

# A guide for carers

Mental health and wellbeing in later life



# Who we are

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

**Our vision** is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

**Our mission** is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can make the most of later life.

**Our three strategic aims** are to:



**Help older people to be as well as they can be**



**Promote a positive view of ageing and later life**



**Tackle loneliness and isolation**

# How we can help

**We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.**

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

## For information, advice and friendship



**Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222**  
**(Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm)**



**Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://agescotland.org.uk)**  
**to find out more.**

# Contents

<b>Caring for someone who is mentally unwell</b>	p1
<b>Treatments for mental health problems</b>	p5
<b>Professionals who can help you and the person you care for</b>	p9
<b>Looking after yourself</b>	p11
<b>Practical advice and help</b>	p15
<b>Useful organisations</b>	p18





# Caring for someone who is mentally unwell



## What can affect mental health in later life?

Later life can bring significant changes. Many are positive, but some events can be very hard to cope with.

Common events in later life include:

- **retiring** and losing daily routine. You may have been looking forward to retirement but find it hard to adjust to the lack of structure in your days, to not seeing your colleagues every day or to a changed sense of purpose
- **moving home** to a smaller property, a care home or sheltered accommodation may affect social networks and could seem like leaving part of your life behind
- **losing contact** with close friends or family if people move away, or are unwell and find it hard to communicate
- **mourning the loss** of someone close who has died
- **changes in physical health** such as worsening arthritis, hearing and sight problems or having a heart attack or stroke. There can be a lot to cope with, from shock at a diagnosis, needing medical treatment, changes to day-to-day routines and a loss of independence. There may also be symptoms to deal with such as tiredness, pain or discomfort.



## Signs that someone is having a difficult time

Stressful events can affect our behaviour and lead to us feeling angry, irritable or sad. These are all natural responses but are usually only temporary.

If someone has a mental health problem, their mood and behaviour may change quickly or over a number of months.

Common signs are:

- changes in mood
- sleeping too much or too little
- preferring not to be around other people
- feeling less interested in or able to cope with their usual hobbies or activities
- difficulty with memory or concentration
- being preoccupied with odd beliefs
- finding it more difficult to look after themselves
- talking about suicide or self-harm.

## Communicating with the person you care for

Communication can be a struggle for many people with a mental illness. However, if you are a carer you need to communicate with the person you care for, to find out how they are feeling and how they want you to help them. They need to know that you want to listen.

Listen to what they have to say and let them express themselves without interrupting or offering your opinion. Do not sound like you are criticising them for being unwell.

Some people will not want to talk, and others may lack the confidence to say what they really want. People who have hallucinations may have problems communicating depending on what they believe is happening to them.



## Getting help

The best place to start is encouraging the person you care for to speak to their GP. This is best discussed when you are both relaxed and you have the time and privacy to talk.

Some people may not want to visit their GP - they may not think they are unwell, or they may think that feeling low is just part of getting older. They may believe that the doctor would not be able to help them or they may feel embarrassed or ashamed.

If you have suggested an appointment with the GP but the person you care for does not want to go, you could explain that you are worried about them and offer to go with them or to talk to their doctor before they go themselves. Try to ask them why they do not want to get help.

If the person you are supporting is feeling paranoid, they may believe that you and the GP are plotting against them. Get advice from your own GP if the person you care for feels like this.

It may help if you tell your own GP about your concerns. Your GP will be able to listen to your concerns, give you information about local services and support and will help you look after your own health too. Most doctors expect the person who is unwell to approach them directly. This can be difficult for a carer as you cannot force someone to speak to a doctor. In some cases a GP will invite them for a check-up to see how they are.

No-one can be forced to accept treatment unless they are detained or 'sectioned' under the Mental Health Act. This would only happen if the health professionals assessed that the person was a risk to themselves or others and they were not able to accept help willingly.



## Charities and voluntary organisations

There may be charities or voluntary organisations in your area that could provide support.

Some people are more comfortable getting help from a voluntary support service rather than from a GP. A voluntary service may feel more approachable and less clinical than a GP surgery. Although voluntary organisations can provide services such as talking therapies and group support, they cannot give medical help.

## If the person you care for has a mental health crisis

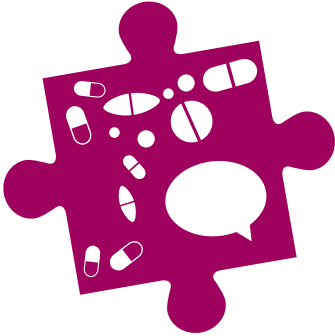
A mental health crisis happens when someone's health worsens to the point where they need urgent medical help. A crisis may be:

- thinking about suicide or hurting themselves
- having an episode of psychosis (where they might experience or believe things that others do not)
- behaving in a way that could put them or others at risk.

In an emergency, call 999. The emergency services will assess the best way to provide help. They may contact the local mental health crisis team. If someone needs physical treatment because they have self-harmed they are likely to refer them to Accident and Emergency, where a duty psychiatrist may assess their needs.

Call **NHS 24** on **111** if you need medical advice and help but it is not an emergency.





# Treatments for mental health problems

When someone first becomes unwell, they will normally be treated by their GP. If the GP feels more specialist help is needed, they may make a referral to the local mental health team. Most people who are supported by a mental health team have their treatment at home or in the local community.



## Medicine

There are a number of different types of medicines available which help people in different ways. A GP will explain which treatment they believe is the best for someone, describe how it works and discuss possible side effects. If the medicine turns out to have side effects that are difficult to handle, the patient should speak to their GP again to see if there are alternative treatments available.

It may take a few weeks before medicine helps someone to feel better, so they may need support to keep taking it until it has time to work. It is important to keep taking the medication for as long as the GP recommends; if someone stops taking it too soon (even if they feel better) they could feel worse again.

Detailed information about medicines used to treat mental health problems is available from **NHS Inform**. See their website **[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)** or call them on **0800 22 44 88**.



## Talking therapies

For some people, talking therapies work well. Your GP can advise what is available locally and what may be of most benefit. There are several types of talking therapy:

**Counselling** gives you the chance to talk through everyday issues that may be causing problems and to develop strategies for resolving them.

**Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy** is based on the idea of becoming at peace with yourself. It aims to help you to focus on the present, rather than being troubled by negative thoughts about the past or the future.

**Cognitive therapy** (sometimes called cognitive behavioural therapy or CBT) looks at the way you think, and how this may cause problems for you. It teaches you skills to identify unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaviour, and looks at how to change them.

**Psychotherapy** looks at how past experience may be affecting your life now, and may involve delving deeply into early experiences and key relationships.

There may be waiting lists for mental health services, and it could be some time before you begin having appointments. Your GP may be able to give you details of local support that could help you in the meantime.

Further information about talking therapies is available from **NHS Inform** on **0800 22 44 88** or see their website **[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)**.



## Complementary and alternative therapies

Complementary therapies are treatments that are used alongside conventional medicine. Some people feel they are helpful for looking after their physical and mental health. Types of complementary therapy include acupuncture, acupressure, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, herbal medicine and homeopathy.

None of these therapies claim to cure illnesses. If you are currently having treatment for an illness, or taking any medicines, discuss any planned complementary therapy with your doctor, to check that it is safe for you go ahead.

Be careful to choose a therapist who is qualified to help you; the **British Complementary Medicine Association** website **[www.bcma.co.uk](http://www.bcma.co.uk)** has a register of therapists who are trained, insured and follow their code of conduct and ethics.



# Professionals who can help you and the person you care for

A GP may be the first person someone talks to about how they are coping. If they have a good relationship with their doctor, they may find it helpful just to know there is someone they can talk to about their feelings in confidence. The GP may make a referral to a specialist service if they feel this will help. As a carer you can also discuss your own needs and concerns with the people who treat or support the person you care for.

## Community mental health teams

Community mental health teams provide help to people in their homes and their community, including counselling and other talking therapies, and advice about claiming benefits. They may also be able to help in a crisis and provide support at home.

They are usually based at a hospital or a local community mental health centre. In some areas, people can refer themselves to the service but in other areas people need to be referred by a GP or local social work team. Some teams provide 24-hour services so that you can contact them in a crisis.



The team will normally include:

## **Community mental health nurse or community psychiatric nurse (CPN)**

They will work closely with the patient, their carer and family to plan appropriate care. Their training covers a range of mental health issues and they can help you to set goals and plan for the future.

## **Psychiatrist**

A psychiatrist is a doctor who specialises in mental health. They will ask about someone's background and any previous treatment, as well as the current situation. They will explain the results of their assessment and diagnosis, and identify what tests or treatments might be needed.

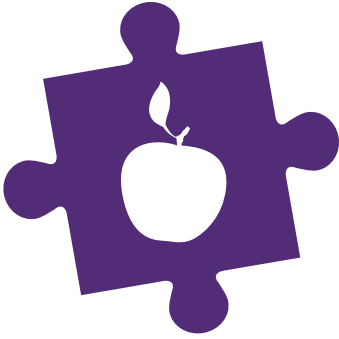
## **Psychologist**

Psychologists are trained to understand how people think, feel and behave. They have a thorough understanding of a range of psychological therapies. A psychologist will talk to someone about their feelings, thoughts and behaviour. They will help someone to understand the problems they are experiencing, and work with them to identify ways they can deal with these problems to improve their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

## **Social worker**

A social worker can assess the care and support needs of both the cared-for person and their carer. A carer has the right to an assessment of their needs even if the cared-for person does not wish to be assessed.

See the section on **Practical advice and help** for more information.



# Looking after yourself

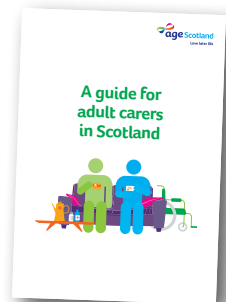
Being a carer can have a big impact on your life and on your physical and mental health. It is important that you look after yourself, both for your sake and so that you can continue to provide care in the way that you want to.

If you find you do not have time to look after yourself, call the **Age Scotland helpline** or your local Carer's Centre to find out about the support available. This may be emotional support to protect your mental health, or practical support such as equipment, help or respite care.

Age Scotland's **Adult Carers** guide can provide more information about your rights as a carer.

## Eat Well

As a carer, eating a balanced diet is essential to keep you healthy. For information about eating well and enjoying your food see the Age Scotland **Eat Well** guide.





## Exercise

Exercise is important for physical and mental health. It helps people deal with stress and to feel better emotionally. Physical activity is good for your heart, keeps you supple and reduces many health risks. Walking, swimming, housework, gardening and even walking up stairs can all make a difference.



Our guide to **Keeping active in later** life explains why exercise is important and includes ideas for activities you might enjoy.

## Sleep

Looking after someone who is mentally unwell can leave you feeling particularly tired. If you are feeling anxious, this can make you tired too - you might have problems sleeping because you are worrying a lot.

If you are combining caring with other work and family responsibilities, you may not be getting enough sleep. Lack of sleep can make it harder to cope and make you feel worse. Some people find that relaxation exercises can help with sleep.

The NHS Inform website has a sleep problems and insomnia self help guide, including information about calming a restless mind or body, improving your sleep and when to seek medical help.

Visit **[www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/sleep-problems-and-insomnia-self-help-guide](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/sleep-problems-and-insomnia-self-help-guide)**.

## Be kind to yourself

Many carers will sometimes have negative feelings, so be easy on yourself if you do. It might be difficult to talk to the person you care for about how you are feeling yourself. Find someone you trust to talk to, this could be a friend or a carers support group.





## Time off

Breaks or time off from caring are necessary - everyone needs some time for themselves - but can be difficult to arrange. A break could be anything from an hour every day or a couple of hours a week to a two-week holiday.

If you have an **Adult Carer Support Plan** from your local council, this should consider what respite breaks you need.

A break should give you time off from your caring role to let you do something that you want to do for yourself, or just time to relax.

A break from caring does not have to mean being away from the person you look after, just a break from the responsibility of looking after their care needs.

## Understand your situation

Finding out more about mental health problems and treatments may give you the knowledge to plan and cope better. It could help you know what to expect from treatment, how successful it might be and how long recovery might take.

SAMH, the Scottish mental health charity, has a wide range of information on their website for people who are living with, or supporting someone with, a mental health problem. Visit **[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)** or call them on **0344 800 0550**.

## Support from your friends, family and community

Your friends and family are often a good support network. They might be able to provide practical support (driving you to appointments, collecting prescriptions, or doing some shopping or cleaning) or just be there to listen.



You may find that your beliefs offer you comfort or support. Find spiritual support if this will help you from friends, family, your religious leader or a faith community.

## Counselling

Some people find it difficult to open up to the people they are close to, and would prefer to talk to someone they don't know. Counselling is a talking therapy that can help with a wide range of issues, from anxiety and depression to relationship issues and coping with bereavement. Counsellors often work with individuals, but may also work with couples or families.

Your GP might be able to refer you to a counsellor or you could consider finding someone privately. Many private counsellors offer reduced fees for people on low incomes. **The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy** has information about counsellors in your area. Visit their website at [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk).

## Support groups

Mental health support groups can be a useful way of meeting people who are dealing with similar issues to yours, to share experiences, support and self-help ideas. Groups may be set up by health professionals, or by people with experience of or an interest in mental health conditions. Meetings vary but could include discussions, talks from professionals, wellbeing activities and informal chats.

Group support may not suit everyone, but many people find the informal, social aspect of groups to be beneficial in helping them feel less isolated. You can look up support groups in your area using the **NHS Inform Services Directory** at [www.nhsinform.scot/scotlands-service-directory/health-and-wellbeing-services](http://www.nhsinform.scot/scotlands-service-directory/health-and-wellbeing-services), or ask your GP for details of local groups.



# Practical advice and help



## Care needs assessment for the person you care for

If you or the person you care for appears to be in need of community care services, the local social work department (or in some areas of Scotland including Highland, the health board) has to carry out a care needs assessment, sometimes also referred to as a single shared assessment.

After the assessment, the council will give you a care or support plan detailing your assessed care needs, and any services they can put in place to help you.

Personal and nursing care are free in Scotland for people who are assessed as needing them. For services such as help with housework or shopping there is likely to be a charge, and a financial assessment will be carried out to work out what you need to pay. The charges and services available vary across Scotland.

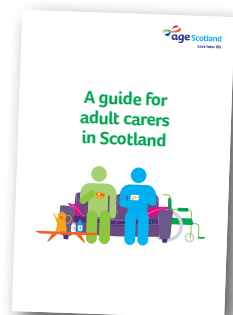
Contact your local council to request a care needs assessment. There may be a waiting list for assessments, so it is important to tell them if you need help urgently, for example, if you are unable to use the bathroom, dress or feed yourself.



## Support for carers

If you provide care, or intend to provide care for someone, you are entitled to have your needs as a carer assessed by your local council. The council can draw up an Adult Carer Support Plan, which may include services such as practical support, emotional support and respite care for the person you care for.

For more information about your rights as a carer, see Age Scotland's **Guide for Adult Carers in Scotland**.



## Carers Scotland

Carers Scotland can provide help and advice for all carers through its free Carers Line helpline. Carers Scotland is part of Carers UK.

**Carers Line: 0808 808 7777**  
**[www.carersuk.org/scotland](http://www.carersuk.org/scotland)**

## Money worries

Balancing a household budget is hard at the best of times but having to be organised whilst looking after someone who is unwell is even more of a challenge.

If you are struggling with your budget and bills, or your budget has been stretched by the extra costs of caring, the UK Government's **MoneyHelper** service has advice about managing your money and reducing your outgoings. Visit **[www.moneyhelper.org.uk](http://www.moneyhelper.org.uk)** or call them on **0800 011 3797**.



## Benefits

If you are caring for someone, you may be entitled to extra money to help you. The benefits system can be complicated, and it can be difficult to work out what you should be getting. Many older people in Scotland don't claim what they are entitled to. For information about benefits, or a free benefit check, call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.

## Legal help

Having a mental health problem can sometimes lead to complicated legal issues. For example, someone may need help to claim the right benefits or to manage their money. Age Scotland's **Help to manage your money and benefits** guide has information about the options available if you need support yourself, or if you are supporting someone. Call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222** for your free copy.

## Relationships

Relationships are important to mental wellbeing. If you are caring for someone who has a mental health problem, the relationship you have with them may change. It can be challenging for both the carer and the cared-for person to adjust to their new roles.

Your local Carer Centre can give you expert information and advice about this and many other aspects of being a carer, along with support, practical help and social opportunities. You can find Carer Centres in your area on the **Care Information Scotland** website at [www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres](http://www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres), or by calling them on **0800 011 3200**.



## Useful organisations

### Age Scotland helpline: 0800 12 44 222

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call **0800 12 44 222** and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us for a copy of our publications list or download or order copies from our website at **[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

### NHS Inform

For more information about health topics

Helpline **0800 22 44 88**

**[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)**

### Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

SAMH is dedicated to mental health and well-being for all and has a vision of a society where people are able to live their lives fully regardless of present or past circumstances. Get in touch with the SAMH information service.

Tel **0344 800 0550**

**[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)**

### Support in Mind

Support in Mind Scotland supports people affected by mental illness, including family members, carers and supporters.

Tel **0300 3231545**

**[www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk](http://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk)**



## Breathing Space

Breathing space operates a confidential phone line for anyone in Scotland feeling low, anxious or depressed.

Weekdays: Monday-Thursday 6pm to 2am

Weekend: Friday 6pm-Monday 6am

Tel **0800 83 85 87**

**[www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot)**

## LGBT Health and wellbeing

LGBT Health and wellbeing promotes the health, wellbeing and equality of LGBT+ adults in Scotland.

Helpline **0300 123 2523** (Tuesday and Wednesday 12-9pm and Thursday and Sunday 1pm-6pm)

**[www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)**

## Care Information Scotland

Care Information Scotland provides practical advice and information to carers on any care related matter.

Helpline **0800 0113200**

**[www.careinfoscotland.scot](http://www.careinfoscotland.scot)**

## Carers Trust

The Carers Trust provides practical advice and support to carers and can give you details of your local Carers Centre.

Tel **0300 123 2008**

**[www.carers.org/scotland](http://www.carers.org/scotland)**



## Carers Scotland

As part of Carers UK, Carers Scotland provides expert advice, information and support to carers.

Helpline **0808 808 7777**

**[www.carersuk.org/scotland](http://www.carersuk.org/scotland)**

## Coalition of Carers in Scotland

Coalition of Carers in Scotland have produced detailed information about your rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act.

**[www.carersnet.org](http://www.carersnet.org)**



This information guide has been prepared by Age Scotland and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and cannot be used as a substitute for professional or medical advice.

Neither Age Scotland nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use and it is the reader's sole responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

# How you can help

## Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



### Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.\*



### Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



### Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

\* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

# Let's keep in touch



## Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting [age.scot/roundup](https://age.scot/roundup)



## Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



[/agescotland](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)



[@AgeScotland](https://twitter.com/AgeScotland)



[@age\\_scotland](https://www.instagram.com/age_scotland)



[/AgeScotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AgeScotland)

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

**Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.**

**Contact us:**

**Head office**

0333 323 2400

**Age Scotland helpline**

0800 12 44 222

**Email**

info@agescotland.org.uk

**Visit our website**

www.agescotland.org.uk

**Follow us on social media:**



/agescotland



@AgeScotland



@age\_scotland



/AgeScotland



We are grateful to the Scottish Government for part-funding this publication

