



SHINE

TIPS TO STAY WELL FOR YOUNG ADULT CARERS

Be the best possible you!

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As a young adult carer you may often feel there is very little time to look after your own health and perhaps even think that it's not that important because you feel fine anyway. However you feel, we want to give you this opportunity to take a look at your own health and wellbeing and show you ways to ensure you do stay fit and well without it impacting on your caring role or becoming a chore. It is really important to look after yourself, not only so that you can continue to be your best in your caring role but, almost more importantly, because you are a person in your own right and you deserve to have a healthy body and mind and to be as fit as you can.

Some of the ideas in this booklet may surprise you and it has been designed to allow you to 'dip in and out' as you wish and refer back when you need to. There are lots of useful links to allow you to find out more in each section. However limited you are by time, space, money or equipment, there are ways to keep fit and eat well. We all need a little help sometimes



EAT THE RIGHT FOODS

Most of us take our bodies for granted and assume that as long as we eat something, maybe including a bit of fruit and veg, we will do ok. Well, here's the news - we can do better in the way we fuel our bodies and when we do we feel better all over. We feel fitter, our bodies work better, our mood is better, our skin looks healthier, we have more energy.

We have millions of little bugs living in our gut, collectively called the Microbiome. These bugs are extremely important in helping to breakdown and harvest energy from food and they help to regulate our immune system. The thing is, they need the right foods to work properly. These bacteria not only affect our physical health but also our mood and mental health.



EAT THE RIGHT FOODS

Ok, this is not about telling you to cut out all your favourite treats but you can do a few things to enhance your health quite easily.

- Eat the rainbow—as many different types and colours of fruit and veg as you can over a week. Focus mainly on veg, with some fruit. Different coloured fruit and veg contain different phytonutrients, all of which have different benefits for our health. Aim for a least 5 portions a day .
- The cheapest way is often to eat what's in season, that is what is growing now, but canned and frozen fruit and veg can be just as nutritious and more convenient.
- Few of us eat the recommended 30g of fibre a day. By eating more fruit and veg you will greatly increase fibre in your diet and this is very important for your gut health. An apple has about 4 grams of fibre.
- There are lots of ways to cook with different fruit and veg so you can find recipes you like. Try adding different herbs and spices - these also have a lot of health benefits and you can gradually build up a collection to keep in the store cupboard which will last for a long time.



- You don't have to avoid all the foods you normally eat and like. To begin with, just try adding more fruit and veg to your usual meals. Start by doing this once or twice a week more than you do already and build up.
- Cooking from scratch can be fun, needn't take long and is generally cheaper and healthier than buying 'ready meals' which often contain high amounts of sugar, salt and highly processed unhealthy ingredients, as well as using a lot of plastic packaging!
- Try to cook larger amounts so you can store left-overs in the fridge to have for lunch the next day, or freeze them to have another day. This will save you time and money in the long run.
- Include more pulses in your diet—they are a cheap, low fat source of protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. All very important to keep your gut bugs healthy. Try kidney beans, borlotti beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas.
- Making soup is a great way to incorporate more veg into your diet.



- Cut down on sugar—there is a lot hidden in cereals, canned drinks and ready meals—have a look at the labels. Current NHS guidelines state no more than 30g per day for an adult.
- Try to eat wholegrains: wholewheat pasta, wholemeal bread, brown rice - they may seem a bit heavy to start with but they are higher in fibre and nutrients and will give you more energy in the long run.
- Keep hydrated—Women need about 1.6 litres a day and men need 2 litres. Water, lower fat milk and sugar-free drinks, including tea and coffee, all count.

Get some great recipes and ideas here:

- [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/20-tips-to-eat-well-for-less](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/20-tips-to-eat-well-for-less)
- [nhs.uk/change4life/recipes](https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes) *This website is intended for adults and kids to use together but it has some really good healthy eating tips and recipes for everyone.*
- [yacbook.co.uk/post/meal-planning-tips-for-young-adult-carers](https://www.yacbook.co.uk/post/meal-planning-tips-for-young-adult-carers)
- [cookingonabootstrap.com](https://www.cookingonabootstrap.com) *Jack Monroe is an award winning food writer who teaches people to eat well on a budget. Find out more about her and see her recipes here.*
- [bbc.co.uk/food/articles/rupy_budget_cooking](https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/rupy_budget_cooking) *Dr Rupy Aujla is an NHS medical doctor who is working hard to teach people to cook their way to health. You can read more here and watch the short inspiring episodes.*



Getting enough sleep is more important than most people realise. Apart from stopping you from feeling tired, the time during sleep is used for our bodies to carry out important functions which repair our

bodies and help to 'recharge our batteries'. Lack of sleep can severely affect your immune system, making you more likely to come down with a cold or other illness.

7 to 8 hours a night is recommended for most adults. As a carer it is often difficult to get undisturbed sleep but there are things you can do to help you get the best quality sleep when you can.

- Avoid using screens for an hour or two before sleep as the blue light can trick your brain into thinking it is still daytime and disturb your natural sleep patterns.
- Sleep in as dark a room as possible, switch off or block light from monitors, switches etc. Try an eye mask if you can't darken your room.
- Avoid social media apps before bedtime as they over stimulate

the mind and often get you thinking about things which aren't relaxing.

- Do something you find relaxing in the hours before bedtime: read, have a bath, listen to relaxing music or podcasts.
- Switch your phone to Do not Disturb mode—you can do this so that emergency contacts can still get through. Turn your phone to wind down/greyscale an hour or so before bedtime
- Avoid eating for two hours before bedtime. It's good for your body to have a rest from digesting food overnight.
- Avoid caffeine after 3pm.
- Keep your room fairly cool, 18° is ideal. Make your bed in the morning so it looks inviting and not messy at bedtime! Clutter can be unsettling and stressful.
- Stick to a regular bedtime routine this will help your body prepare for sleep—wash, clean your teeth, read. Try to go to bed and get up at more or less the same time each day which will help your 'body clock'.
- If you can't get enough sleep during the night, a ten minute daytime nap can really help.

Read more at [nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/why-lack-of-sleep-is-bad-for-your-health](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/why-lack-of-sleep-is-bad-for-your-health)



EXERCISE REGULARLY

Regular movement is very important to keep your body healthy. It doesn't matter what size you are or how fit you are. You don't need to be aiming to be an athlete! Even a few minutes of exercise a day adds up and ensures that your blood is circulating properly and delivering oxygen around your body. Our joints also need regular movement to keep them healthy. You don't need a lot of time or expensive equipment.

Set yourself small, achievable goals and build up gradually. Try some of these:

- Morning stretches. Try these to energise and increase flexibility ready to face the day ahead



EXERCISE REGULARLY

- Walking or running if you can get outside - it can be a trip to the shop!
- Dancing
- Housework is great exercise—do it to music or a podcast
- Weights—if you don't have any use canned food or bags of sugar—don't drop them!
- Do some stretches whilst waiting for the kettle to boil
- Even if you only have access to a small outdoor space you can try skipping, hula-hooping or running on the spot. Set yourself an achievable challenge e.g. number of skips and build up each day or week.



You can find a selection of free fitness videos here:

- [nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio)
- [youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1/videos)
- [drchatterjee.com/5min-kitchen-workout](https://www.drchatterjee.com/5min-kitchen-workout)
- [bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/waking-up-stretching](https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/waking-up-stretching)



Modern day life means that our brains are overloaded with information and we are constantly having to make decisions. As a carer you will have even more to think about than most people your age. It is very important to look after our minds to avoid mental health problems.

Just a few minutes now and then can help to clear the mind and achieve a positive focus on the day ahead or help you to relax during stressful periods or at the end of a long day.

- Try to get a few minutes in nature everyday, even through an open window if you can't get outside. Notice the sounds: birdsong, leaves rustling on trees (if you concentrate you will normally be able to hear these even above other noise). Look at changing patterns of nature: clouds moving, new shoots appearing. If you can't get outside try an app with sounds of nature: Naturespace is an amazing free app which allows you to listen to high quality recordings from natural spaces around the world.
- Try mindful walking. If you can get out, even for a short walk, leave your phone behind or in your pocket and notice each

step you take, how each is slightly different and how it feels.

- Try to find time to talk to friends or family outside your home. Even a 5 minute phone call can help you feel more connected
- Practise gratitude. This may sound hard, especially after a difficult day but try to think of three things, however small or simple, that you are grateful for. If you like, write them down to look back at.
- Try journaling. Write down your thoughts, dreams, worries. This can help you to make sense of them, give you a sense of purpose or simply be a relief to get them down on paper. List things you have achieved, however small they may seem. Include doodles, cuttings or anything you like! Don't worry about spelling or grammar—it's only for you to see!
- Use breathing exercises to reduce stress. Sit or stand still and focus on your breath, as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Do this for ten breaths, breathing naturally, not trying to change anything. This is just a simple technique—find more here: [5 breathing techniques to help reduce stress](#)
- Colouring. The simple act of concentrating can help clear the mind.



BE KIND TO YOURSELF

We should not feel guilty about taking time for ourselves. It is a very important part of self-care and relaxation as well as giving us the opportunity to develop our own interests.



Spend a short while each day doing something you enjoy:

- Reading: books, magazines, poems, anything you enjoy or wish to learn more about
- Music
- Art: drawing, colouring, painting
- Puzzles: jigsaws, word searches, Sudoku,
- Listening to Podcasts

Your local library is free and about much more than books!

You can register to join free online and will then be able to access the eLibrary. Choose from eBooks, eMagazines, eAudiobooks, eComics, eNewspapers - or go for all of them!

SUMMARY AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Build activities into everyday life so you will stick to them – make them part of your daily routine. Start by doing them once or twice a week and build up. Don't worry if you have days when you aren't able to include them. Doing them as often as you can will still benefit your health. Choose things you enjoy so you are more likely to stick with them.



Below are some more links which can help you with ideas and support for your own wellbeing and health:

- yacbook.co.uk/post/mindfulness-for-young-adult-carers-creative-tips-to-help-you-switch-off
- mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/
- nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/
- westsussexwellbeing.org.uk/

References

The Doctor's Kitchen—Dr Rupy Aujla,
Drchatterjee.com; Feel Better in 5 - Dr Rangan Chatterjee
The Tin Can Cook—Jack Monroe
Spoon-Fed—Tim Spector

