

Caring for someone

Information on your rights, financial entitlements,
accessing support and looking after yourself



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How we can help



Age NI is the leading charity for older people in Northern Ireland. We enable older people to make the very best of their lives and we work to create a society that truly values, supports and welcomes them.

Age NI has a range of services, from regular telephone calls by volunteers to older people, to wellbeing groups, along with day, home-based and residential care services to support the changing needs and life transitions of older people.

We also offer information and support to carers to help them in their caring role. Our Freephone Advice Line responds to around 1,000 calls a month, providing advice and guidance on topics including housing, health & social care, residential and nursing care and financial help available.

We offer a free Benefits Check to older people and their carers. Each year we help put over £1million in unclaimed welfare payments into the pockets of older people, many of whom didn't know they were entitled to claim.

Find out more about Age NI:

W: www.ageni.org

E: info@ageni.org

Regional office Telephone:

T: 028 9024 5729

Free Advice Line:

T: 0808 808 7575

*(Monday-Friday 9-5pm,
excl bank holidays)*

About this Guide

Caring for a friend or relative can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience. It can also be demanding and exhausting, but there is support available, both for you, and for the person you care for.

Individuals and families caring for older people have told us about their experiences of the practical and emotional sides of caring. At times, information can be hard to find, or may seem overwhelming, and it can be difficult to know where to go for the right support.

This guide looks at your right to help with the practical side of caring, the financial support available and the potential impact on your own life.

You will find up to date and accurate information to guide you in your caring role including:

- Carers' Rights
- Financial Help
- Help to look after the person you care for
- Taking Care of You

At the end of this booklet we have also brought together a list of other sources of help and information which may be helpful to you in your caring role.



This booklet has been developed by Age NI and supported by the Department of Health Mental Health Fund and Carers' Support Fund, funded by Community Foundation

Am I a Carer?

Many people provide help and support to someone else, but don't see themselves as carers, they just feel they are doing what anyone would do to support friends or family.

They may think:

"I'm just doing what anyone would do in my position."

The word 'carer' means different things to different people – and there are many circumstances in which you might provide care for someone.

For instance, you might:

- Help your partner take care of themselves day-to-day.
- Regularly visit a relative who lives some distance away to check how they're doing.
- Arrange hospital appointments on behalf of a parent.
- Drop in to see a disabled friend each day to provide a meal and some company.
- Move in with a relative to help them recover after a major operation.

You might be providing care by yourself – or you might be getting help from family, friends or paid care workers.



You may have chosen to be someone's carer, or you may have found yourself in a situation where you felt you had no choice. It is common to become a carer without realising it.

Whatever the circumstances, if you look after someone who needs support because they're ill or frail or because they're disabled, then you're a carer.

The caring experience may put pressure on finances, relationships and health and wellbeing.

Some older people require intensive support for their care needs such as help in the morning or with meal preparation.

Others need equipment, aids and adaptations to improve their mobility, enable their independence and increase their confidence at home, yet lots of people don't know about the help that's available.

It's important to **acknowledge that you're a carer because it means you could get extra support** – such as financial benefits or flexible working arrangements.

Carers' Rights

If you're a carer, you have certain rights, including:

- The right to a Carer's Assessment
- Employment Rights if you are working and caring
- The Right to receive a Carer's Allowance

The **Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995** was the first piece of legislation that legally recognised carers. It gave carers the right to their own separate Carer's Assessment.

Carer's Assessment

In Northern Ireland, the **Carers and Direct Payments Act (Northern Ireland) 2002** makes provisions:

- to give carers the rights in law to an assessment, whether the person they care for is having an assessment or not;
- to allow Health and Social Care Trusts the power to give services directly to carers;
- to make Direct Payments accessible to more people, including carers age 16+ via Health and Social Care Trusts, subject to meeting the conditions;
- to recognise children adversely affected by caring responsibilities as "children in need".

A carer is defined as "an individual aged 16 or over, who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis." This care must be provided on an informal basis.

Assessing your needs

When you're so busy making sure the needs of someone else are being met, it can be easy to overlook your own.

Take a few minutes now to think about yourself – and the kind of help you could use.

As a carer, you have a right to an assessment of your own needs, whether the person you care for receives help from social services or not.

Do you find yourself having any of these thoughts? If so, there's support available:

"I'm finding certain tasks difficult because of my own health."

"I'm struggling to find enough time for myself, my family and friends."

"The person I'm looking after is getting worse and I'm worried about how to cope."



A **Carer's Assessment** will review your needs and assess what support services can be provided for you. It may be useful to think about what would benefit you as a carer:

- Are you getting enough sleep?
- Are you eating well?
- How's your physical and mental health?
- Can you get out and do things by yourself?
- Can you cope with other family commitments?
- Is juggling work and caring difficult?
- Are you able to pursue your work or educational goals?
- Can you socialise and enjoy your hobbies in the way that you used to?
- Are there any other issues that may affect your ability to continue caring?

To get started, contact your local Health and Social Care Trust (*see contact list on the following page*). After being assessed, the Health and Social Care Trust will consider what services (if any) can be provided to support you as a carer.

This may include training, contact with other carers, or emotional support.

A Carer's Assessment should be straightforward. You will be provided with all the details you require throughout the process, including information on the following:

- Health and Social Care Trust services and how they can support carers.
- Networking opportunities with other carers in your local area.
- Respite or a short break from your caring role.
- Suitable services for the person you are caring for, such as personal care support, day care, or residential care.
- Types of equipment aids and adaptations which may help.

A Carer's Assessment should be provided in writing. This is called a Care Plan. Any services provided should also be flexible to suit you and the person you care for. If you are unhappy with any aspect of your care plan, talk to the person who carried out the Assessment and make sure all your needs have been identified.

Direct Payments

Health and Social Care Trusts can also make Direct Payments to carers for the services that meet their own assessed need (*see Accessing Care and Support, page 16*).

Carers' Rights

Local Health & Social Care Contacts

Your local Health and Social Care Trust can provide more information on Carer's Assessments and support for carers in their area:

Belfast Health & Social Care Trust:

T: 028 9504 2126

W: www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/carers-services/

E: carerSuppSvc@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Western Health & Social Care Trust

T: 028 6634 4163

W: westerntrust.hscni.net/service/carers-support-service/

E: carers.Support1@westerntrust.hscni.net

South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust

T: 028 4372 1807

W: www.setrust.hscni.net/service/carers-support-service

E: carer.support@setrust.hscni.net

Northern Health & Social Care Trust

T: 028 2766 1210

W: www.northerntrust.hscni.net/services/carerhub

E: carer.hub@northerntrust.hscni.net

Southern Health & Social Care Trust

T: 028 3756 6284

W: southerntrust.hscni.net/involving-you/community-development-and-user-involvement/carers-information/

E: carers.coordinator@southerntrust.hscni.net

Working Carers and Employment Rights

If you are employed as well as caring for someone, you may be able to ask your employer for flexible working arrangements which let you work in a way that fits in with your caring responsibilities.

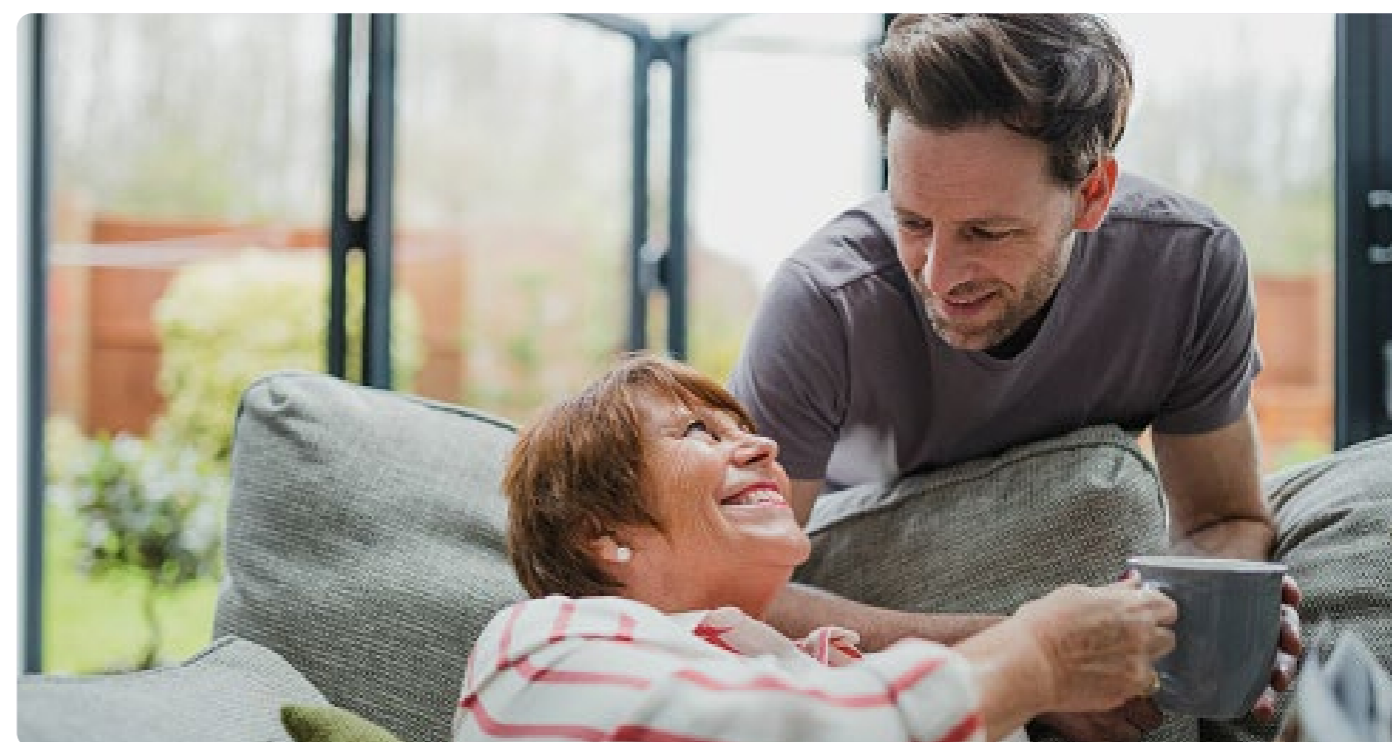
You have a statutory right to ask your employer for flexible working if you care for an adult who is a relative or lives at the same address as you.

Carers also have the right to take unpaid time off work for dependants in an emergency.

Returning to work after being a carer may have an impact on any entitlements and benefits you receive as a carer. The amount of hours you do, how much you earn, and your savings will be taken into consideration.

Caring for a relative with disabilities or ill health is often unpredictable and care arrangements can be complex. You do not need to tell your employer that you are a carer, but if they know, they will understand better if you need to ask for flexible hours or time off.

If you want to work, it is in your employer's best interest to consider making reasonable changes to your work pattern to help you work and continue caring.



Many employers offer help to carers in various ways. Think about how your employer could help you and talk to them about your needs.

You and your employer might consider different arrangements including flexible working and special leave in emergencies.

Most carers know they can get emergency leave (paid or unpaid), but there are other leave arrangements that your employer might be able to offer.

These include:

- Carer's leave (paid or unpaid)
- Compassionate leave
- Borrowing / buying leave
- Career breaks

You are entitled to take a reasonable amount of time off if you have worked for your employer for at least a year and there is an emergency with the person you care for.



Scan here for more information on carers' rights from the NI Direct website.

If you are working, are under State Pension Age and you are caring for one or more people for 20 hours or more a week, you may be eligible for **Carer's Credit**, a National Insurance Contributions (NIC) credit which can help to protect your future State Pension and bereavement benefits.

Contact the Disability & Carers Service to find out more: **Tel 0800 587 0912**, email dcs.post@dfcni.gov.uk

Financial Support



Benefits and Allowances for Carers

Carers often talk about the financial challenges they face in their caring role. This can be related to increased heating costs, transport and fuel costs, paying for services, cutting down or changing working hours, and not having the disposable income to do things that they enjoy. It's important to make sure that you know what financial support is available and how to apply for it.

Age NI's **More Money in your Pocket** guide explains this support in more detail. www.ageni.org/moremoney and our Advice Line **0808 808 7575** (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) offers expert guidance on all benefits and entitlements.

Age NI's team is experienced in navigating this and can explain how various benefits interact.

Carer's Allowance

Carer's Allowance is the main benefit specifically for carers. It is paid at £76.75 per week (2023-24). It can be claimed by carers who:

- Spend at least 35 hours a week caring for a person (*it does not matter whether or not you live with them*) who receives Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance care component (at the highest or middle rate), Personal Independence Payment daily living component (at either rate), Armed Forces Independence Payment or Constant Attendance Allowance.
- Are not in full-time education or earning more than £139 a week (2023-24); income from an occupational pension is not taken into account as earnings.

Claiming Carer's Allowance can also help you qualify for higher rates of Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Housing Benefit or Rates Reduction, or entitle you to claim these benefits for the first time.

It is important to note that the link between Carer's Allowance and other benefits is complicated. People who are receiving a disability payment because they have entitlement through their own health condition, can claim Carer's Allowance if they are providing care for another person. **You can claim Carer's Allowance online: www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-carers-allowance-online.**

Other benefits and entitlements

Many older people of pension age are missing out on payments they are entitled to. Some of these are outlined below.

Each year, the Age NI Advice and Advocacy service helps unlock over £1 million in unclaimed benefits for older people, with the average amount around £2,500 a year. This can make a big difference to an individual's quality of life.

You can also check out benefit entitlement by using the handy, anonymous Age UK Benefits Calculator, via the Age NI website: www.ageni.org/calculator

You will need to have to hand information about your savings, income, pensions and existing benefits (*for you and any partner*).

Attendance Allowance

Attendance Allowance (AA) is a benefit for people over pension age who may need extra help to stay independent at home due to an illness or disability.

There are two weekly rates: £68.10* (lower rate) if help is needed either in the day or at night, or £101.75* (*higher rate*) if help is needed both in the day and at night. (*correct at 2023-24).

These rates don't depend on your income or savings, or any other benefits you may be receiving – just on the help you need.

You don't have to actually be receiving the help to claim AA, and you can use it in any way you like to stay independent in your own home – it doesn't have to be spent on a carer. If you're entitled to AA, you may also be paid extra money with Pension Credit and Housing Benefit.

Personal Independence Payment

If you need help with daily activities or getting around because of a long-term illness or disability, you may be entitled to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP). PIP has two parts - a daily living component and a mobility component. PIP has replaced Disability Living Allowance for anyone making a new claim.

You may be eligible for PIP if you're *under* State Pension age and need help with daily living activities or getting around, or both. If you're awarded PIP before you're of State Pension age, you'll continue to receive it after too.

You can still make a claim if you're working. PIP isn't means-tested, which means it doesn't matter how much income or savings you have.

Financial Support

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is the new single benefit payment which replaces a range of other benefits *if you are of working age*. It is a means-tested benefit that's now been rolled out throughout Northern Ireland. It's based on several things, such as the hours you work, what you earn and your savings. If you're a mixed aged couple, meaning only one person is over Pension Credit qualifying age, new rules came into effect on 15th May 2019.

State Pension

State Pension is a regular payment from the government based on your National Insurance (NI) contributions. The State Pension age is currently 66. From 6 May 2026, State Pension age will start increasing again and will reach 67 by 6 March 2028 (affecting anyone born between 6 April 1960 and 5 April 1977). Find out when you can claim by entering your date of birth at www.gov.uk/state-pension-age.

You won't receive your pension automatically – you need to claim it. You should receive a letter from the Northern Ireland Pension Centre around four months before you reach State Pension age telling you what to do next. If you still haven't received it with three months to go, contact the Northern Ireland Pension Centre. You don't have to claim your State Pension straight away. You can postpone claiming it – known as 'deferring' – and possibly get a higher pension when you do.

There are some benefits that might be affected if you defer, so call Age NI's Advice and Advocacy Service on freephone 0808 808 7575 to find out the best option for you.

Pension Credit

It's worth claiming Pension Credit even if you're only entitled to a small amount as it can help you qualify for other benefits such as Housing Benefit and recent cost of living payments.

This is an income-related benefit to give you some extra money in retirement. If you're on a low income or struggling to make ends meet, claiming Pension Credit could help.

If you are single, you can claim Pension Credit (PC) when you reach State Pension age, as set out in the table below based on your date of birth. If you are a couple, you can claim PC when you both reach State Pension age. Check the date of birth of the younger partner in the table below to see when you can make a claim.

Date of Birth	Date you can claim Pension Credit
Before 6 October 1954	Can claim now
6 October 1954 to 5 April 1960	66th birthday



Pension Credit comes in two parts, and you may be eligible for one or both parts:

Guarantee Credit tops up your weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level of £201.05* if you're single, or £306.85* if you're a couple. These amounts can be higher if you have a disability, are a carer or are a homeowner with service charges.

Savings Credit is only available if you reached State Pension age before 6 April 2016. You may receive it if you saved some money towards your retirement, or your income is higher than the basic State Pension. You could get up to £15.95* if you're single, or £17.84* if you're a couple.

Myth: "I own my own home so I won't get anything."

Reality: Owning your own home doesn't rule you out. Many older homeowners make successful claims for Pension Credit.

To claim, call the **Northern Ireland Pension Credit Application Line** on **0808 100 6165 (0808 100 2198 for textphone)** (*values correct at 2023-24)

Housing Benefit

Housing Benefit helps pay your rent if you are a tenant.

You could get Housing Benefit if:

- you pay rent
- you're on a low income or claiming benefits
- you receive the Guarantee part of Pension Credit
- you have less than £16,000 in savings

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
General enquiries **03448 920 900**
Housing Benefit enquiries **03448 920 902**

Help with Rates

If you are entitled to **Guarantee Pension Credit** you may get **full help with your rent and rates**. If you are an owner occupier and on a low income, you may also get help with rates, but you will have to go through a means test rather than be entitled automatically. There is an upper savings limit of £50,000 and a lower savings limit of £10,000.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

If you are **aged 70 or over, and live alone**, you may be entitled to a **20% reduction on your rates bill**. This benefit is not means tested so it's worth applying if you live on your own. There are some exceptions which allow you to claim Lone Pensioner Allowance if don't live alone, for example, if you have a carer living with you.

Financial Support

Help with heating costs

Many of us worry about rising fuel costs, but a cold home puts us at risk of cold-related illnesses such as pneumonia. If you have reached State Pension age (*the minimum age at which you qualify for Pension Credit*), or receive certain benefits, you can get extra money to help you in winter.

Winter Fuel Payment

The Winter Fuel Payment is an annual payment to help with heating costs, made to households that include someone over State Pension age. In 2022/23 the payments were **£200 if you're under 80 or £300 if you're 80 or over**. You'll usually get less if you live with other people who also qualify – but, between you, it should add up to the same.

You usually get a Winter Fuel Payment automatically if you get the State Pension or Pension Credit. You'll receive a letter with the amount and the approximate payment date.

If you don't receive the State Pension or Pension Credit but might be eligible, you need to make a claim by contacting: **Winter Fuel Payment Centre** on **0800 731 0160**.

You can also download the claim form by visiting: **www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim**



You'll need your National Insurance number and Bank or Building Society details to hand. You only have to claim once. After that, you should get the payment automatically each year – as long as your circumstances don't change.

Cold Weather Payment

If the average temperature in your area has been, or is expected to be, 0°C (32°F) or below for seven days in a row between November and March, you should get a payment of **£25 a week**.

You should automatically receive a Cold Weather Payment if you get Guarantee Pension Credit.

Contact the **Northern Ireland Pension Centre on 0800 587 0892** if you think you should have received a Cold Weather Payment but didn't.

Help with Health Costs

In Northern Ireland everyone is eligible for free prescriptions.

When you reach 60, you can also get a free sight test.

If you receive the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit, you automatically qualify for help towards additional health costs including:

- **free dental treatment**
- **an eye test once a year**
- **a voucher towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses**
- **free wigs and fabric supports**
- **help with necessary travel costs to receive healthcare treatment if you're referred by a doctor, dentist or need to see a consultant.**

If you don't get the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit but have a low income and less than £16,000 in property, savings or any other money (either on your own or jointly if you're a couple), you may still get some help with these costs through the **Health Service Low Income Scheme**.

You may also be eligible for this scheme if you live permanently in a care home and have savings of less than £23,250.

For information visit **www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/help-health-costs#toc-1**

Help with one off or urgent expenses

If you're faced with a cost you can't meet because of your low income, or you find yourself without any money at all, you may be able to get help from the **Finance Support service**.

The Finance Support service includes:

- **Discretionary support**, which is an interest free loan or grant that can help you if you are faced with an exceptional or crisis situation. Discretionary support replaces community care grants and crisis loans for household items and living costs.
- **A Budgeting Loan** of between £100 and £1500 may be available if you're receiving Pension Credit and you need to pay for an essential item. You'll need to repay it out of your weekly benefits.
- **A Short-Term Advance** can help to tide you over between claiming a benefit and receiving it. You'll usually need to repay the money within three months, out of your weekly benefits.
- **Funeral Payments** can help you cover the cost of a funeral, such as burial or cremation costs and up to £1000 for other expenses, such as the funeral director's fees.

For information visit: **www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/finance-support-service-times-crisis-and-need**

Accessing Care and Support



Needs Assessment

Regardless of income or savings, the person you care for may be entitled to a Needs Assessment from their local Health and Social Care Trust. You can ask for one on their behalf, with their permission.

What will happen?

When someone has a Needs Assessment, the assessor will usually come to their home and talk to them about how they manage everyday tasks and what they want to achieve.

The assessor will look at:

- the person's health and what they can and can't do
- their current living arrangements
- how they'd like to be supported
- your views and insights into their needs, as their carer.

As well as the person's physical safety, the assessor should consider their emotional and social needs, and whether there's any support that would prevent them needing more significant help in the future. Your thoughts and feelings as their carer should also be taken into account.

The assessor will identify what the person's needs are – and whether those needs meet the eligibility criteria for help from the Health and Social Care Trust.

If the assessor finds that the person you care for is eligible for help, the Health and Social Care Trust will produce a care and support plan setting out how it will meet their needs, taking into account the care you provide. You should both be involved in drawing up the care plan, and the care you provide should be recorded.

Direct Payments

Direct Payments are local Health and Social Care trust payments for people who have been assessed as needing support from Social Services (either as an individual, or as a carer)

If you require personal care services, you could use this payment to employ a personal assistant or to buy services from an agency of your choice.

This may be suitable for you if you like to have control over the assistance you get - you choose who works for you, when they work and what they do.

It is important that you get all the information you require before you decide that Direct Payments is suitable. You should think about the personal advantages and also the responsibilities you will be taking on.

To receive Direct Payments, you will have to contact your local Health and Social Care Trust and ask them to assess your needs.

If you are a carer aged 16 or over, you may be eligible for Direct Payments.

If you are a carer you cannot use Direct Payments to buy services for the person you care for. They can only be spent on getting the support you, as a carer, have been assessed as needing.



Your local Health and Social Care Trust is obliged to offer you the option of Direct Payments in place of the services you currently receive.

There are limited circumstances where you are not given this choice, and your local Trust will be able to tell you about these. If your local Health and Social Care Trust has decided that you do not need help from social care services, you will not be offered Direct Payments.

The Centre for Independent Living can provide more information on Direct Payments and Independent Living:

T: 028 9064 8546

Text: 028 9064 0598

E: info@cilbelfast.org

W: www.cilbelfast.org

URL: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/direct-payments

Accessing Care and Support

Disabled Facilities Grant

Owner occupiers, landlords or private tenants can get help if there is a person with a disability living in the house. The Disabled Facilities Grant is administered through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

It is based on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist. Typical work may include improving access to your bathroom, living room or bedroom, or kitchen adaptations making the preparation and cooking of food easier.

Contact your local Health and Social Care Trust, who can start the process and will contact the Housing Executive. You can also speak to your GP or social worker.

Aids and Adaptations

Occupational Therapy promotes the health and wellbeing of people by providing aids and adaptations so they can continue to live independently at home and lead a more active life.

Your local Health Trust may provide equipment aids and adaptations to help with daily tasks such as cooking, dressing and bathing through its Occupational Therapy Department.

As a carer, this support can be beneficial to you and the person you are caring for.

These may include:

- grab rails
- bed rails
- perch stools
- raised toilet and bath seats.

An Occupational Therapist will carry out an assessment of a person's needs and may visit to provide expert advice on particular equipment aids that will suit.

Falls Alarm

If you're worried about the person you care for having a fall, a personal alarm can provide both a sense of freedom and independence for the wearer, and peace of mind for a carer.

Worn on a pendant or wristband, a button alarm allows the wearer to call for help if they are unwell or have a fall and can't reach a telephone.

Pressing or activating the button will alert a 24-hour response centre. Within seconds help will be on the way.

These are available from a range of providers, including Age NI. Age NI Personal Alarms are provided by Taking Care, using tried, tested and trusted technology, and recommended by consumer experts, Which? Proceeds from sales support the charitable work of Age NI.

www.ageni.org/personalalarms



Residential or Nursing Care

If the person you look after is no longer able to look after themselves and you are unable to provide the care they need, for whatever reason, residential or nursing care is a sensible and realistic option.

Making the decision that residential care might be an option for the person you are looking after might feel like a difficult thing to consider. You may have really conflicting feelings about this.

Carers have told us that they experience a mixture of sadness and guilt, whilst also feeling relief that the person they are looking after will be given a level of practical care and assistance that is now too difficult to maintain at home.

Caring can be both physically and mentally exhausting and it can be much better to arrange the best residential care possible than struggle on until you reach crisis point.

Finding Residential Care

Your local Health and Social Care Trust should be able to provide you with a list of residential care homes in your area and should be able to advise on suitable residential care homes within their budget, or the budget of the person you are looking after if they are self-funding.

Another useful source of information is the RQIA, the regulatory body which inspects nursing homes. It publishes its inspection reports on its website:

www.RQIA.org.uk

Accessing Care and Support



Transport

The following concessions are provided on eligible scheduled services operated by Translink and other participating operators:

Free travel for:

- everyone aged 60 and over
- people who are registered blind
- war disablement pensioners

Half fare travel for people:

- who get the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- who have had a driving licence refused or revoked on medical grounds
- who have a recognised learning disability
- who are partially-sighted (sight impaired)

To be eligible for any of the above concessions, you must apply for and receive a concessionary travel card, called a SmartPass.

You can get an application form in person at any manned Translink bus or rail station or:

T: 028 9066 6630

Text: 18001 028 9066 6630

E: smartpass@translink.co.uk

Please note: you will never be contacted asking for any bank account details when you're applying for or renewing a SmartPass.

Blue Badge

You may be able to get a Blue Badge if you, or the person you care for:

- Receive the higher rate of the mobility part of Disability Living Allowance.
- Are in receipt of eight points or more under the 'moving around activity' for the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – you must give a copy of your statement of entitlement detailing the points awarded.
- Receive a benefit under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme within tariff levels one to eight (inclusive) and have been certified by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) as having a permanent impairment which causes inability to walk or a lot of difficulty walking.
- Have a permanent disability which means you cannot walk or have a lot of difficulty walking - in this case your doctor may be asked to confirm your eligibility.
- If you have difficulty in planning and following a journey as it would cause overwhelming psychological distress and need the help of another or that you could be a danger to yourself or others – in this case a doctor may be asked to confirm your eligibility.
- Drive a vehicle regularly, have a severe disability in both arms and are unable to use, or have a lot of difficulty using, all or some types of parking meter.

- Are registered blind.

- Receive a War Pension Mobility Supplement.

Blue badges are issued for a maximum of three years. Applicants whose benefit award will end within three years of the application date will only be issued with a blue badge until the end of their benefit award.

Community Transport

Disability Action Transport Service

Disability Action Transport Scheme, (DATS) is a transport scheme that operates in and around large towns across Northern Ireland.

Request a DATS membership form on **028 9029 7870** or email **transport@disabilityaction.org**.

Rural Transport Service

Find your local Rural Community Transport partnership on NI Direct, here: **<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/rural-community-transport-partnerships>**. They can also help with other schemes you may be eligible for, such as dial-a-lift.

Reminder: many organisations and businesses offer concessions to carers. Ask if they do and you could save money and access additional support.

Looking after Yourself

Carers often talk about the impact of caring on their mental health and wellbeing. Over time, caring can really take its toll.

It's vital that you take time to look after yourself as well as the person you care for – not just so that you can carry on caring, but so you have the energy to still do the things you enjoy yourself.

You should try to:

- Eat properly.
- Get enough sleep.
- Have some time for yourself.
- Do something you enjoy, either by yourself or with the person you care for.
- Accept the support that is offered by other people; you don't have to do everything yourself.
- Ask for help: see the sections in this guide on Carer's Assessments (see page 6).

If you feel that caring is affecting your health, speak to your GP or practice nurse.

How do you feel?

Caring for someone can be a positive experience. But it can also mean you face extra pressures, such as money worries or concerns about the person you care for. You may also experience a range of emotions about your caring role – it can be tiring providing physical and emotional support, or juggling many things in order to co-ordinate care.

You could feel unprepared for your caring role and your feelings towards the person you're caring for may change.

You might feel sadness or guilt – or even anger at times – as you do the best you can to help them.

There's no right or wrong way to feel and this might change by the day.

Some carers talk about feeling:

- anxious and stressed
- sad, depressed and even helpless
- grief and fatigue
- lonely
- guilty or ashamed
- frustrated, resentful or angry

It can help to talk about how you feel. Try talking to someone you trust, your GP, **Lifeline 0808 808 8000**, or the Samaritans on **116 123**.

Even when you're looking after someone 24/7, caring can be a lonely experience. This is especially true when you feel that others, including family and friends, or even health professionals, don't understand what you're going through.

While it can be difficult, there are some things you can do to try to deal with these feelings and get the support you need.

Five Steps to Wellbeing

There are five steps that we can take to help keep our mind and body well. Try to build some of these into your daily life where you can – think of them as our “five a day” for wellbeing.

Sometimes it will be the last thing you'll want to do, but try to stay connected, eat healthily, stay active and make sure you get enough sleep.

Connect



Being a carer can feel lonely at times.

Social relationships are important to our wellbeing: it's good to talk and to share. Connect with a friend or supportive family member regularly or join a carers' group and chat to others with similar experiences.

Be Active



Physical activity makes us feel good, stronger and helps our emotional wellbeing.

It can also boost our energy. Anything that gets the body moving counts. Take a short walk regularly, if you can. Join activity sessions online or at a leisure centre or dance in your kitchen to your favourite music.

Keep Learning



Focusing on learning new things can help take our mind off daily stress and worries.

Try to make time for something new or rediscover a hobby that you love. Check out local FE college courses or classes in your community. Or search online for learning sessions on a topic you're really interested in.

Take Notice



Stop, pause or take a moment to look around you.

Connecting your senses to the wider world beyond your walls can help shift your mind away from the here and now. Breathing exercises are a great way to slow down and feel calm.

Give



Caring is an act of generosity, but it is important for you to be kind to yourself too.

Making time for yourself or finding small things every day to be grateful for, can be a gift to yourself and your wellbeing.

Looking after Yourself



Mental and Physical Health

It can be difficult to make the time to put yourself first but self-care as a carer is not selfish: it is vital so that you can carry out your caring role and live a fulfilling life too.

It can be easy to forget about “being healthy” when caring responsibilities build up and you have many competing demands on your time. However, physical activity, eating well, rest and relaxation are really important to achieve the balance of care for yourself, whilst caring for someone else.

The idea of starting a new activity, particularly when you already feel under pressure, can be daunting. Start with small steps, aim to establish a routine with the time clearly allocated to it (like a diary appointment), and set yourself some manageable goals in the first instance. Celebrate the little wins and take note of how they make you feel.

Move More to Feel Good

Staying active is powerful medicine for both mind and body. Regular exercise and movement can help reduce the impact of several diseases, for example osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke and it can reduce the risk of falls by keeping our muscles strong.

Moving our body can also improve sleep and improve low mood and memory.

Taking regular exercise is one of the best things you can do to keep mentally and physically strong, both to be able to carry out your caring role, and to live a full life for yourself.

The first and most important step to moving more is to break up periods of inactivity throughout the day. If you haven't been very active, aim to stand more and sit less: you could do this by taking regular walk breaks around the garden or street or doing some gentle stretches while waiting for a kettle to boil when making a cup of tea or coffee.

If you are already active, keep up this activity to boost your energy and improve your mood, helping you to deal with stress and challenges you may face in your caring role.



Scan here for Age NI's series of exercise videos, Move With Mary by Lady Mary Peters.



Some suggestions for moving more:

Aerobic activity should be sufficient to get your heart rate up a little, make you breathe faster and feel warmer. You will need to begin this slowly and build up gradually if you haven't done anything vigorous for a while.

The Public Health Agency's guidance is 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity every week.

This may seem overwhelming, but you can build up gradually, and all activity counts, even if it's only a few minutes at a time, across the day or week.

Be active in a way and at times that suit you. All movement brings benefits.

Examples of aerobic activity:

- Brisk Walking
- Climbing Stairs
- Swimming

Day to day activities which keep your muscles strong include:

- Carrying or moving loads such as groceries.
- Gardening jobs such as mowing the lawn, digging, collecting grass and leaves.
- Activities involving stepping and jumping, such as dancing.



Scan here for the NHS website's useful 10 minute activity videos

If you experience any of the following when exercising, stop and contact your GP:

- Discomfort in your chest.
- Excessive shortness of breath - you should still be able to hold a conversation whilst exercising.
- Dizziness.
- Excessive pain.

Eat Well

Eating and Drinking

Eating well is a key step to help nourish our body to keep healthy and stronger for longer. What we eat and drink becomes even more important as we get older and staying well-hydrated is essential for how the body functions.

Think of it as putting the right fuel in, not just for energy to do the things we enjoy, but as the building blocks of a strong, resilient and healthy body.

At each meal time try to have:

- Foods rich in starchy carbs and fibre
- Foods rich in protein
- Plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Foods containing calcium for healthy bones

Here are some top tips:



Base meals around starchy food

Starchy foods, like rice or pasta, are a good source of energy. Wholegrain and high-fibre versions are even better, as they help prevent constipation, too.



Drink about six to eight glasses of fluids each day

This doesn't have to be just water. Tea, coffee and low-sugar or sugar-free squash are fine, too. When it's hot, drink a little more to make sure you stay hydrated. Having a glass of water within reach during the daytime will remind you to keep up your fluid intake.



Eat fish at least twice a week

Having one portion of white fish (like cod or shellfish) and another of oily fish (like salmon or mackerel) each week is ideal. Oily fish is rich in vitamin D and a type of fat, Omega-3, that helps reduce the risk of heart disease. Grilling, poaching or baking fish is healthier than frying it.



Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day

Eating plenty of fruit and veg reduces your risk of developing heart disease and certain cancers, like bowel cancer. Frozen, canned or dried fruits and fruit juices all count. Don't be put off if you don't always reach your 'five a day' – two or three portions is better than none. Aim to eat more green leafy veg each day, and try to eat more berries (frozen are much cheaper than fresh and just as good).



Eat different sources of protein

You could try alternatives to meat, such as beans, lentils or soya-based meat substitutes. Dairy products such as milk and cheese contain protein, too. They're also a good source of calcium, which helps to keep your bones strong. If you eat meat, limit portion sizes of red meat or poultry, and choose lean cuts of meat or mince.



Cut down on foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar

Eating too much salt can increase your risk of high blood pressure and stroke. Look for lower-salt versions of foods where you can. Foods that are high in saturated fat, such as cakes, sausages and cheese, increase cholesterol levels in the blood and raise your risk of heart disease and stroke. Try to see these as a treat rather than as something you'd have day-to-day.



Variety is the spice of life

Include a good range of foods in your diet to help you get all the nutrients you need and to help you to maintain a healthy weight. The Eatwell Guide (overleaf) shows how to get a healthy balance over the course of a day or a week.

If you have special dietary or medical needs, you may wish to speak with your GP or dietitian first.

Eat Well



Supplements

Eating and drinking foods that are packed full of vitamins and minerals will keep the brain and body fit and healthy. As we age, many of us no longer absorb nutrients from food as efficiently as we did when we were younger. So, even if we eat a very good diet, our body may have inadequate levels of certain nutrients.

Consider supplementing your diet with **fish oil** and **vitamins B12** and **D**. Fish oils contain the essential 'omega-3' fatty acids which may have similar beneficial effects on the brain to B12, in terms of memory loss and dementia. An intake of between one and two grams per day of omega-3 from fish oil or algae capsules could be beneficial.

Vitamin D is formed by the action of UV light on the skin, but most of us do not get enough sun when we age. **It is important to take supplements of vitamin D to protect your bones, muscles and brain.**

Keeping a weight that's right for you

As we get older, our weight can change. If you've noticed you've gained some unwanted weight, you might decide to eat a bit less and move a bit more.

If you've noticed yourself losing weight, it's important to eat more. Malnutrition happens when your diet does not contain the right amount of nutrients to keep you healthy: try to eat foods and drinks that are high in calories and protein 'little and often'. **Weight loss is not an inevitable part of getting older.**

Any unexpected change in your weight can also be a sign there's something else going on. **If you're worried about a change in your weight, talk to a health care professional such as your doctor or practice nurse.**

The Eatwell Guide

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 3.0g	Saturates 1.3g	Sugars 34g	Salt 0.9g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/ 167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars



Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.



Invest in Rest

Taking on caring responsibilities can be exhausting. The added stresses or changes to routine may affect how we sleep. Alongside exercise and nutrition, good sleep is one of the most important ingredients for our health and wellbeing.

Sleep is important to our brain health, our mood and ability to cope with everyday life. If at all possible, we should actively invest in resting and getting a good amount of sleep. Ideally, we should aim for seven to eight hours of sleep per day.

Practical things that could help us to get a better night's sleep:

- Get out in the fresh air during the day.
- Move more during the day to keep rest and sleep cycles on track.
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake and stop smoking.
- Don't eat too late in the evening.
- Keep a regular routine for going to bed / waking up.
- Avoid napping too much.
- Have a peaceful, quiet space to sleep and lower the lights.
- Wind down for at least 30 mins before going to bed.
- Disconnect from devices like phones, ipads, laptops before going to bed.
- Practice breathing exercises to help you relax to get to sleep (see page 29).

“As a carer for my husband and worried about the future, I didn't realise how the stress was affecting my sleep. I felt so tired during the day. With some help I can relax better now and that lets me rest even if I'm not asleep.”

Janet, aged 72 Coleraine

Responding to Stress

A key factor which can affect our sleep and ability to relax is stress.

Stress usually happens when we are in a situation that we feel we can't manage or control, so it's not surprising that carers often feel the effects of stress.

A small amount of stress from time to time can help us to complete tasks and feel more energised. But stress can become problematic when it lasts for a long time or is very intense. In some cases, stress can affect our physical and mental health.

Stress can make you feel afraid, think the worst and focus on the negatives, inhibiting us from doing the daily activities or things we enjoy or spending time with others.

If these feelings continue, we might lose confidence, feel more isolated and reduce our movement.



There can be many causes of stress but there are things that can help you to reduce and manage stress. Think about the Five Steps to Wellbeing outlined earlier (page 23) and if stress is affecting your health or your mood, it is important to seek help by talking to your GP or healthcare professional.

Remember that your wellbeing is important for both you and the person you care for, so make the time to focus on yourself to stay well.

The Power of Breath

Practicing how we breathe can help us to relax and reduce stressful thoughts and feelings.

Focusing on our breath, the depth and length of each breath in and out, and the rhythm of our breathing, can have a transformative effect on how we feel.

It can take us out of a state of anxiety and into rest and repair and can help us to sleep better.

478 Breathing Exercise

This breathing exercise can help to control and slow down your breathing, and in turn helps to calm your heart rate, helping you to feel more relaxed.

4 - Inhale for four seconds through your nose

7 - Hold it for seven seconds

8 - Exhale for eight seconds through your mouth.

The aim is to have your exhale longer than your inhale.

When your Caring Role Changes



Your caring role can change over time. There may come a time when you can no longer provide the help the person you care for needs, perhaps because your circumstances or health have changed, or perhaps because theirs have.

The person you care for might become very unwell or might die. You might have changes in your personal circumstances and be unable to carry out your caring role. These changes can lead to difficult decisions that might seem overwhelming at times.

If things have changed, you can ask for an updated care needs assessment for both yourself and for the person you

provide care for, to make sure both of you continue to get the support you need (see earlier section).

If you are considering whether a care home would be the best way to meet the needs of the person you provide care for, you may have a lot of questions and some conflicting emotions.

Planning Ahead

We know that caring roles can change so we have included guidance on advance care planning, making a will and end of life care. These things can be difficult to consider, but carers tell us that having the right information does help in making those decisions.

Advance Care Planning

Advance Care Planning is an on-going process of conversations between a person, those important to them, and those providing care, support or treatment. Advance Care Planning should be an important part of life for all adults and as a carer it is helpful to be prepared and informed so that you can start these conversations about your own plans and wishes as well as with the person you care for.

There are four parts of Advance Care Planning:

Personal: Your wishes, feelings, beliefs and values; funeral wishes, social media accounts, support for dependants.

Legal: Mental Capacity, Power of Attorney, Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment (ADRT) (also known as DNR).

Clinical: Declining health and unexpected emergencies, ReSPECT, recommendations for CPR, organ donation, body donation to medical science.

Financial: Making a will, cohabitation, planning for retirement, planning for care.



Scan here for the Department of Health's detailed guide on the four parts of Advance Care Planning.

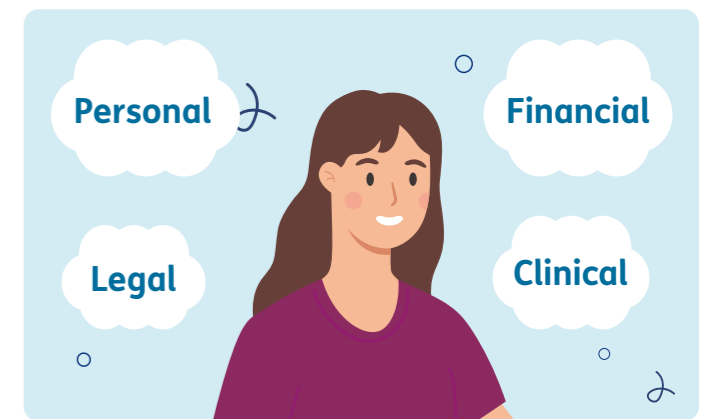


Image Source: Department of Health NI.

Power of Attorney

If the person you care for has the mental capacity to make their own decisions, they may want to consider granting Power of Attorney to the person or people they would like to make decisions on their behalf.

Power of Attorney gives someone the right to make decisions about another person's property and affairs.

In the event of someone becoming mentally incapable, an Enduring Power of Attorney would be required and must be set up while the person still has capacity.

This is a serious and legally-binding arrangement. You should seek legal advice as careful consideration should be given to the range of powers you wish to give your attorney.



Scan here for more information from NI Direct.

When your Caring Role Changes

Bereavement

If the person you care for dies, it may be a very difficult and emotional time for you. If you have been spending a lot of your time caring for someone, the whole structure of your day may change, and you may lose contact with the other people involved in their care.

How you cope with the death of the person you cared for is a very personal thing. There are no time limits on grief, and no set pattern of emotions and behaviours that everybody follows.

Grief does not always happen straight away. As well as coping with the loss of the person you cared for, you also have to deal with the loss of your caring role. You may feel guilty about feeling relief, but you may also feel exhausted and alone.

It is important to give yourself the time you need to come to terms with your feelings, and the changes that bereavement brings.

There is no right or wrong way to feel following a death, but if you are finding it hard to cope, speak to your GP to talk about the support that is available locally. Contact details for CRUSE Bereavement Care are provided at the back of this booklet.

Life after caring

The end of your caring role may take some time to adjust to. Having more time to yourself may give you the opportunity for a much-needed rest, but it can also leave you feeling that you have a lot of time to fill.

If you are used to always having things to do, it can be hard to stop and think about what you would like to do now. Some people find that once they are no longer caring, exhaustion – both physical and emotional – catches up with them and they may feel unwell for a while.

Some practical matters, such as making sure you are claiming the right benefits for your situation now you are no longer caring, and dealing with any changes to your housing situation (if there are any), have to be dealt with fairly quickly. However, you do not need to rush into making decisions about other aspects of your life.

In time, it can be a good opportunity to re-establish links with family and friends if you have become isolated, and allow yourself time to pursue your own interests. The following suggestions may be helpful for you if and when you feel the time is right.



Taking time for yourself

Resting and letting yourself have a break now your caring role has ended, is just as important as taking on a new endeavour.

Access support from other former carers

You may feel isolated after many years of caring, and you might want to see if there is any support you can get from others in a similar position.

You could find out what support your local carer's organisation or local carers group offers to former carers. Your Health and Social Care Trust (*details on Page 8 should have this information*).

Check in again with the Five Steps to Wellbeing when you feel ready

You may want to explore new and different ways to Connect, Be Active, Notice, Keep Learning and Give but don't put pressure on yourself to make decisions until you feel ready.

Checklist for Carers

You may find it helpful to go through this short checklist to see what areas you might need support with.

Am I a Carer?

Consider if you are, or have become, a carer. Whether you've just started looking after a loved one or have been supporting someone for a while, you could get extra support for your own wellbeing, your money, your work and the person you care for. This checklist will help you get started with support.

Your Wellbeing

- Get a Carer's Assessment from your local Health and Social Care Trust
- Make time for yourself and your interests as often as you can
- Take a break from caring – there is help available. Contact your local Health and Social Care Trust for support (*see contacts page 8*)

For the person you care for

- Make sure they have a Needs Assessment from the local Health and Social Care Trust
- Help them complete a Benefits Check
- Consider if any home adaptations would make their life easier
- Think about future care needs, personal wishes, financial and legal matters such as a will or power of attorney

Your Money

- Apply for Carer's Allowance
- Use the Age NI Benefits Calculator or contact Age NI Advice Line to check if there are benefits you could be claiming

Your Work

- Tell your employer about caring responsibilities
- Think about asking for flexible working

Care for carers

Caring can sometimes feel lonely and it's ok to admit it's all getting a bit much. There is help and there are others sharing similar challenges and experiences.

We have suggested some local contacts on the back page, who you can talk to for advice, support or just a listening ear. There are carer support teams in every Health Trust area (pg8).

Recovery Colleges offer access to education and skills training to support mental health & wellbeing and help increase connection. These are also available in every Trust area.

Carers NI has a wealth of information for carers, far beyond what this booklet can cover.

Specific services are also offered by CRUSE, the Stroke Association, Alzheimer's Society, Action Mental Health and Inspire Wellbeing, among others.

Useful Contacts

Local Health Trust Carers' Service - contact your local Health & Social Care Trust Carer team – see page 8 for details.

Age NI

Age NI

www.ageni.org
028 9024 5729

Age NI Advice Service

Freephone: 0808 808 7575
Available Monday - Friday 9am-5pm

Age NI Care and Wellbeing service:

www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/services/carewellbeing-services

Age NI Money Matters:

www.ageni.org/moremoney

Other useful Organisations

Carers NI:

028 9043 9843
www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/
www.carersuk.org/northernireland
www.carersuk.org/ni/help-and-advice/guides-and-tools/online-tools-to-help-with-caring/

Cruse - Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677
www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/

Inspire Wellbeing – Mental Wellbeing

0800 189 0036
www.inspirewellbeing.org

Stroke Association

www.stroke.org.uk/finding-support/steps-emotional-support-northern-ireland

Alzheimer's Society

www.alzheimers.org.uk/blog/mental-health-wellbeing-tips-dementia-carers-during-coronavirus

Action Mental Health

www.amh.org.uk/services/mindful-carers-project/

Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

www.nichs.org.uk/our-support-services/support-for-carers

Helplines NI

A full list of specialist local helplines is available at www.helplinesni.com

Trust Recovery Colleges in your area (see page 36):

Western Trust

westerntrust.hscni.net/service/recovery-college/

Northern Trust

www.northerntrust.hscni.net/services/northern-region-recovery-college/

South Eastern Trust

setrust.hscni.net/service/recovery-college/

Southern Trust

southerntrust.hscni.net/service/support-and-recovery/

B Well Belfast

bwellbelfast.hscni.net/mind-ur-mind-mind-ur-mind/belfast-recovery-college/

T: 028 9504 3059

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