

Why Carers Need to Take Care of Themselves Too: 5 Tips for Staying Healthy as a Carer

As a care worker, nurse, or health care staff it's important for you to remember that taking care of yourself and your own health is of utmost importance. Carers often face stress and anxiety, which are mentally taxing issues that can later actually surface in other aspects of your life.

Furthermore, in between shift work that can be long winded or unpredictable, it might be hard to find the spare time to dote on oneself as well. Just remember, it's not only your clients or patients who need the care! Look at the following tips to effectively keep yourself healthy and happy too:

Try Rekindling Some Hobbies and Passions

It's important for everyone to occasionally let loose and blow off some steam. This is true especially for someone who works in an environment that requires physically and mentally demanding tasks. Take the time every so often, at least once a week if possible, to do something you enjoy. Whether this outlet is something creative like arts and crafts, or something more physical like hiking or joining an adult sport league, indulging in a passion or a hobby can refresh your mind and leave you feeling happier and more energetic.

Importance of Sleep

Carer shifts are notorious for being long, and at odd hours. On top of the fact that most of us don't get enough sleep as is, care workers have to juggle their work schedule as well, which can really impinge on having a good restful night's sleep. Sleeping well is so important when it comes to keeping our brains functioning properly. It also ensures that our physical and mental health stays in balance. In short, sleep deprivation can be dangerous for both the carer, and the clients they take care of.

According to the NIH, "The damage from sleep deficiency can occur in an instant (such as a car crash), or it can harm you over time. For example, ongoing sleep deficiency can raise your risk for some chronic health problems. It also can affect how well you think, react, work, learn, and get along with others."

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

If you're sleep deprived, you are unlikely to have quick reflexes and rational decision-making skills – both of which are essential skills as a career. Furthermore, fatigue can be dangerous for you as well when you commute for your shift too.

Adults on average need 7 to 8 hours of quality sleep at night to function properly. If you're not getting this amount, try and figure out a way to change up your routine.

Eat Healthy Nutritious Food

When you work as a nurse or a carer you are working in a fast-paced environment. This might leave you short of time when it comes to your own time during the day. It's easy and tempting to opt for a fast, cheap, and tasty option if its right around the corner, or if it lets you sleep in for an extra 30 minutes in the morning instead of preparing a meal for yourself. However, in a care work profession,

the health of your own body is your livelihood and it's very important that you take the time to take care of yourself too.

Your body's health in the long run reflects what you put into it. When you eat foods that are high in sodium, sugars, and preservatives you're not doing yourself any favours. Eating good nutritious foods has great benefits, keeping your energy high, helping you keep a healthy weight, and giving your body the ability to fight illnesses. Not to mention the money you could potentially save by bringing a lunch from home instead of paying for a burger every day.

A little bit of meal preparation on your day off can help keep your organised in the mornings so you won't even need to wake up early to whip up a healthy option for the day. Taking a bunch of healthy power boosting mini snacks is also a good option, especially if you find yourself short on time throughout the day and need something to grab on the go to keep energy up and hunger pangs down.

Exercise, Sports, and Fitness Mindset

It's a known fact that a little bit of exercise – daily, or even just once a week – is extremely beneficial. Some plus sides to exercise include lowered risk of disease, increased lifespan, healthy weight, and better sleep.

A lot of the time health care workers find that they don't have a lot of spare time to exercise, especially if they have family or other priorities external to their jobs. Instead of taking exercise as a casualty of the job, trying to make small changes to your daily routine instead. Did you know that walking up the stairs instead of using the lift, can be enough to shave 6 pounds off of your weight over the course of the year even if you don't change anything else about your routine?

Sport is also a great way to exercise and keep fit. What's more, sport is a social activity for the most part so you can enjoy your time with a friend or your family, while getting the movement needed to stay healthy. Try setting up a sport group within an adult sport league comprising of your healthcare colleagues or join a tennis club with your family members. The possibilities are vast, and you'll be sure to find something that fits within your schedule.

Other good options for exercise include swimming, heading to the gym, or taking a class like cycling or yoga. You don't have to stick to one thing of course!

Don't Ignore Negative Feelings, Anxiety, or Depression

When you work in an environment that is mentally and physically taxing, while potentially depriving you of sleep, and also making it hard to exercise and eat healthy, you've got a recipe for emotional stresses that can cause depressive and anxious results. Pair this with facing stressful and emotionally harsh realities, like death and mourning, and you've got the potential for a depressive state that can be hard to climb out of alone.

Don't ignore your feelings if you find yourself feeling down, antisocial, or depressive. Recognising these signs is important and getting help will assist you in coming back to a positive mindset. Speak to your supervisor, HR, or your employer about how you've been feeling, and together with them you can find out what the next steps in the plan should be to help you. If they're not available to talk, or if you don't feel comfortable, seek out a therapist to help you decipher the causes of your feelings.

Similarly, to being able to recognise these feelings within yourself, it's important to being able to see them in your fellow carers as well. Have you noticed that someone you work with who is usually upbeat, is feeling down in the dumps? Perhaps reaching out to them and letting them know you're there for a talk will help them as well.

As a care worker, a nurse, or anyone in the care work field it's so easy to forget that your health, whether mental or physical, is important too. Remember that taking care of yourself means that you can put your best foot forward and provide the best, safest, and most beneficial care for your patients and clients.