CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

Live-in carer breaks, rotas and handovers explained

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IN BRIEF

Live-in carers need a daily break, a proper night's sleep and regular time off, and a good care plan says exactly when each happens and who looks after the person meanwhile. Many providers plan a break of around two hours a day, and carers usually live in for a set period before a regular second carer takes over after a careful handover. Arrangements differ between providers and people, so the written care plan, not a general rule, sets them for each person.



IN THIS GUIDE

1. Why breaks matter
2. The daily break: how it commonly works
3. Who covers the break
4. Nights and sleep
5. Rotas: how long a carer stays
6. Handovers: what should be passed on
7. Holidays, bank holidays and time off
8. If the carer is ill or has to leave suddenly
9. Words you can use
10. Questions to ask a provider
11. What to do next
12. How we can help
13. Common questions
14. Sources and further information

Why breaks matter

A live-in carer is with the person for most of the day. To stay patient, observant and safe, they need time to rest, eat, get some fresh air and speak to their own family. Breaks are not a perk: they are part of what makes live-in care safe. Providers registered with the Care Quality Commission must deploy enough suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff, and planning breaks and cover is part of that.

The daily break: how it commonly works

- **Length:** many providers plan a break of around two hours a day, and some longer. The care plan sets the length for each person.
- **Timing:** usually at a quiet time in the person's day, for example after lunch when they rest. It should fit the person's routine, not the other way round.
- **Leaving the house:** the carer can go out during the break. If they stay in, their time is still their own.
- **Written down:** the agreed time, and what happens if it has to move, should be in the care plan.

Who covers the break

If the person…	Common arrangement
Can safely be alone for a couple of hours	No cover needed; a risk assessment, a personal alarm, and a drink and phone within reach
Needs someone nearby but not hands-on help	A family member, friend, neighbour or sitting service
Needs personal care or cannot be left at all	A visiting carer from the provider, or a trained relative
Enjoys company and activities	A day centre or club on some days

Break cover is often a separate cost, so ask for it in the written quote. As an example of the difference, Oxfordshire County Council's 2026/27 ceiling for the live-in care it arranges is £1,600.64 a week with the carer's breaks covered and

£1,168.35 a week without. See respite options for sitting services and day centres.

Nights and sleep

A live-in carer sleeps in their own room and is normally expected to get a proper night's sleep, with occasional help, such as one trip to the toilet, being part of the role. If they are woken regularly, they cannot also give safe care all day, and the plan should be reviewed. A waking night carer may be needed. See live-in care or 24-hour care.

Rotas: how long a carer stays

Patterns vary between providers and between people. Commonly, a carer lives in for a set block, from a week or two to several weeks, then has time off at home while a second regular carer takes over. Some arrangements also include a regular day off within the block, covered by another carer or by family.

What matters most is continuity. NICE guidance for home care says providers should build teams of workers around a person, introduce people to new care workers, and tell them in advance, with reasons, if staff will change. A small team of two or three regular carers means the person always sees a familiar face.

Ask each provider: How long will each carer stay? How many carers will the person meet in a typical year? Will the rota be shared with us in advance?

Handovers: what should be passed on



A changeover is the moment things can be forgotten. A good handover is both spoken and written, ideally with the two carers in the home together for a while, and involves the person where they wish.

A handover checklist to print

- [ ] How the person has been: mood, sleep, appetite, drinks, pain, bowels and continence.
- [ ] Any changes to health, skin or mobility; any falls or near-misses.
- [ ] Medicines: changes since the last handover, stock levels, the medicines administration record (MAR), when the next prescription is due.
- [ ] Appointments, visits by the district nurses or therapists, and anything to follow up.
- [ ] Equipment: hoist or slings, pressure cushion, alarms, and anything needing repair.
- [ ] Household money: cash held, receipts and the spending record.
- [ ] Shopping, meals planned, bins and anything about the house.
- [ ] Family news and messages, and anything the person is looking forward to or worried about.
- [ ] Any safeguarding concern, which should also go to the provider's office straight away.
- [ ] What has gone well: favourite activities, conversations and routines that work.

Keep the handover notes with the daily records so family and health professionals can see them, with the person's agreement.

Holidays, bank holidays and time off

- Carers' annual leave is usually covered by the rota, with another regular carer stepping in.
- Christmas, New Year and bank holidays may cost more; check the contract for any higher rates.
- If the family wants to take over care for a while, for example while visiting, agree how this affects charges and the carer's rota, with notice. See care contracts.

If the carer is ill or has to leave suddenly

Illness and family emergencies happen. With a fully managed provider, finding and briefing a replacement is the provider's responsibility. With an introductory agency, the family may need to manage the gap; see managed or introductory live-in care.

Either way, have a back-up plan written down:

1. The provider's office and out-of-hours numbers.
2. One or two family members or friends who could step in for a day.
3. Where the care plan, medicines and MAR are kept, so anyone arriving can find them.
4. Key safe code arrangements, shared only with people who need them.

Words you can use

"Before we agree to live-in care, please could you put in writing: when the daily break will usually be and who will cover it; how long each carer will stay; how changeovers and handovers work; how much notice we will get of a new carer; and what happens, and how quickly, if a carer is ill. Please also include any extra charges for break cover, bank holidays and disturbed nights."

Questions to ask a provider

- When will the break be, and who covers it if Mum cannot be left?
- How long do your carers usually stay, and how many regular carers will she have?
- Do outgoing and incoming carers overlap, and what is written down?
- How do you introduce a new carer?
- Who covers holidays and sickness, and how quickly?
- Who should we call if a handover is missed or goes wrong?

What to do next

1. Decide, with the person, whether they can safely be alone for a break, and for how long.
2. Ask providers to describe breaks, rotas and handovers in writing, with all costs.
3. Check the care plan names who covers each break.
4. Write a short back-up plan and keep it by the phone.
5. Review after the first changeover: did the handover work, and did the person feel comfortable?

How we can help

Day and Nightcare provides fully managed live-in care anywhere in England, from £1,550 a week, and home care visits from one hour across Oxfordshire. We are registered with CQC and rated Good, and we work with people who fund their own care, councils (including direct payments) and NHS Continuing Healthcare. If you would like to know how breaks and changeovers would work for you or someone you support, call us on 01865 715780; after a free initial assessment, we give you a written quote.

Common questions

Who looks after Mum during the live-in carer's break?
It depends on her needs. If a risk assessment shows she can safely be on her own for the break, perhaps with a personal alarm and a drink and phone within reach, no cover may be needed. If she cannot be left, the break must be covered: by a family member or friend, a visiting carer from the provider, a sitting service or a day centre. Ask how cover is arranged and charged before care starts, and make sure the care plan names who covers it.

Can the daily break be skipped if the carer is happy to stay?
It should not become a habit. Breaks protect the carer's health and the quality of care, and a carer who never stops is more likely to make mistakes or leave. Occasional flexibility, for example on a hospital appointment day, is normal, but the break should be taken later that day where possible. If the person can never be left, plan proper cover instead of relying on goodwill.

How much notice will we get before a carer changes?
Planned changeovers should be known well in advance and shared with you. National guidance from NICE says people should be told in advance if their care workers will change, with the reason, and be introduced to new workers. Unplanned changes, such as illness, can happen at short notice, but a good provider still briefs the replacement fully and tells you who is coming and when.

Does the second carer have to be a stranger?

Ideally not. Many managed providers aim for a small team of two or three regular carers who take turns, so the person knows each of them. A new carer is sometimes unavoidable, for example if a regular carer leaves, but ask whether new carers can be introduced before their first stay, by video call or an overlap visit, and whether the person's routine and preferences are written down for them.

Sources and further information

- NICE: Home care, delivering personal care and practical support to older people (NG21)
- Legislation.gov.uk: Regulation 18, staffing (Regulated Activities Regulations 2014)
- Oxfordshire County Council: Adult social care fees and reviews (2026/27 rates)
- CQC: Managing medicines, home care providers
- NHS: Carers' breaks and respite care

Read next

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

What is live-in care? A complete guide for families in England

Live-in care explained for families in England: what a live-in carer does day and night, who it suits, breaks and rotas, couples and pets, how it compares with visiting care and care homes, typical costs, funding, regulation and how to start.

Read the guide →

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A day with a live-in carer: what live-in care looks like

A realistic picture of a typical day and night with live-in care, from the morning routine to bedtime, the carer's daily break and what happens at night, with a sample daily record, the questions to ask and the signs that care needs a review.

Read the guide →

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

Managed or introductory live-in care: what is the difference?

Fully managed live-in care, introductory agencies and self-employed carers compared for families in England: who is responsible, CQC regulation, employment status, insurance, cover when a carer is ill, VAT, costs, risks and the questions to ask before choosing.

Read the guide →

All guides in the information centre **Check what help you could get**

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CQC overall rating: Good (report published 20 April 2018)

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Information, not advice: please check anything important with the organisation named.