

Compassion fatigue & self-care



Carers provide unpaid care to their family and/or loved ones who require some form of support due to illness, disability, addiction, chronic condition or age. Caregiving includes providing emotional and social support, as well as physical care including feeding, toileting, showering, dressing, moving and transporting their loved ones. This is often done on top of their own work, looking after other family members, or managing a household.

Did you know?



There are over
2.65 million carers
in Australia



1 in 11
are young carers
under the age of 25



Over 400,000 people
are primary carers
providing care for over
20 hours each week



287,000 people
are primary carers
providing care for over
40 hours each week



7 out of 10
primary carers are
women



While caring can be rewarding, it can also be tiring and stressful. Carers fatigue, or compassion fatigue, is not uncommon. Compassion fatigue is a heightened level of exhaustion and stress that results in reduced ability to empathise with others and is sometimes referred to as *the cost of caring*.

Recognising the signs



Feeling irritable, anxious or angry



Headaches, weight loss or trouble sleeping



Chronic exhaustion



Decreased sympathy or empathy



Reduced sense of fulfillment



Difficulty relaxing or 'switching off'



Increased illnesses







Losing interest in things that previously brought you joy and happiness

Preventing or recovering from compassion fatigue

Self-care plays an important role in managing and preventing compassion fatigue. On planes, the crew advise that if the oxygen mask drops, to put your own mask on first before helping others. The same principal applies in life more generally, but particularly to carers. You cannot pour from an empty cup, so it's important to look after yourself so that you can better look after others.

Tips to help you prioritise your own self-care and prevent or recover from compassion fatigue

	<p>Have a routine. Set time for important self-care activities each day including eating healthy meals, getting a good sleep, getting some exercise and time to relax.</p>		<p>Ask for help. Reach out to your friends and family for support. They may be able to make some healthy meals for you, give you a break from your caring duties or just be there to provide emotional support.</p>
	<p>Spend time with your loved ones. Other relationships can be neglected when caring is a priority, but regular social connections are integral to your self-care. Social interactions don't need to take huge amounts of time out of your day – schedule in a coffee or dinner date, invite some friends over for a movie or call a loved one while you're making dinner or going on a walk.</p>		<p>Take some time for yourself. Do something that is just for you – read a book, get a massage, take a bath, watch a movie, go for a walk, practice mindfulness. It doesn't matter what it is, but ensure you set aside time for yourself to relax.</p>
	<p>Go easy on yourself. Imagine your loved ones were in your position and give yourself the same kindness that you would show them.</p>		<p>Talk to a professional. Being a carer can be difficult. If you need support for your own mental health or are struggling with compassion fatigue, speak to a professional about other coping mechanisms that might work for you.</p>