

Health and well being

GP services

As a carer, you will probably find yourself having to deal with a wide range of health professionals: hospital consultants, physiotherapists and community nurses are just a few examples. For the majority of carers, however, the most frequent and important point of contact is their family doctor or GP (General Practitioner). If you have not already done so, it is a good idea to register as a carer with the surgery which you attend. This can be done very simply by filling in the tear off form attached to Wigan Council's leaflet 'Looking After Someone.....then you are a carer!'. Copies of this (as well as the equivalent leaflet for children and young people entitled 'Are You A Young Carer?') can be obtained from doctors' surgeries across the borough or, by contacting the Carers Support Team. If you have access to the internet you can also download a registration form from the Wigan Council website.

Knowing that you are a carer will make it easier for your GP to treat and advise you. They may also be able to relieve some of the pressures of caring by:

- Giving you information about the condition of the person you are looking after and the treatments that have been prescribed;
- Arranging more convenient appointments, or even home visits, if your caring responsibilities make it difficult for you to attend the surgery;
- Arranging for repeat prescriptions to be delivered to your local pharmacy so that you do not have to pick them up;
- Referring or signposting you towards other sources of help and support.

The GP registration scheme is also the main route by which you can access the range of help and support provided by Wigan Council's Department of Adult Services. For further information see the section on 'Community Care Services'.

General health

Many people do not realise - or are reluctant to admit - the very real impact that caring can have on their health. Ultimately, of course, this can lead to serious consequences, not only for the carer but also for the person they are looking after.

If you are caring for someone who requires a lot of lifting and moving, the risk to your physical health is especially high. Strained muscles, increased blood pressure and chronic back problems are all very common. Fortunately, there are steps that you can take to manage this:

- Speak to your GP, district nurse or other health professional. There may be a lot of practical help and advice that they can offer;
- Contact the Occupational Therapy Service. An OT can recommend equipment and adaptations that will assist the person you care for live as independently as possible and reduce their physical dependence on you;
- Make sure you are familiar with safe moving and handling techniques. The National Back Pain Association (Backcare) publishes an inexpensive booklet entitled 'A Carer's Guide to Safer Moving and Handling of Patients' which you may find useful. The Council's Learning and Development Section also runs moving and handling courses for both paid and unpaid carers.

Backcare 16 Elmtree Road, Teddington TW11 8ST ☎ 0845 130 2704 web link: www.backcare.org.uk

Learning and Development Section Professional Development Centre, Park Road, Hindley WN2 3RY ☎ 01942 703713 / 01942 704152 web link: www.wigan.gov.uk

Occupational Therapy Service Wigan Council, Disability Resource Centre, Hamilton Square, Wigan WN5 9RX ☎ 01942 700889 ✉ ssddrc@wigan.gov.uk

The emotional demands of caring are less obvious than the physical but they can be every bit as debilitating. As a carer, you are likely to experience a range of, sometimes contradictory, feelings. Concern for the person you are looking after may be mingled with resentment because your life no longer seems to be your own. You may look forward to the little time you have to relax but feel guilty that you are 'not doing enough'.

All these are perfectly normal emotions and you should not be afraid to talk about them. Even if you do not think that you can discuss your feelings with family or friends, there are other carers, in similar situations, who will be only too ready to listen and to empathise. This sense of shared experience is one of the reasons that carers join support groups or online forums such as that run by Carers UK.

A more serious problem for many carers is stress. Moderate amounts of stress are a natural part of everyday life and may even have a positive effect.

Sometimes, however, the demands of caring can seem overwhelming and it may feel as though you are losing control.

Organisations such as Wigan and Leigh Crossroads sometimes facilitate training in stress management but there are also some basic lifestyle changes which you can make to enable you to cope more effectively:

- Learn to relax. If you want to know more about relaxation techniques you will find plenty of useful information in the 'Carers Health Factsheet Pack' produced by Wigan Council (see below) or you could try asking your GP for advice.
- Set aside some time for yourself and to do the things that you enjoy. Many groups and organisations offer special 'pamper days' for carers. You may also be able to access a one-off grant from Wigan Council to fund a break or other activity (see the section on 'Community Care Services).
- Exercise. In addition to its many physical benefits regular exercise promotes feelings of well-being and helps reduce stress. Even a short walk every day can be wonderfully therapeutic!
- Don't do more than you can comfortably manage. Decide what tasks you will undertake each day outside of your caring role and limit yourself to these.
- Talk about it! The support of other people – including, of course, other carers – can make a big difference to the way that you feel about your situation.

Counselling

Counselling can be an effective way of maintaining, or restoring, emotional well being. It is a therapy that may be prescribed by your GP if you go to them with symptoms of stress or depression, for example.

Many people find it particularly difficult dealing with the feelings of loss that caring for someone brings. This could be loss of independence, finances or even friends. It might stem from the death of the person being cared for or the belief that they are not the same as they once were. Wigan Council's 'Loss and Bereavement Counselling Service' provides help to carers who are affected by just these kind of issues. The service is free, confidential and available to anyone over the age of 18 who cares for (or has cared for) another adult.

Carers Loss and Bereavement Counselling Service Wigan Council, Hyndelle Lodge Bungalows, King Street, Hindley, Wigan WN2 3AW ☎ 01942 828771
mob: 07786 275 364 / 07786 312 338 ✉ ssdfst@wigan.gov.uk web link:
www.wigan.gov.uk

Although not aimed specifically at carers, Wigan Family Welfare and **Wigan and Leigh Pensioners link** also offer free, professional counselling services. To access the Pensioners Link service you must be aged 50 or over.

Wigan Churches Association for Family Welfare St Catherine's Vicarage,
Catherine Terrace, Scholes, Wigan WN1 3JW ☎ 01942 867 888 📧
admin@wiganfamilywelfare.co.uk web link: www.wiganfamilywelfare.co.uk

Physical health

Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust has a team of specialist 'health trainers' that can help you to get fit, eat more healthily and make other important lifestyle changes. Health trainers won't tell you what to do but they **will** help you to identify your personal goals and the best ways of achieving them. For example, if you want to increase your fitness levels, a health trainer may be able to tell you about classes or activities that you can take part in and which will fit around your caring responsibilities.

Health Trainers ☎ 01942 481712 📧 health.trainers@alwpct.nhs.uk web link:
www.alwpct.nhs.uk

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust's 'Active Living Team' also runs a large number of special health and activity sessions for sedentary adults and those who face particular barriers to exercise. Health walks, cycling, tai chi, yoga and dance are amongst the programmes currently on offer.

Active Living Team ☎ 01942 488481 📧 activeliving@wlct.org web link:
www.wlct.org

If you simply want to know more about health and lifestyle issues, you can get a lot of information from websites such as NHS 'Choices' and Carers UK. There is also a 'Carers Health Factsheet Pack' published by Wigan Council and available without charge from the Carers Support Team. The pack contains 15 factsheets, on topics such as healthy eating, relaxation techniques and getting a good nights sleep.

NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx>

Wigan & Leigh Pensioners Link

**27 Charles Street
Leigh
Lancs
WN7 1DB**

Wheelchair access Disabled toilets Parking Public transport

Telephone: **01942 261753**

Email: kevin@pensionerslink.org.uk

Web: www.pensionerslink.org.uk

Who is the service for: **Any persons over the age of 50.**

Service details: **Advice and information on a wide range of issues affecting the over 50's. Activities for the carer, arts & crafts sessions, reflexology.**

Charges / membership fees: **Donations for tea / coffee accepted.**

Referral method: **Any.**