



Care workers have never been as valued and appreciated as they are today. It is no secret that social care is under-resourced, and this pandemic has magnified the strain beyond anything we could have imagined. You are truly amazing people. As well as the hardship and worries many of us are experiencing you are going the extra mile to keep your work families safe and happy. You are covering extra shifts, may not have enough PPE and make difficult decisions every day. As well as worrying about your loved ones at home you may be grieving the loss of residents and supporting scared and anxious relatives. This sustained level of stress and trauma is detrimental to your mental health, safety, and ability to provide the best possible care.

There is no easy answer but there are simple things you can do to support your mental health and wellbeing at this difficult time.

## **Acknowledge and Understand Your Reactions**

Remember, it's ok to feel frightened, angry, upset, short tempered or out of control. Life is complicated and stressful at the moment, and everyone reacts differently. I had a very heated row with my neighbour over toilet rolls the other day, fueled by fear and anxiety on both parts and out of character for both of us. Thankfully, these feelings and reactions are usually temporary and will pass.

## **Be Prepared**

Keep up to date with current policy changes and PPE requirements so you are as safe and prepared as you can be. Make sure you understand your sick pay and benefits rights. Think about who you can get help from locally. Are there local charities or community groups who can support you with shopping, treats for residents, or sewing PPE? Can families help you? Helping and supporting you will help them to cope with their fears and losses too. Accept all appropriate offers of help both at home and at work. Community spirit has never been higher.

## **Talk About your Worries**

Don't be frightened to talk about how you are feeling. We are all human and knowing that others feel the same is comforting. It's important to get things off your chest. Perhaps you can link up with a 'self-care buddy'. This could be somebody in your workplace or someone who works in a similar job and understands what you are going through. Just like a diet or fitness buddy, you support each other through stressful times, share coping strategies or just let off steam.

It's easy to be consumed by the bad news and statistics, but we all have other things going on in our lives. Talk about the positives of lockdown, remember all the people that you have supported and the funny and heart-warming stories along the way. Talk about positive plans for post lockdown - this won't last forever.

## Look After Your Physical Health

It's tempting to treat ourselves with chocolate or a bottle of wine to "take the edge off" a stressful day, but falling into unhealthy patterns of behaviour will only make you feel worse in the long run and contribute to post-lockdown weight gain. Do your best to maintain a healthy diet and make time for some fresh air and exercise if you possibly can.

If the stress of care-giving isn't dealt with, it can affect your health, relationships and state of mind; leading to anxiety, depression and ultimately burnout. When you feel like this, it's hard to do anything - let alone look after someone else. That's why taking care of yourself isn't selfish, it's a necessity. We need you.

## Thank you for being there.

For further support with emotional wellbeing including anxiety, low mood and trouble sleeping, the [NHS Every Mind Matters website](#) is a great resource, easy to navigate and full of useful information. It also includes links to helplines if you feel you need someone to talk to.