

Your health and wellbeing

What does living a healthy life mean to you?



Do you need to call someone?

Emergency

In an emergency or if someone is in danger

Triple Zero 000

Need to talk?

If you are in crisis, anxious or depressed and want to talk with someone

Lifeline: 13 11 14 – for anyone

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 – for people aged 5 to 25

Carer services

Call the Carer Gateway Contact Centre for support and services:

1800 422 737 – Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm local time

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Except where otherwise indicated, the images in this publication show models and illustrative settings only, and do not necessarily depict actual services, facilities or recipients of services.

This publication may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where the word 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Name:

How to use this workbook

In this workbook you will find activities, information, resources and opportunities designed to support the facilitated and self-guided coaching experience. How you use this workbook is entirely up to you. We encourage you to make notes, draw or scribble ideas and thoughts throughout. It is your resource and can be something you refer back to in future.

You can work through this booklet at your own pace. You can choose to explore the content with a coach, with a peer or someone you trust, or by yourself.

Throughout this workbook you will see the following icons:



indicates further information



indicates an activity you can complete



indicates an opportunity to pause for a reflection. You could discuss the idea with a friend or your coach, or you could write down your thoughts in your journal



You can download this workbook in PDF format.
Visit coaching.carergateway.gov.au

As a carer, your health and wellbeing matters



Alice, 41, Qld.

A big focus of our relationship is having fun together. When I'm rested and happy it has many positive impacts.

We try to not take ourselves too seriously, even though it's really hard sometimes. A big focus of our relationship is having fun together. When I'm rested and happy it has many positive impacts, for him and for me.



Chen, 68, N.S.W.

I am slowly re-connecting with nature and with myself.

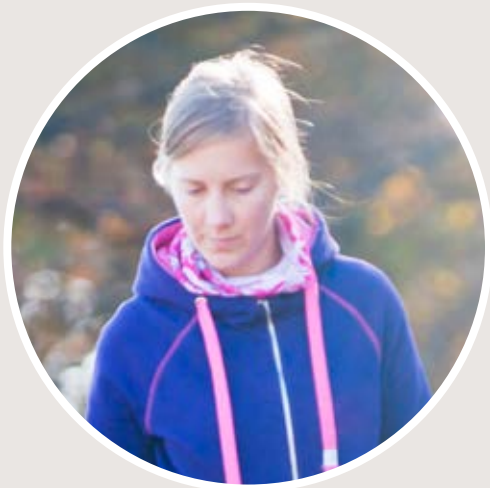
I became focused completely on what was best for her; I realised I had gradually lost my sense of place and purpose. I am slowly re-connecting with nature and with myself.



David, 74, Tas.

For many years I didn't look after myself, it wasn't a priority. I had no time and multiple people to support.

As a carer for multiple family members, I was always advised "take care of yourself first," which were wonderful words of wisdom, but unfortunately at the time, my work-life-carer balance left me extremely time poor.



Leah, 30, Tas.

I love taking my dog for a walk as just a simple way to get out of the house and keep moving.

Looking after my health is so important to me. I love taking my dog for a walk as just a simple way to get out of the house and keep moving. It helps with my physical and mental health. I look for the small things I can work into my day that help me feel better.



Karlie, 37, Vic.

We do our best to have activities where the whole family can be involved.

But I think it's equally important that we all have one on one time – sometimes my son gets overlooked because a lot of the focus is on my daughter. I'm really conscious of making sure he knows he's important too.



Nicole, 36, W.A.

My yoga group has been a great find; I'm mixing with a whole new group of people.

I was getting quite lonely because I was only ever talking with my husband and his health care providers. I joined a beginner's yoga group and it's been a great find. I'm mixing with a whole new group of people.



Taylah, 23, Vic.

I'm learning to recognise when I feel stressed and prioritise taking time out.

My caring role can be emotionally and physically exhausting, and I can get kind of caught up in just being focused on looking after Mum. I know that unmanaged stress can have a bad impact on my mental health.



How important is your own health?

Sometimes we care for someone whose needs appear more demanding than our own. We might dismiss, minimise or even unintentionally ignore our own health, because the needs of others urgently require our attention. Over time, this can have a big impact on our health. Our ability to 'live a healthy lifestyle', how important it is for us, and whether we feel able to attend to our own health, is different for everyone and it can change over time.

This course is about taking stock of your health and wellbeing and recognising your right to a healthy life. It's a chance for you to notice how well you are already looking after yourself and to consider some of the opportunities open to you for greater health and wellbeing.

Topics:

- The possible health impacts of a caring role,
- Whole person health and wellbeing,
- Managing your own health and wellbeing.

By the end of this coaching session, you will be able to;

- Recognise how your caring role can impact on your health,
- Know what contributes to keeping you healthy and well,
- Feel confident about managing your own health and wellbeing.

This workbook contains the following sections:

Introduction to health and wellbeing	8
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What's important to you?

As you work your way through this course, it can be helpful to keep in mind the things in life that are of the most importance to you. As you explore the topics, questions and activities, consider how your responses are shaped by the values you hold.

On the right is a list of values. The list is by no means complete, and the values included will mean different things to different people.

As you read through the next few sections and reflect on your own experiences, think about how these values might influence your choices and actions.



Read through the list and circle five values that are very important to you.

Hint: Try not to over think it; your first response is enough.

Acceptance

Family

Justice

Accuracy

Flexibility

Knowledge

Belonging

Friendship

Love

Challenge

Fun

Order

Comfort

Growth

Passion

Compassion

Honesty

Respect

Cooperation

Hope

Responsibility

Creativity

Humility

Stability

Dignity

Humour

Tradition

Excitement

Independence

Wealth

The impacts of the caring role on your health and wellbeing

Caring for a family member or friend can be very rewarding and it can also be very demanding. Depending on the nature of your caring role, it might place significant restrictions on your life.

People who have become carers say that sometimes providing support can be physically draining, emotionally taxing and can have a negative effect on their health. Research into the impacts of caring paints the same kind of picture.

Did you know?

Carers have the lowest levels of wellbeing of any group in Australia.



There are **2.7 million** unpaid carers in Australia



More than **one third** of Australian carers are experiencing **severe or extreme** stress



Just under **two thirds** of carers (64.7%) **carry an injury caused by their caring role**



Carers are **twice as likely** than the general population to **experience high levels of pain**



Over half of carers report some level of **depression**



As the **number of hours** each week providing unpaid care increases, **carer wellbeing decreases**

“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is **one of the fundamental rights** of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.”

The United Nations and World Health Organization

Your right to health

Regardless of where we live, how old we are, or whether we're rich or poor, our health is our most basic and essential asset.

The right to health is actually regarded as a fundamental human right – something every person on the planet is entitled to.

So why is it, as carers, that we sometimes overlook our own health and wellbeing, our own right to living a healthy life?

Perhaps there just isn't enough time or money; or sometimes there just isn't enough mental space to consider our own health needs. It might even feel like just thinking about our own wellbeing is somehow betraying or ignoring the needs of the person we support; maybe we feel it's selfish?

Perhaps we tend to dismiss our own right to health because we are working so hard to ensure this same right is upheld for the person we care for.

Finding a balance here is so hard. Is it any wonder we end up with the lowest levels of wellbeing?

Thinking about your right to health

Fighting for and protecting the rights of the ones we care for takes a lot of energy – and there's often not a lot left over to fight for our own rights.

"There just isn't enough time in the day or money in the bank to get to the doctor when I'm sick."

"Sometimes there just isn't enough mental space to even consider my own health needs."

"I feel like just thinking about my own wellbeing is being selfish."



Are there aspects of your health you feel too busy to attend to? What are they?

.....

.....

.....

What do you think is stopping you from attending to these aspects of your health?

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.....

.....

What would you need to be able to act on some of these health issues?

.....

.....

.....

Thinking about health... and wellbeing

When we think about health, our first thoughts are often about how we are feeling physically – if we aren't feeling sick or don't have an injury, we tend to consider ourselves healthy.

But there's more to health than just how our body is functioning.

We know that how we are feeling emotionally is important too. Whether we are feeling satisfied or purposeful in how we are living matters as well.

And it's not even just about us – there are outside factors that influence our health too; like our environment, the people we interact with, our society and our culture. These factors all play a part in our health.

If we begin to think about all of the things that contribute to health, we start to create a much more detailed picture of what it means to live well – that is, to be well... to have wellbeing.

We will now look further into these five aspects...





Body

Looking after the health of our body is about ensuring it functions as well as it can. Being physically strong and having enough energy makes it possible to live the way we'd like to and to participate in all aspects of our life.

If there are limitations on our strength, energy and vitality, the way we can operate in the world is also limited. This is also going to have a negative impact on our caring role.

Physical health is an area carers often don't attend to – and this can lead to developing serious health conditions. There's an increased incidence of chronic illnesses in those who provide unpaid care.

Investing in physical health can give us really important resources to help sustain us in our caring role – and other parts of life.

Looking after the health of your body can be helpful for:

- Increasing your energy,
- Feeling more comfortable in your body,
- Feeling more confident moving your body,
- Building strength and resilience, so you can do what you want to do.

Ways you might attend to the health of your body include:

- Finding activities you can do with friends, like going for a walk together,
- Visiting your GP for a physical health check,
- Taking steps to change unhelpful habits, this may include making changes in diet or reduction in alcohol or other drug use, including smoking,
- Drinking more water.



Mind

Looking after the health of your mind is about understanding your feelings, thoughts and behaviours. It's about how you process and understand the world.

By paying attention to your mental and emotional health, you can more easily work toward goals, manage life's ups and downs, and identify and navigate your emotions.

If your ability to express your feelings, think clearly or choose how you behave is restricted, the way you feel about the world and your place in it can shift greatly. This can have a negative impact on your ability to connect with others and to function in your various roles.

We know that the experience of caring can be an emotional rollercoaster. It's very common for people in caring roles to feel emotionally depleted or to find it difficult to manage their emotions and thought patterns.

Looking after the health of your mind can be helpful for:

- Experiencing positive emotions like love, joy or compassion,
- Finding the confidence to make your own decisions,
- Being able to like most things about yourself,
- Facing challenging situations effectively.

Ways you might attend to the health of your mind include:

- Building connections with others,
- Identifying and using your strengths,
- Talking with others about your thoughts, ideas and feelings,
- Participating in activities that you enjoy and can get absorbed in.



Relationships

Relationships are vital for everyone. Feeling connected to others in your life, either family, friends or other people in your community, is one of the most important factors of wellbeing.

The demands of caring can affect the time you spend with family and friends, as well as how much time you have to yourself. Time spent focused on supporting someone can increase tensions within families and make it hard to keep up with friends or participate in community.

People who spend a lot of time caring for others often report feeling isolated and lonely. The pressure this can create can become quite intense; the feelings of responsibility and obligation can pile up, often to a point where we become unable to function.

Looking after the health of your relationships can be helpful for:

- Creating a sense of self worth and acceptance,
- Getting a different perspective on situations, issues or challenges,
- Strengthening identity,
- Experiencing connection, love and appreciation.

Ways you might attend to the health of your relationships include:

- Chatting with friends or family on the phone or online.
- Scheduling regular time with your family and friends.
- Finding activities you can participate in with others,
- Exploring how current relationships can be rekindled, strengthened and nurtured.



Community

We all need to be connected to other people. Our wellbeing depends on the relationships we develop, not just intimate relationships, but also connections with others in our community, such as colleagues, neighbours, teammates, shopkeepers, or interest groups.

Being involved in community is also about being connected to place, culture, history and nature. When we have these connections, we feel a sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves.

Feeling connected to, and part of a community can be a challenge, especially when time and energy are mainly spent caring for someone. If there are limitations on our ability to belong, our emotional health suffers and our ability to participate in life in a way that's meaningful to us is restricted.

Having healthy community connections can be helpful in:

- Building a sense of belonging,
- Being able to contribute to the needs of others, and learn from others,
- Exploring recreational and cultural opportunities,
- Finding fulfilment and meaning in your life.

Ways you might build up your community connections could include:

- Learning more about your culture,
- Meeting your neighbours,
- Connecting with other carers,
- Spending time exploring your local area.



Purpose

An essential aspect of wellbeing is our sense of purpose in life. This includes our relationships with others, ourselves, and the world around us.

Our beliefs and where we find meaning and purpose in life can encompass spirituality, connection with tradition and the way we live out our values.

Experiences of illness, stress and trauma can disrupt our connection with ourselves and with others. Witnessing the pain or distress of others can profoundly challenge our sense of meaning – and can lead us to question our beliefs and understanding of the world.

Exploring meaning, spirituality or purpose may be helpful in:

- Finding a way to understand what is happening,
- Finding a source of strength and hope,
- Connecting with a supportive community,
- Enabling self-awareness and compassion for others,
- Dealing with grief and loss.

In seeking wellbeing, you may wish to explore and express your spirituality through:

- Prayer, meditation or mindfulness,
- Participating in a faith community or talking with a spiritual leader,
- Connecting with nature,
- Developing self-awareness through physical practices such as yoga or breathing exercises,
- Practicing rituals that are personally meaningful.



Wellbeing

Our health and wellbeing is a dynamic process. We are always in a state of 'health in progress' – maybe working on eating a more balanced diet, finding new ways to be involved in our community or practising how to understand and manage our emotions more effectively.

The aspects of health and wellbeing you have just explored are all interlinked. This holistic approach to health and wellbeing is about acknowledging all of the parts that contribute and influence our overall ability to live a good and satisfying life.

Finding a balance where all these aspects of our wellbeing are nourished can be difficult. It's important to recognise that people continue to function when their health and wellbeing is compromised. But if one or more areas of health are under duress for too long, it can lead to some really serious outcomes.

Something that can have a negative impact on all aspects of health and wellbeing is something most carers experience daily – stress.



Stress

Stress is a natural response to challenging or dangerous situations. It can help us achieve our goals or negotiate demanding situations. However, if the challenge or danger is an ongoing, repeated or long term concern, our body's stress response can become a problem.

Stress can be a vicious cycle – caused by health and wellbeing issues and also the cause of health and wellbeing issues.

We know that caring for someone brings added responsibilities and often additional, ongoing stress – we can end up spending a lot of time worrying about another's needs, health and happiness – and trying to orchestrate a team of health professionals.

Our body perceives these ongoing worries as threats, and it responds by increasing our stress hormones, which can raise our heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate and metabolism.

Stress reduction

Ongoing stress is often described as a sense of being 'overwhelmed' or 'stuck'. It can be really hard to feel capable of doing anything in this state, let alone dealing with the issues that are creating the stress.

If you are feeling stressed, there are things you can do; little, quick 'tricks' that can lower the body's stress response. See what they are like for yourself by trying one or two now.

These five quick stress reduction strategies don't address the source of your stress and they take practise; they might not work every time you try them.

What these strategies offer you is a moment of space; a way of tuning in to your body, acknowledging your stress and allowing some time for the stress hormones to start to decrease.

Each activity comes courtesy of neuroscientific research into stress reduction and has been evidence tested.

5 quick stress reduction strategies

Seven Breaths

Take seven breaths with the aim for the exhale to be longer than the inhale. To begin the exercise, count “one” to yourself as you exhale. The next time you exhale, count “two,” and so on up to “seven.”

Subtle soften

Notice how you are holding your body and soften one part. Can you relax your jaw or soften your shoulders? Loosen the leg muscles? Feel your skin softening, muscles easing.

One OK thought

Notice one alright thought and stay with it. Think of anything that makes you feel safe, fulfilled or appreciated and cared about. Let the thought hover in your mind and take a moment to believe it.

5-4-3-2-1

Locate *five* things you can see, *four* you can touch, *three* you can hear, *two* you can smell and *one* you can taste.

Name it

Grab a pen and something to write on. Write down a word or two that describes the emotion you’re experiencing.

Where to from here?

After working through this course you might now be thinking about some changes you'd like to make regarding your health and wellbeing.

Before considering any kind of change, it's helpful to think about why you'd like things to be different. At the beginning of the course, you identified five values that are really important to you – keep these in mind when you think about making a change.

Any plan for change needs to be realistic and achievable. To find actions you can take to create real change, it's useful to think about where you're at right now – is there a certain aspect of your health and wellbeing that stands out as wanting your attention?

The following pages include ideas and suggestions for ways you might work on, or even just begin thinking about, your own health and wellbeing.

The suggestions are organised. You could use the action plan questions at the end of the section to help you organise your next steps.



**I feel a
bit stuck**

I find it hard to think
about my needs


Go to page 36



**I don't
know where
to start**

I want to start thinking
about my health

Go to page 38



**I'm ready
to make
a change**

I want to commit to
looking after my health

Go to page 40



**I'm
looking
after my
health**

I'm learning as I go

Go to page 42



**I'm
where I
want to
be**

I'm happy with
my health

Go to page 44



I feel a bit stuck

I find it hard to think about my needs

Sometimes it's really difficult to even consider making any changes. We might not even want to think about our health because we have too much else to do. If this is how you're feeling at the moment, you might like to:

Connect with others

It can be helpful hearing from other people who have been in similar situations. You might connect online in the carer forums, chat in person with friends or other carers or watch some videos of carers sharing their experiences.

Complete a self-assessment

This straightforward and practical form can help clarify things you might like to talk to a health professional about. Refer to your journal for a Physical Health Screen Self-Assessment worksheet.

Gather information

Is there a particular aspect of wellbeing that interests you? Visit your local library or research online about aspects that are relevant to you.



For more information about wellbeing, browse the *Carer Resources and Information* section of the Carer Gateway website carergateway.gov.au



I don't know where to start

I want to start thinking about my health

We might know we want to change some aspects of our life but may feel powerless to do so or feel unsure of where to begin. If this is how you're feeling at the moment, you might like to:

Explore your values

You might like to consider how making a change might connect with your values – or you might even like to think more closely about what your values are. There are lots of ways you can do this – there is a simple online values sorting exercise available from the *Where do I start?* page of jobsandskills.wa.gov.au (it's designed to help people think about careers and jobs but it works just fine when considering life in general!)

Visualise

How will you look, feel and function after making the changes? Can you visualise 'the new you'? Maybe you could create a Pinterest board with images, or create a vision board, an artwork or a written description of what it could be like.

Reflect

How might changing (or not changing) impact others around you? You might like to write your thoughts down in a journal, or talk to someone about this.



For more information about wellbeing, browse the *Carer Resources and Information* section of the Carer Gateway website carergateway.gov.au



I'm ready to make a change

I want to commit to looking after my health

If you're feeling ready to make some changes to improve your health and wellbeing, you might like to:

Make a commitment to someone

If you're feeling like you're serious about making a change but you're worried about sticking to your promise, try making the commitment to someone else. Catch up with a friend or make a time to see a Carer Coach and talk through the change you are working towards and the commitment you want to make. They might also match your commitment and you can encourage each other.

Act to Motivate

Motivation comes from taking action and seeing benefits. Just doing little things or making small changes can give us a sense of achievement and help us build momentum and motivation to maintain our new approach to our health and wellbeing. Start small!



For more information about working with a Carer Coach, visit coaching.carergateway.gov.au



I'm looking after my health

I'm learning as I go

If you're already doing pretty well looking after your health and wellbeing, you might like to consider:

Checking in on your progress

Create opportunities to reward yourself for the progress you've made or the goals you've achieved. Perhaps this might involve something as simple as stopping for a moment to acknowledge the good work you're doing. Or maybe you can take some time out to reward yourself with something more tangible, like setting aside time for an activity you enjoy or catching up with someone you haven't seen for a while.

Enlist support from people around you

Share your experiences, challenges and goals with those around you. Let people know the hard work you've been doing and the success you are finding. You never know the positive impact your story might have. It's also really helpful to have those around you aware of the changes you are making so that they can support your efforts.



You might like to share ideas and connect with other carers on the *forums* section of the Carer Gateway website at forums.carergateway.gov.au



I'm where I want to be

I'm happy with my health

If you're happy with your health and feel confident about maintaining your wellbeing, you might like to consider:

Sharing your wisdom with others

Sharing your successes, triumphs, setbacks and learning with others can help reinforce the changes you have made. It can also be really helpful for others to see your example, to see that making change is possible.

Plan ahead for challenging situations

You have probably encountered your fair share of setbacks and challenges in your journey towards health and wellbeing. Now can be a good time to think about how you can plan for possible challenges to come. This might involve talking with your GP, counsellors, a carer coach or a trusted friend.



You might like to share ideas and connect with other carers on the *forums* section of the Carer Gateway website at forums.carergateway.gov.au

Action plan

After reading through the information and ideas in this workbook, you might like to choose one specific step you would like to take in relation to moving forward with your health and wellbeing.

You can use the questions opposite to help plan how you will turn your ideas into an achievable action.

Refer back to the page earlier in this workbook where you identified the values that are important to you. Write them in the space provided below.

When you create your plan, think about how the action you want to take will express, support or align with your values.



Action: Write one thing you'd like to try

Why do I want to do this? What is your reason? What do you want to achieve?

Who will I do this with? Who might help you with this? Who might be involved?

When will I do this? Be precise as possible. Can you name a day and time?



Now that you have finished this coaching session, we encourage you to spend a few minutes putting down some of your thoughts or talking through some ideas with your coach or someone you trust. You can write your ideas on this page or in your coaching journal.

You could write or chat with someone about:

- Aspects of health and wellbeing; community, relationships, purpose, body and mind.
- How you now feel about the current phase of your caring journey.

This workbook represents a significant amount of time and energy that you have dedicated to your own wellbeing. It is an important part of your journey and worth hanging on to. Keep it somewhere that allows you to revisit it whenever you need to.

You can also come back to look over, check in on, revise or change your action plan. You can even re-do the activities or share some of the information or resources with friends.



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