



# Carers Wellness Guide

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This guide offers practical tips to help you manage stress and prioritise self-care. Remember, looking after yourself isn't a luxury —it's essential.

Being able to provide the best care starts with caring for yourself.



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# Carers Wellness Guide

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## Looking After Yourself

As a carer, you spend most of your time looking after others. Whether you are a paid carer or you support a family member or friend, it can be difficult at times.

You probably often find yourself putting their needs ahead of your own, and you might feel tired, stressed or overwhelmed at times.

But it's important to look after yourself too.

That means eating well, getting enough sleep, and taking breaks. If you feel guilty about taking time for yourself, remember that you can't care for anyone if you are overworked or unwell. Think of the oxygen mask analogy on an airplane - put your own mask on before you help others.

Looking after yourself isn't just important for your own health – it means you can carry on being a great carer and looking after others.



## Feeling Low?

Maybe you are concerned about the person you support. Or you might be worried about money, your own health, your career, or any one of a thousand things.

**It's important to remember you are not alone.**

Carers UK found that more than three-quarters of carers feel anxious or depressed – and half feel lonely, too.

If you care for a family member, you might miss the relationship you once had, or worry about how you'll cope as their condition progresses. If you are a paid carer, you probably often work alone with your clients. Even if you work in a care facility, most of your time is probably spent one-on-one with the people you support.

When we don't have anyone to talk to, everything feels worse. Consider opening up about how you are feeling to a friend or family member. Alternatively, seek a professional in the form of a therapist or counselor. Further information can be found within this guide.

## Feeling Physically Ill?

If you are not eating enough or getting enough sleep, you can quickly become ill. You might feel sick, achy, or even faint. If you are run down, your immune system can be affected and you may be more likely to catch infections and viruses that are circulating.

**Often, taking some time to rest and eat well can help.**

Everyone's mental health fluctuates from time to time. Even minor feelings of anxiety or depression can build up. For example, you might find it hard to breathe, feel like your heart's racing, have chest pains, or even think you are about to faint. These can all be symptoms of anxiety. Or, you may feel tired, lack energy, have changes in appetite or sleeping. These can all be symptoms of depression.

It can be hard to cope with feelings of anxiety or depression, but there are some techniques you can use to feel better when unsettling feelings arise.

## How Can I Feel Better Quickly?

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Sometimes, you need techniques to feel better right now.

You can feel your heart racing and your breathing getting faster. Maybe you are on the verge of a panic attack, or you can feel anxiety or anger creeping up on you.

**Here are some simple techniques that can help immediately.**

In this section, we will introduce some techniques that can help you to relax quickly, take some time for yourself, and improve your wellbeing. Think of them as your mental health first aid kit!

We will talk about vagus nerve stimulation, breathing techniques, and other ways that you can focus on your own body and the sensations you are feeling. All of these methods can help to distract you from your anxiety and help to regulate your breathing and heart rate.

These techniques are really useful in a lot of stressful situations. But if you don't feel that you can keep yourself or others safe, speak to your GP or in an emergency, call 999 and ask for help.

### Vagus Nerve Stimulation

Your vagus nerve is one of the main nerves that links your body and your brain. It's part of your parasympathetic nervous system – that's the part of your body that controls your resting heart rate, breathing, and your rest and digest system.

When you are feeling anxious, panicked or angry, your heart rate starts to speed up. You might find that you are breathing more quickly – or you might feel breathless or like you can't breathe properly. Sometimes you might feel sick or like you need to go to the toilet very suddenly.

Massaging your vagus nerve can help to regulate your heart rate, breathing, and digestion – which, activates your rest and digest system and in turn, can help you relax.

**Let's look at some techniques that massage your vagus nerve and help you calm down quickly.**

### ► **The Neck Stroke**

The neck stroke is one of the quickest and easiest ways to calm yourself. You don't need any equipment, and it only takes a moment.

In this technique, we're going to find an area where the vagus nerve is very near to the skin, and gently massage it.

You can do this discreetly and no one needs to know that you are doing it – which is great if you are in public or surrounded by people and need to calm down quickly.



#### **How to do it:**

- 1.** Find the ridge of muscle that runs from your ear down to your collarbone.
- 2.** Gently stroke your fingers down this muscle.

You might find that it makes you yawn. That's great, and it's a sign your body is starting to relax already!

#### **When should I use this technique?**

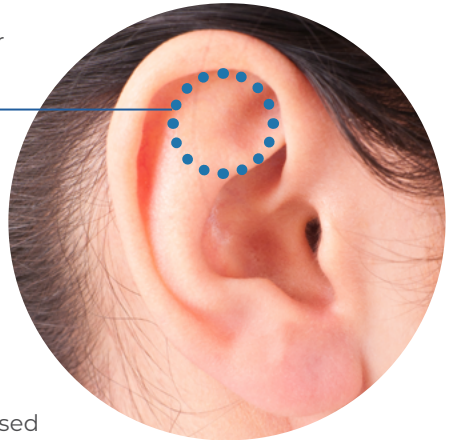
- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you only have a few moments.
- When you need to calm down discreetly without anyone noticing.

## ► The Cymba Swizzle

This is another quick and discreet way to help yourself calm down. It works by massaging the area in your ear nearest to your vagus nerve.

### How to do it:

1. Start by placing the tip of your finger in the cymba concha at the top of your ear.
2. Using the pad of your fingertip, massage first one way then the other.



When you do this, you might make yourself yawn. That's because your body is starting to relax.

### When should I use this technique?

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you only have a few moments.
- When you need to calm down discreetly without anyone noticing.

## ► Grounding Yourself

**We don't need to massage the vagus nerve to calm down, though.**

If you are feeling panicky or can't keep focused, you could try some grounding techniques. These methods help you move away from overwhelming feelings by encouraging you to focus on the present moment.

Grounding can help you if you are having a panic attack, experiencing anxiety, or just need to distract yourself and move past distressing emotions.

### **There are a few ways you can do this:**

- Get help from a palm buddy: Hold something in your hand and focus on it. This could be a smooth stone, a fidget spinner, or anything nearby. Think about how it feels in your hand, and focus on its textures and colours.
- Get your hands wet: Put your hands in a bowl of water, or run them under the tap. Focus on the temperature, and how the water feels on your hands.
- Feel the soles of your feet: Focus on the soles of your feet. Even if you are wearing shoes, try to sense your soles. You could do this while sitting in a chair and placing your feet on the ground, or by standing up.



### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you need to calm down discreetly without anyone noticing.



## ► Hand Breathing

It's a funny name, but hand breathing can be really useful. It helps you focus on your breathing, as well as the physical sensations of your own hand.

**You'll find that it helps you breathe more calmly – and it can even help to slow a racing heart.**

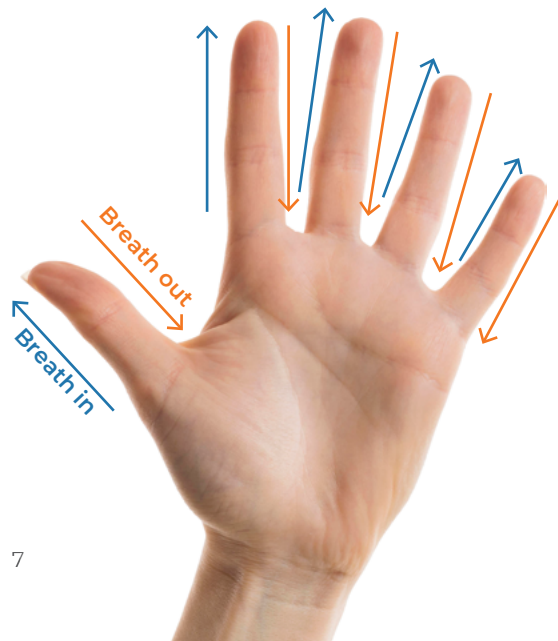
It's easy to do, as well, and doesn't need any equipment.

### **How to do it:**

1. While breathing in, slowly run your thumb from the base of your index finger to your fingertip. Notice how your skin feels, and how your finger feels when your thumb touches it.
2. While breathing out, slowly run your thumb from your finger tip to the base of your finger. Again, focus on the physical sensations that your finger and thumb are feeling.
3. Repeat this for the rest of your fingers.

### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you need to calm down discreetly without anyone noticing.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.



## ► The Physiological Sigh

This is another way that you can calm yourself and reduce anxiety quickly.

For this technique, you'll take two breaths in and one breath out. It can act as a reset button for your breathing, especially if you are feeling very anxious and breathing quickly.

### **How to do it:**

- 1.** Take a really deep breath in through your nose – you'll feel like you are filling your lungs with air.
- 2.** Once you have taken the first deep breath, take another, shorter, breath in – again through your nose. You can usually manage to get some more air in.
- 3.** Let your breath out in one long exhale.
- 4.** Repeat this a few times.



### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you need to calm down discreetly without anyone noticing.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.

## ► Box Breathing

Box breathing is another easy deep breathing technique. You might also hear it called 4-4-4-4 breathing. While you are trying this technique, you'll be breathing deeply and counting, both of which can help distract you from your anxiety. You'll need to count in your head, rather than out loud, so that you can continue breathing in time.

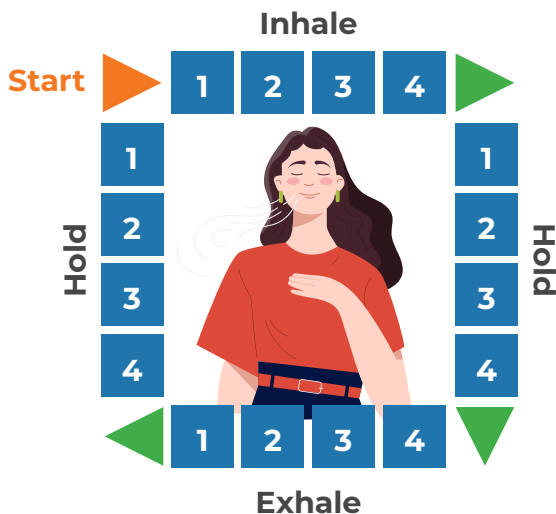
If you have tried yoga, you may have tried box breathing already. If not, it's very easy to pick up. Remember to breathe and count slowly.

### How to do it:

1. Breathe in slowly for four counts.
2. After breathing in, hold your breath for another four counts.
3. Breathe out through your mouth for four counts.
4. After breathing out, hold your breath for another four counts.

### When should I use this technique?

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.



## ► Humming

We often hum or sing when we're feeling happy or calm, but did you know that humming can actually help you calm down? It's been used as a yoga technique for many years – you may have heard it called bee breathing.

**Humming works to calm your breathing, because you breathe out for a long time while you do it.**

You can try this whether you are musical or not! Either begin by humming a favourite song or tune, or follow this guidance for bee breathing.

### **How to do it:**

1. Start by taking a few deep breaths in and out.
2. Focus on relaxing your face and jaw. Close your mouth.
3. Breathe in through your nose, and then breathe out while making a low humming noise in your throat. Continue humming that one note for as long as you are comfortable.
4. Repeat this process a few times.
5. Focus on how your mouth, tongue, and throat feel while you are humming.

### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.
- When you are by yourself, or don't mind making noise around people.



## ► Body Scanning

If you have a little more time, you could try body scanning. This is where you focus intently on each part of your body at a time. You might also hear it called progressive muscle relaxation.

**Some people find this very relaxing.**

It's simple to do – but you may need to practise a bit to make sure you don't get distracted during the process.

You don't need any equipment for body scanning, and you can spend as long on it as you need. You can do this sitting, laying down or even standing.

### **How to do it:**

- 1.** Focus on the tips of your toes, and slowly relax them.
- 2.** Move up your body, feeling each part and relaxing it as you go.
- 3.** By the time you have reached the top of your head, you should feel much more calm.

### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you have a bit of time to relax.
- At night time to help you to fall asleep.



## ► Alternate Nostril Breathing

This technique comes from yoga breathing practices, but you can try it without doing yoga. You might hear it called nadi shodhana.

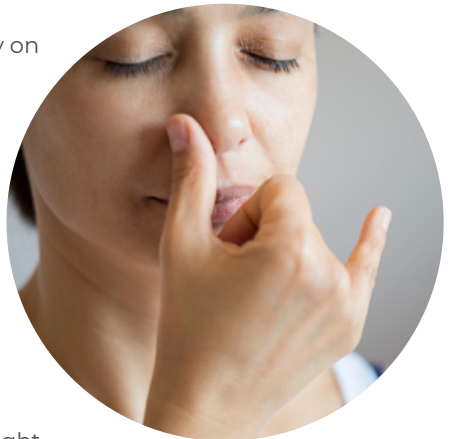
Research has shown that alternate nostril breathing can help to lower your heart rate and blood pressure – and doing it for half an hour a day can help to lower your stress levels.

**But even if you don't have time to spend half an hour a day on this technique, doing it for a short time can still help to calm your anxiety.**

You might not be able to try alternate nostril breathing if you have a cold, blocked nose, or sometimes struggle to breathe through one nostril.

### How to do it:

1. Use your right thumb to press gently on your right nostril, so that it's closed.
2. Breathe in slowly through your left nostril.
3. Use your right ring finger to press gently on your left nostril, so that it's closed.
4. Breathe out slowly through your right nostril.
5. Keep your left nostril closed, and breathe in slowly through your right nostril.
6. Use your right thumb to close your right nostril.
7. Breathe out slowly through your left nostril.
8. Repeat these steps, closing and breathing through alternating nostrils.



### When should I use this technique?

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.
- When you are by yourself, or don't mind people seeing what you are doing.

## ► Belly Breathing

Another deep breathing technique that might help is belly breathing. You might also hear it called diaphragmatic breathing or abdominal breathing.

It's often recommended for people with lung conditions like COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), because it can help to strengthen the diaphragm, which is the muscle at the bottom of your lungs.

But it can also help you regulate your breathing and feel calmer.

### **How to do it:**

1. Lie down with your knees bent. You may want to put a pillow under your knees, if that's more comfortable.
2. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your tummy, just below your ribcage.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose. Let the air flow down towards your tummy. You'll feel the hand on your chest stay still, and the one on your tummy rise.
4. Tighten your stomach muscles and breathe out through your mouth. You'll feel the hand on your tummy move down again.
5. Repeat this several times.

Once you have mastered belly breathing lying down, you may want to try it in a sitting position as well.

### **When should I use this technique?**

- When you're feeling anxious or stressed and need to calm down quickly.
- When you are struggling to control your breathing.
- When you are by yourself, or don't mind people seeing what you are doing.
- When you have a safe place to lie down.



## Carer Burnout

### Do you feel anxious or stressed a lot of the time?

Whether you look after a family member or you are a paid carer, it can be a difficult role.

It's not always easy to take a break from caring responsibilities, and it's normal to feel overwhelmed from time to time.

But if those feelings don't go away, it could be a sign of something more, and you might need extra support.

### Look out for these signs:

- Feeling tired or exhausted all the time
- Not wanting to spend time with family or friends
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities you usually enjoy
- Struggling to concentrate
- Feeling upset, hopeless, or helpless
- Feeling anxious or stressed
- Feeling irritable and annoyed – or resenting the person you care for

These could be signs that you are struggling with anxiety, depression, or carer burnout.





## The Next Steps

Are you feeling burned out or need extra support? Help is available. There's not always an easy cure, but having a break from your caring responsibilities can help.

If you care for a family member or friend, you may be able to talk to relatives and ask if they can help you for a little while.

You could contact your local council to ask for a carer's assessment. The local authority could help signpost you towards respite care, advise about training courses, or help you apply for any benefits you are entitled to.

If you care for an adult, you'll need to contact your local adult social services, and if you care for a child, you'll need to talk to the children with disabilities department.

If you are a paid carer, talk to your employer about your worries. You may be able to take some time off work and rest, or move to a different role for a time. If you are a paid carer and have financial worries, The Care Workers Charity can provide hardship grants and Step Change can help with debt relief. See the following page for their details.

Whether you are a family carer or paid carer, you could also contact your GP. They may be able to help by:

- Signing you off work for a short time
- Referring you to a therapist or counsellor
- Prescribing medication to help your mood

If you are feeling low and need to talk to someone, contact the Samaritans on 116 123 or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org).

If you don't feel that you can keep yourself or others safe, speak to your GP or in an emergency, call 999 and ask for help.

## Useful Contacts

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As a carer, these organisations and links might be able to help you:

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

If you are a carer, the Carers Trust may be able to help you. They're a charity that operates a network of local carer organisations, where you can find peer support and extra information.

**Age UK:** [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

If you support an older person, Age UK has a wide range of information guides and fact sheets that may be able to help you. They also provide day centres, befriending services, and IT training for older people.

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

A charity that offers information about being a carer, as well as campaigning for carers' rights.

**Carer's Allowance:**

[www.gov.uk/carers-allowance](http://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance)

Carer's Allowance is a benefit that you might be entitled to if you support someone for more than 35 hours each week. Find out more about Carer's Allowance and apply online.

**Surewise:** [www.surewise.com](http://www.surewise.com)

Looking for carers' insurance? Surewise offers a wide range of options, as well as insurance for mobility aids.

**Citizens Advice:**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

If you need legal support, advice about benefits, or other practical advice, Citizens Advice may be able to help. You can contact them online, over the phone, or in person.

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

If you need mental health support, Mind may be able to help. Their website contains a huge variety of information about different mental health conditions and your legal rights, and they also offer peer support.

**The Care Workers' Charity (CWC):**

[www.thecareworkerscharity.org.uk](http://www.thecareworkerscharity.org.uk)

The Care Workers' Charity supports UK care workers facing hardship through crisis grants, mental health support, and resources to improve wellbeing and financial stability.

**Step Change:** [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)

StepChange Debt Charity offers free, confidential advice and support to help you manage and overcome debt. They provide tailored solutions like debt management plans, individual voluntary arrangements, and debt relief orders, ensuring you receive guidance suited to your situation. Their services are accessible online 24/7 or via phone, offering a judgment-free space to regain financial control.



## MY NOTES

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