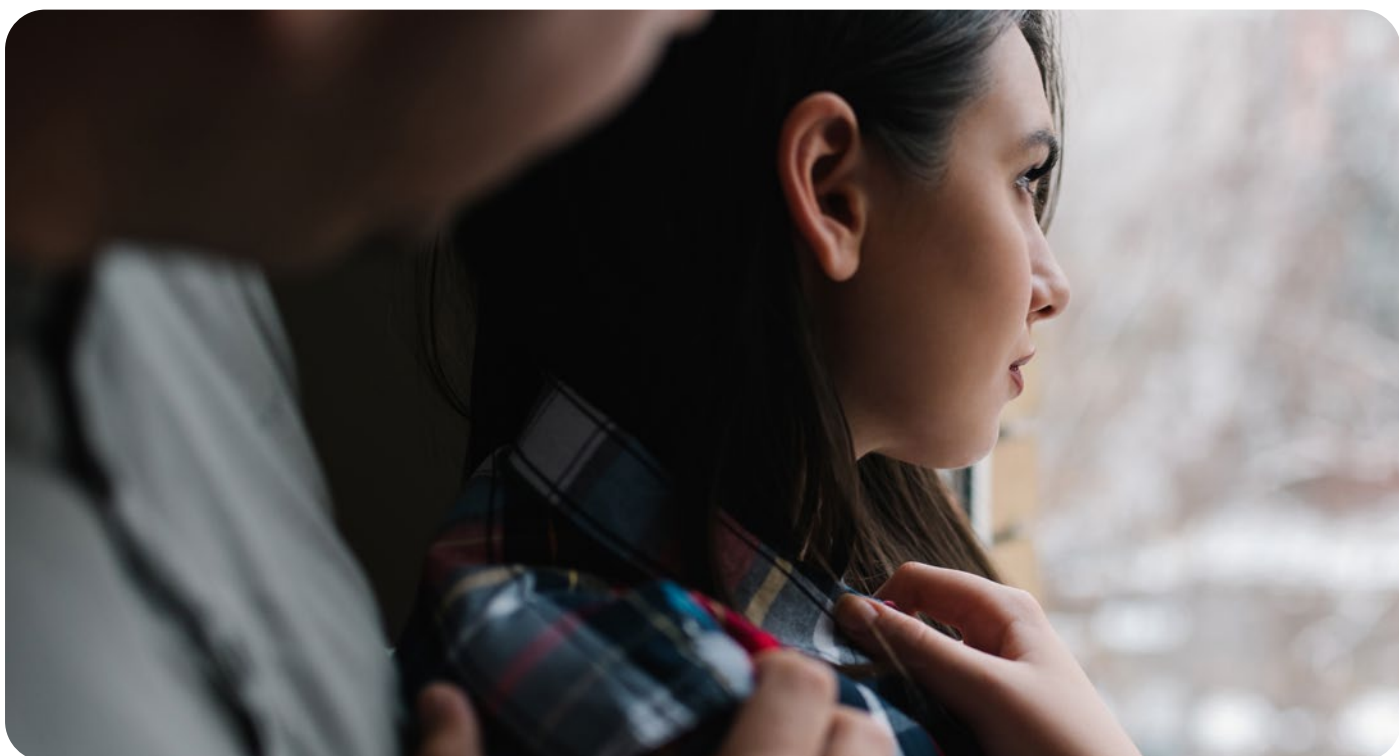
### You don't want to talk to anyone

You stop replying to messages. You cancel plans. You might tell yourself you're too busy or too tired, but you're also pulling away without meaning to.



### You feel stuck

You might think there's no way out, that you're on your own, or that no one else could do it the way you do. These thoughts are heavy, and they're a sign you need support, not more pressure.



## Why your health matters too

You might think the person you're caring for should come first. But if you're not okay, everything else starts to fall apart. Your health isn't a side issue, **it's part of the care.**

- **You can't pour from an empty cup**

If you're burned out, sleep-deprived, or in pain, you won't be able to give the care you want to. **Looking after yourself is part of the job**, not something extra.

- **Small issues become big problems**

That sore shoulder or low mood won't fix itself. If you keep pushing it aside, **it can turn into something that stops you from coping at all.**

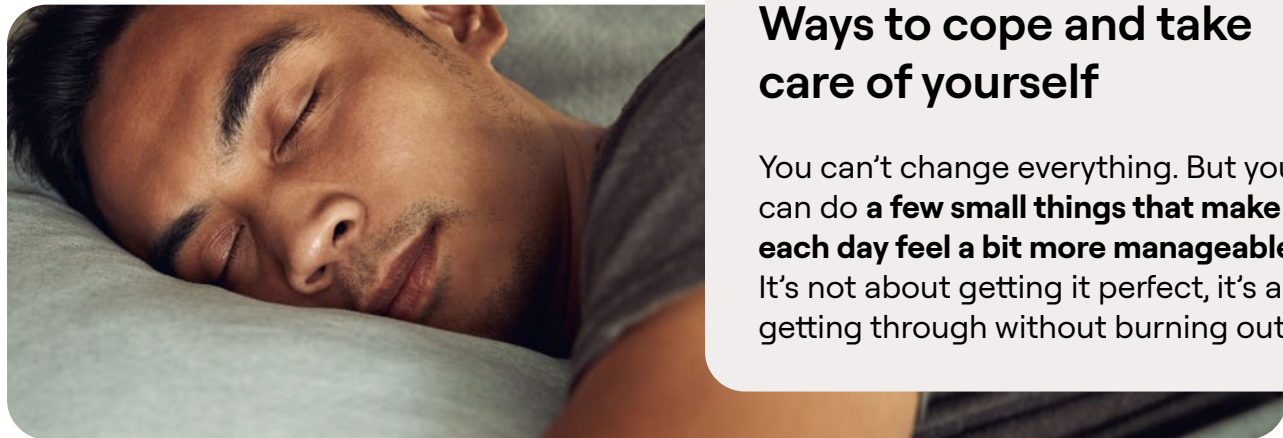
- **Mental health counts**

You don't have to be upbeat all the time. But if you're always feeling low, angry or hopeless, that's not just "part of the job." **It's a sign you need help too.**

- **Doing it all doesn't make you a better carer**

You might think you're the only one who can do things right. But no one can do everything, all the time, without a break. **Letting others help doesn't mean you're failing**, it means you're being sensible.

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## Ways to cope and take care of yourself

You can't change everything. But you can do **a few small things that make each day feel a bit more manageable**. It's not about getting it perfect, it's about getting through without burning out.

- **Take proper breaks**

Step outside. Sit down with a hot drink. Go for a short walk. **Even ten minutes can make a difference**. If someone offers to help, let them. Say yes more often.

- **Set limits**

You don't have to say yes to everything. It's okay to say, ***"I can't do that right now."*** Start small. Boundaries are there to protect you, not to make anyone feel bad.

- **Sleep when you can**

If nights are broken, find time to rest during the day. Lie down. Close your eyes. Even short naps help. **If sleep's always a struggle, talk to your GP.**

- **Move your body**

You don't need to join a gym. **A quick stretch, a walk to the shop, or a few minutes of light movement** can clear your head and ease the tension in your body.

- **Eat real meals**

Don't live off toast and leftovers. Try to **eat something proper at least once a day**. Keep it simple. Eggs, rice, soup, anything that gives you steady energy.

- **Say things out loud**

Don't keep it all in. **Tell someone how you're feeling**. A friend, a family member, a support line. You're not being dramatic, you're being honest.

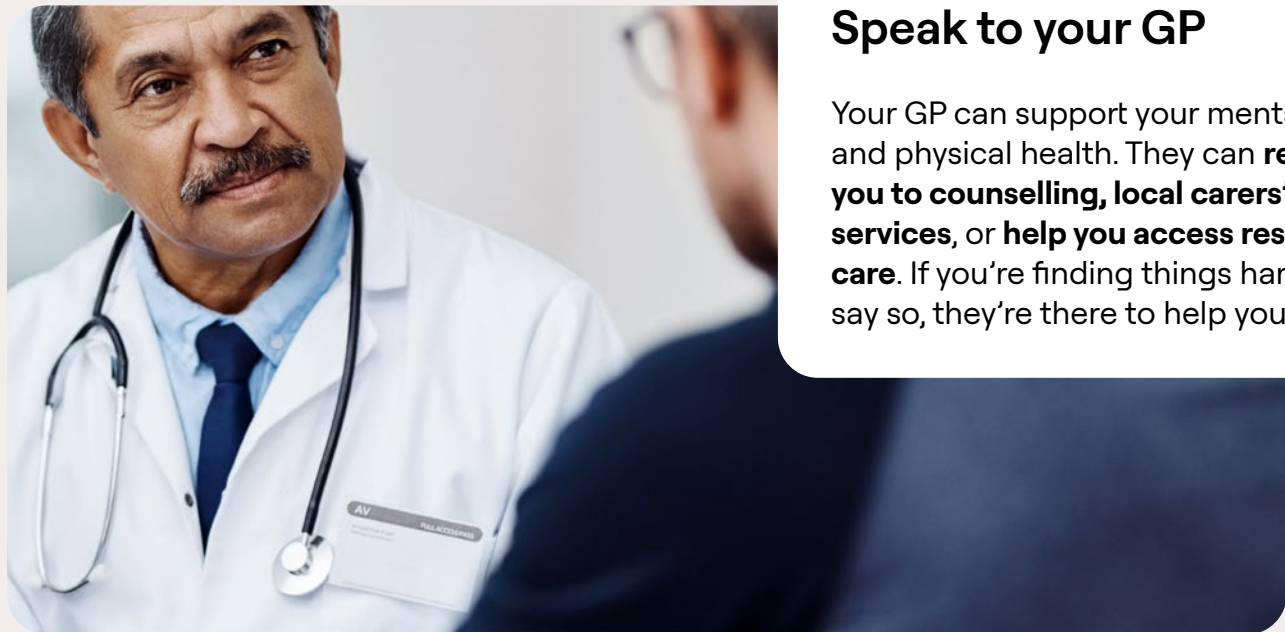
- **Get support**

You don't have to do it all on your own. **Ask for help early**, not just when it's urgent. Whether it's practical or emotional, support can take the edge off.

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## Where to get support

If you're based in the UK, there are **places you can turn to for help**, you don't have to do this on your own.

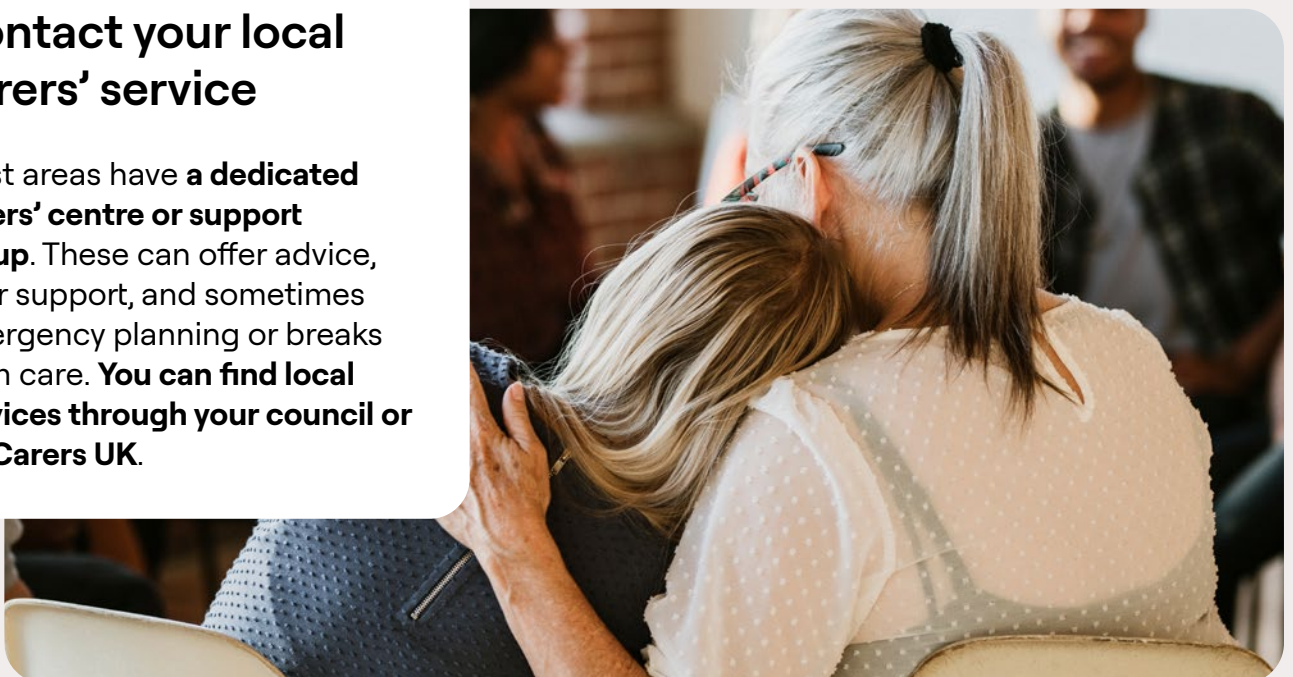


### Speak to your GP

Your GP can support your mental and physical health. They can **refer you to counselling, local carers' services**, or **help you access respite care**. If you're finding things hard, say so, they're there to help you too.

### Contact your local carers' service

Most areas have a **dedicated carers' centre or support group**. These can offer advice, peer support, and sometimes emergency planning or breaks from care. **You can find local services through your council or via Carers UK.**





## Look into respite options

You may be entitled to **short breaks or funded respite care** through your local council. **You can request a carer's assessment**, which looks at what support you need, not just the person you care for. If you're finding things hard, say so, **they're there to help you too**.

## National charities and helplines

**Several UK charities focus on unpaid carers.** They can help with money advice, mental health support, and where to turn next. Try:

- **Carers UK** – Help with benefits, rights, local services, and practical support
- **Mind** – Mental health support for carers, including how to cope with stress and burnout
- **Samaritans (116 123)** – A free, confidential line open 24/7 if you need to talk
- **Citizens Advice** – For help with carers allowance, energy bills, housing, and more



## Ask for help from friends and family

Even small things like a lift, a cooked meal, or someone sitting with your loved one can ease the load. **Be clear about what you need**, it makes it easier for others to step in.



## Remember

Caring for someone **can be exhausting, lonely, and overwhelming**. It's not just the physical side, it's the mental load, the worry, the lack of sleep, and **the way your own life slowly disappears into the background**.

You're not weak for finding it hard. You're human. **Pay attention to how you're coping**. Take breaks when you can. Speak up when it's getting too much. **You don't need to carry it all alone**. Help is out there, and you deserve it just as much as the person you're caring for.

**Not sure where to start with getting help as a carer? Book a chat with a **HealthHero** doctor and get clear, friendly guidance for your health and peace of mind.**