



## Self-care for Carers

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*Self-care is an important part of life but can often be the first thing we stop when life gets busy or priorities change. Finding a few minutes a day to focus on activities that support you mentally, physically, and emotionally will place you in a better space to help others.*

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Since becoming a carer of a person living with ME/CFS, you may have had to make big or small changes in your life. You may have had to change family priorities, or reduce or stop work entirely. Your life may be moving in a different direction than you previously imagined.

This factsheet has been designed to support you in caring for yourself.

### Looking after yourself

As a carer of a person living with ME/CFS you'll often put their needs before your own. It's important to make sure you take a few minutes each day to care for yourself.

**Self-care** means different things for different people, but put simply, it is any activity that increases your physical, mental, or emotional well-being.

It's important for you to decide what self-care activities are right for you and aim to take few minutes out of each day to do things that bring you joy. Some common examples of self-care include making time to relax, spending time doing something you love, engaging in a mindful activity, learning a new skill, eating well or connecting with friends, family or other carers who understand what you are experiencing.

### Self care planning

Caring for a person living with ME/CFS can take a lot of time and energy and may leave people feeling time poor and exhausted. It's important to take small steps towards self-care, making sure each step is achievable and can be a part of your daily routine.

Self-care can provide balance in your life and helps your body and mind to rest and unwind. Self-care can reduce stress, build resilience, and increase your capacity to be more productive. This also makes it easier to focus making is easier to make clear decisions.

When you start thinking about self-care, the **first step** is to plan one small self-care activity each day. It may be as simple as taking 5 minutes to walk in the garden, 1 minute to breathe deeply, reading a paper/magazine or any small activity that brings you joy.

By making self-care a part of your daily routine and practice, self-care will soon become a part of everyday life.

The **second step** is to think about what support you have or would need to organise to take a longer break from the person you care for. This might be something that you do once a week or once a month, but is a planned activity.

If leaving the person you provide care for alone or in the care of another is not possible, choose an activity that you can do at home. Activities like taking a long bath, meditating, calling a friend for a catch up, gardening, art or any other activity you find relaxing.

It is important to set a routine for self-care as this can create stability for you and the person you provide care for. It takes up to six weeks to make self-care a part of your daily life.

***Here are some ideas you could include in your self-care plan:***

- create a plan to hand over care for an hour or two to someone you trust
- make time to connect with other important people in your life
- think about what makes your heart sing
- write in a journal
- boundary setting
- learn to say no
- seek help from your social network
- explore meditation or yoga
- develop a routine
- relaxation podcasts and apps
- research new activities to try
- practice mindfulness
- face-to-face and online peer support
- connecting with others through social media

Use the template on the next page to create your self-care plan.

### **Seeking extra support**

Sometimes self-care means reaching out and seeking some extra help. There are different ways of doing this and can include talking to your doctor, a psychologist or counsellor, contacting a telephone or online support service, or talking to a carer support organisation to ask for some extra self-care resources.



### **Carer Gateway**

The Carer Gateway is an Australian Government initiative that delivers new, improved and expanded services to carers across Australia. Through the Gateway you can get the practical support and advice that you need including information, counselling, peer support and respite care.

**Visit [carergateway.gov.au](https://carergateway.gov.au) or call 1800 422 737**

## Self-care Plan

### ***What are your personal signs of stress?***

These are the signs which tell you that you need to take some time to care for yourself.

For example: feeling irritable, lack of focus, avoiding activities you would normally enjoy

### ***My personal signs that might tell me I am becoming stressed or finding it difficult to manage are:***

### ***What strategies can you use to manage stress?***

Note down your 'go-to' strategies. These can be as simple as taking 3-deep breaths.

Try to be as specific as possible.

### ***The strategies I would be able to use to manage stress include:***

### ***Who can you call upon for support?***

Identify people in different areas.

For example: family, friends, colleagues

### ***If I need extra support, I can ask/talk to:***

### ***What enjoyable activities can you include in your routine over the next month? When?***

Try to make a list of various activities and then schedule them into your calendar and make them non-negotiable.

### ***The activities that I will try to include in my routine (and stick to!) are:***

## Connecting with other ME/CFS carers

Join the Emerge Australia Online Community initiative to connect with other carers who just like you support someone living with ME/CFS. Visit the link below for further information and to learn how to get involved:

[emerge.org.au/online-community](http://emerge.org.au/online-community)



[www.emerge.org.au](http://www.emerge.org.au)  
1800 865 321