SUPPORT FOR FAMILY CARERS

Respite care options: how to plan a break from caring

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IN BRIEF

Respite care means someone else takes over the caring for a few hours, a night or a few weeks so that you can rest. The main options are a sitting service, home care visits, a day centre, night care, a live-in carer at home or a short stay in a care home. The council may help pay after a carer's assessment and a needs assessment, and the person's own budget or benefits can also be used.



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The main types of respite care

There is no single right kind of break. The best choice depends on the person's needs, what they enjoy and how long you need.

Type of respite	Best for	Things to know
Sitting service	A few hours of company while you go out	Often volunteers; may not include personal care
Home care visits	Help with routines at set times	Personal care, meals and medicines support
Day centre	Regular daytime breaks, social contact	Activities and meals; transport may cost extra
Night care	Unbroken sleep for you	A sleep-in or a waking night carer
Live-in respite	Longer breaks, staying at home	Carer needs a bedroom and proper breaks
Care home stay	Higher needs or a change of scene	Book early; a new place can unsettle some people

Sitting services

A trained volunteer or paid sitter keeps the person company for a few hours, so you can shop, see friends or rest. Charity sitting services are often free or low-cost. Check what the sitter can and cannot do, as many do not help with personal care.

Home care visits

Paid carers visit at agreed times to help with washing, dressing, meals and medicines. Regular visits can cover the parts of the day that are hardest for you, or give you a fixed afternoon off each week.

Day centres

Day centres offer company, activities and a meal, sometimes with specialist support for people living with dementia. Transport is often available, though there may be a charge.

Night care

If broken nights are wearing you down, night care can make the biggest difference. A **sleep-in** carer sleeps in the home and gets up if needed. A **waking night** carer stays awake all night, which suits people who need help several times a night. See our page on night care.

Live-in respite

A live-in carer moves into the home for a few days or weeks and takes over the day-to-day care. The person keeps their own bed, routines, food, pets and neighbours, which can be especially reassuring for someone living with dementia. It also suits couples who want to stay together. The carer needs their own bedroom and agreed breaks. Our page on live-in respite care explains how it works.

Respite in a care home

Many care homes offer short stays, and some take bookings in advance. A nursing home may be the right choice if the person needs nursing care. Some people enjoy the change and the company. Others, particularly people with dementia, can find a new place confusing, so a short trial stay first can help.

Other options

Family or friends may move in for a while or host the person. Shared Lives schemes, which councils can tell you about, offer short breaks with approved carers in their own homes. Some charities offer holidays with care built in.

How respite care can be paid for



Through the council

The council will only fund respite where it has assessed a need for it. You will usually need a carer's assessment for yourself and a needs assessment for the person you care for. If support is agreed:

- Replacement care is treated as a service to the person you care for. Any charge is based on their finances, not yours, and they need to agree to it.
- For a short care home stay of up to eight weeks, the council can choose to charge using its care-at-home rules rather than care home rules.
- The person's direct payments can pay for respite at home, or for short care home stays of up to four consecutive weeks in a year.
- You can ask for a carer's direct payment to arrange replacement care yourself, as long as the person you care for is happy with it.

Our guide to direct payments and personal budgets explains more.

Getting council-funded respite: step by step

1. **Ask for two assessments.** Contact adult social care at the council where the person you care for lives. Ask for a carer's assessment for you and a needs assessment for them. Our carer's assessment guide has an example email.
2. **Explain the break you need.** Be specific, for example "one night's sleep a week" or "two weeks in the summer so I can have surgery".
3. **Expect a financial assessment** for the person you care for, if the council will arrange or pay for their replacement care.
4. **Choose how it is arranged.** The council can arrange it, or the person can take a direct payment and choose a provider themselves.
5. **Get it in writing.** The support plan should say what respite is agreed, how often, and what it costs.
6. **Book early,** especially for school holidays and Christmas, and ask for a review if it is not working.

Through the NHS

If the person you care for is eligible for NHS Continuing Healthcare, the NHS is responsible for meeting their assessed needs, so talk to the Continuing Healthcare team about respite as part of their package. See our guide to NHS Continuing Healthcare.

Their own money and benefits

Attendance Allowance and Personal Independence Payment are not means-tested and can be used towards respite. Charities such as Carers Trust offer some grants, and the Turn2us website can search for others.

How to plan a break: a checklist

- **Book early:** popular dates, such as school holidays and Christmas, fill quickly.
- **Start with a trial:** a short break first builds confidence on both sides.
- **Write a one-page profile:** routines, likes and dislikes, how the person communicates, what calms them, and what upsets them.
- **Medicines:** a current list, enough supply for the whole break, and clear instructions agreed with the provider.
- **Health details:** GP, conditions, allergies, and any ReSPECT form or other emergency care plan.
- **Equipment:** check hoists, commodes and continence products are ready.
- **Access and contacts:** keys or key safe code, neighbours, and who to call first.
- **A handover:** arrange for the carer to meet you both beforehand if possible.
- **Staying in touch:** agree how often you will hear how things are going, and whether you want to be contacted at all.
- **Afterwards:** talk about what went well, and book the next one.

One-page profile: template

Fill this in together and leave it where the carer will see it. It helps anyone new give care the way the person likes it.

- **What people like and admire about me:**
- **What is important to me:** for example, family photos by my bed, my morning paper, my cat.
- **How to support me well:**
- **My day:** usual time I get up, meals and snacks, favourite drinks, when I like to rest, bedtime.
- **Personal care:** how I like to wash and dress, and what I can do myself.
- **Moving around:** walking aids, hoist or equipment, and how many people are needed.
- **Eating and drinking:** diet, allergies, texture of food, help needed.

- **Medicines:** where they are kept, when they are taken, who supplies them.
- **Communication:** hearing, sight, glasses or hearing aids, how I show I am in pain or upset.
- **What calms me:** music, a walk, a familiar programme.
- **What upsets me:** things to avoid.
- **Health contacts:** GP, district nurse, pharmacy, and any ReSPECT form.
- **Family contacts:** who to call, and when.

Emergency respite

If you are suddenly unable to care, for example because you are taken ill, call the council's adult social care team, or its emergency duty team out of hours. In Oxfordshire, the social and health care team is on 01865 519800 in office hours and the emergency duty team on 0800 833 408. If someone is in immediate danger, call 999.

A written emergency plan, shared with family and neighbours, makes it much easier for someone to step in. Our guide to an emergency plan for carers includes a template to copy. Some local carers' centres run emergency schemes, so ask yours.

Free helplines

- **Carers UK:** 0808 808 7777, Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.
- **Age UK Advice Line:** 0800 678 1602.
- **Independent Age:** 0800 319 6789, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm.
- **Carer's Allowance Unit:** 0800 731 0297, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, to report a long break in caring.

Common worries

"They will be upset with me." It is natural for the person to feel uncertain at first. Talking about it positively, and starting small, usually helps.

"Nobody else can do it like I do." Probably not exactly. But a good carer, given a clear handover, can keep things safe and familiar, and you will come back better able to carry on.

What to do next

1. Ask for a carer's assessment, and a needs assessment for the person you care for.
2. Talk together about which type of break might suit them.
3. Write a one-page profile and an emergency plan.
4. Book a short trial break.
5. Put regular breaks in the diary, not just one a year.

How we can help

Day and Nightcare has supported people at home since 2008 and is a CQC-registered provider rated Good. We provide fully managed live-in care anywhere in England, which can be arranged as respite, and home care visits from one hour, sleep-ins and waking nights across Oxfordshire, and 24-hour care with carers working in shifts anywhere in England. Care can be funded privately, by the council (including direct payments) or by NHS Continuing Healthcare. Call 01865 715780 for a free initial assessment.

Common questions

How long can respite care last?

As long or as short as you need. Respite can be a regular afternoon each week, one night a fortnight, a long weekend or several weeks while you have an operation or a holiday. Short, regular breaks often do more for a carer's wellbeing than one long break a year. Live-in respite and care home stays usually suit longer breaks, while sitting services and visits suit shorter ones.

Does the council pay for respite care?

It may. The council will only fund respite where it has assessed a need for it, usually through your carer's assessment and a needs assessment of the person you care for. Replacement care given to them is charged to them under their own financial assessment, not to you. If the council arranges a short care home stay of up to eight weeks, it can choose to charge using its care-at-home rules.

Can direct payments be used for respite in a care home?

Yes, within limits. Direct payments can pay for short stays in a care home of up to four consecutive weeks in any 12-month period. Stays that are more than four weeks apart are not added together, so regular short breaks spread through the year are usually possible. Direct payments can also pay for respite at home, such as visiting carers or a live-in carer, from a provider you choose.

Will Carer's Allowance stop while the person is in respite care?

Not straight away. You can usually keep getting Carer's Allowance during a short break. You must tell the Department for Work and Pensions if you or the person you care for will be in hospital, a nursing home or respite care for more than 12 weeks, or if you stop caring for more than 28 days for any other reason. The person you care for must still receive their qualifying disability benefit.

Is live-in respite better than a care home stay?

It depends on the person. Live-in respite lets them stay in their own home, with their routines, pets and belongings, which many people, especially those living with dementia, find less unsettling. A care home stay can suit someone who needs two people for every transfer around the clock, wants company, or whose home cannot accommodate a carer's bedroom. Think about what has helped them feel settled before.

Sources and further information

- NHS: Carers' breaks and respite care
- GOV.UK: Care and support statutory guidance
- NHS: Carer's assessments
- GOV.UK: Carer's Allowance, report a change in circumstances
- legislation.gov.uk: Care Act 2014, section 10
- Oxfordshire County Council: Contact adult social and health care

Read next

SUPPORT FOR FAMILY CARERS

Carer's assessment: your rights and how to prepare

A carer's assessment is free and is your legal right under the Care Act 2014. What it covers, how to ask your council for one, how to prepare, and the support that may follow, from funded breaks and replacement care to a carer's direct payment.

Read the guide →

CHOOSING LIVE-IN CARE

Types of care at home: live-in, visiting, night and respite care

The types of care at home in England explained simply: live-in care, visiting home care, sitting and companionship, waking nights and sleep-ins, 24-hour care, respite, reablement, Discharge to Assess and palliative care, who each suits and how to combine them.

Read the guide →

PAYING FOR CARE AND REDUCING THE COST

Direct payments and personal budgets: a guide for families

How personal budgets and direct payments work in England: who can get them, setting one up, using them with a care agency or for live-in care, employing a carer, paying family, adding your own money, record-keeping, reviews and audits, with wording you can use.

Read the guide →

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

Talk to our care team: 01865 715780

enquiries@dayandnightcare.co.uk · Out of hours: 07775 686272

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The latest version of this page: **www.dayandnightcare.co.uk/guides/respite-options/**

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