

# Caregivers: Self-care and care for others during Circuit Breaker

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Caring for the elderly often involves personal sacrifices and can take an emotional toll on the caregiver. As the elderly have weaker immunity, it is crucial to keep their exposure risk low. Social distancing and stay-home precautions are necessary for slowing the spread of the COVID-19 virus but can create new challenges for the elderly and their caregivers.

In this article, we will delve into understanding the sources of stress and explore solutions to help with adapting as the reality of caregiving undergoes rapid change.

## Potential sources of caregiver stress

- As sources of social support such as senior activity centres and community outreach are temporarily suspended, caregivers face challenges in making alternative arrangements for their loved ones.
- More time may be taken during visits to healthcare institutions as a result of entry point restrictions, especially for elderly with mobility issues.
- Additional pressures from juggling Work From Home (WFH) and Home-Based Learning (HBL) arrangements for children can compound caregiver burden.
- Unable to access usual outlets for release of emotional tension such as social activities.
- Family members may need time to adjust to living together in closer proximity and domestic disputes can be more difficult to avoid.

## Coping with change and stress at home

- Anticipate the increased likelihood of conflicts within the home: Mental preparedness can help you cope and moderate your responses to prevent further escalation.
- Exercise empathy when managing conflicts within the home: Each person has their own way of expressing frustration. Actively practising compassion can help you with providing your loved one with the emotional support they need and addressing the source of their unhappiness.
- It is human nature to mirror the emotions of each other and aggression can be contagious. Try to manage tension with kindness instead of anger.
- Self-care is important for caregivers to be able to take care of others:
  - Have enough rest and sleep
  - Eat healthily
  - Exercise with home-friendly workouts
  - Limit use of alcohol or cigarettes
  - Practise taking deep breaths and meditation
- Seeking caregiver support resources
  - Caregiver Alliance Limited: <https://www.cal.org.sg/post/support-for-caregivers-throughout-the-covid-19-crisis>
  - Apply for the Home Caregiving Grant if you are eligible: [https://www.aic.sg/financial-assistance/Home%20Caregiving%20Grant%20\(HCG\)](https://www.aic.sg/financial-assistance/Home%20Caregiving%20Grant%20(HCG))

## Planning Care Management amidst Social Distancing

- Sharing of care burden: If more than one person can be involved, plan a roster, and have backup plans in case the primary caregiver is ill or quarantined.
- Healthcare providers have postponed non-essential appointments. If you originally planned collection of medications around these appointments, medication delivery from our Public Healthcare Institutions can reduce your exposure risk from traveling.  
The Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore has prepared the following guide: [https://www.pss.org.sg/sites/default/files/kym/pdf/how\\_to\\_order\\_your\\_medicines\\_from\\_home\\_-\\_info\\_for\\_pss\\_web.pdf](https://www.pss.org.sg/sites/default/files/kym/pdf/how_to_order_your_medicines_from_home_-_info_for_pss_web.pdf)
- Empowerment with chronic medical conditions and medications: HealthHub is an initiative by MOH which offers a comprehensive resource: <https://www.healthhub.sg/a-z/a?cat=diseases-and-conditions>  
You can also learn more about self-monitoring for conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.
- If you are looking for more personalised advice on medications, “Just Ask” your community pharmacist: <https://www.pss.org.sg/know-your-medicines/external-resources/ask-our-pharmacists%C2%A0#.Xr0BmsgzY2x>
- Telecommuting services in community care: Most of the organisations which run day care and senior activity centres should already be performing outreach to their clients to follow up. You may seek their advice for ideas on how to keep them engaged and help with creating new routines to follow at home.

- Domestic helpers staying with elderly: Take care that they are not burnt out from their caregiving duties and provide emotional support to them. Check in with them periodically to see how they are doing and small acts of kindness can go a long way in making their day.
- Caregivers of persons with dementia (PWD) may face additional challenges
  - For persons with mild dementia who may roam independently, communicate on the importance of social distancing and hygiene with simpler terms. Use familiar examples like the 2003 Outbreak to help them understand the importance of staying home. Avoid overloading with information and be patient if they have trouble understanding you.
  - The Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA) and AIC have collaborated with enforcement agencies to help PWD and their caregivers navigate the difficulties of complying with safe distancing measures: <https://alz.org.sg/spoc19/>
  - For comprehensive advice, ADA has created a list of tips: <https://alz.org.sg/covid19/>