Getting informed, getting prepared

First steps to finding care and support for older people

Introduction

Lots of people find that they need more help or support as they get older.

This can include practical support, such as help with shopping or keeping the home clean and tidy, or personal care, such as help with bathing and dressing. Such help can be provided in the person's own home, or elsewhere.

Unlike healthcare, this kind of help is not always free. Most people will have to pay something, and may have to look for the help themselves.

Sometimes people find themselves needing help because of an event like a fall or being diagnosed with an illness. But for many people, needing a bit more help or relying more on friends and family can happen quite gradually.

Careful planning can help people get what is best for them when they need it.

Starting to look

Starting to look for care and support can feel overwhelming, but there are lots of people and organisations that can help.

They can help you to find out what help is needed, what's available in your area and how to pay, and to think about how things might change in the future. Even if you need to pay for care, this help is available to you.

This leaflet is to help people who are looking for information about how to find care and support for themselves or for someone else, now or in the future.

Getting the right support

There are many types of care and support available. You may find a cleaner or gardener is all you need to keep your home as you like it. Many local voluntary organisations and community groups offer help with shopping, or company in the home while a carer or spouse goes out for a few hours (‘sitting services’). If you need more help in the home, care agencies offer help with things like getting up in the morning and going to bed, dressing, washing, help with meals and using the toilet (‘domiciliary services’). Talk to agencies and voluntary organisations about exactly what help you would like, and what they can offer.

You may also think about moving home; this might be to supported housing or to a care home. Take advice and think about what sort of care is needed; for example, is nursing or dementia care necessary? Short breaks or respite care allow someone to continue living at home but stay over in a care home for a period of time from one night to several weeks.

Facing challenges – planning ahead

Some of the biggest challenges in getting help can be identifying that help is needed, knowing when to have the conversation, and accepting help that is offered. Not looking for help can leave you feeling more isolated, and overwhelmed and exhausted. Don't try to do everything yourself. Talk to your friends and family about what is needed, and seek out help from local and national organisations.

Some of the systems and organisations you will deal with can be confusing, and the process can be time-consuming. It's a good idea to keep track of who you've spoken to and what's been said, as well as names and contact numbers of specific people at each organisation. You might choose to have a 'support broker' organise care for you (see inside of leaflet for more details).

It can be a struggle to find the right kind of care, especially if needs change over time. It's important to plan ahead and talk to as many people as possible to help you make choices. Think about what's important to you. The location of a care home? Consistent timing of visits for help at home? You can always go back to organisations like your local council, if the situation changes.

Voluntary organisations may be able to provide free or inexpensive support, such as sitting and companionship services. They might also offer information about various services in your local area, help with filling in forms to claim particular benefits, or information about coping with specific illnesses like dementia or sight loss. You may have to contact different organisations for different kinds of advice and support. Voluntary organisations may be unable to recommend specific care agencies or care homes.

> **“The man from Age UK unpicked a whole load of things.”**

Friends and family can be a valuable resource for recommending particular services and organisations in your local area, as well as offering emotional support. However, don’t assume that because someone you know has received something for free, you will be entitled to the same; your local council can tell you exactly what you are entitled to.

A financial adviser can help make sure that you are receiving the benefits you are entitled to, and help you to manage your money and assets as circumstances change. They can also help you think about financial products like insurance or investment schemes that might be useful. Financial advice may be especially useful if you own your home, or have substantial savings. Restricted financial advisers deal with particular companies, and/or particular types of financial products. Independent financial advisers are not tied to particular products or companies. If you choose to seek this type of advice, make sure you are speaking with an adviser who has expertise in ‘later life advice’. Financial advisers charge for their services.

> **“When I look back, I think, why didn’t I get some expert advice sooner.”**

Your Local Council, also known as **Social Services** or **Adult Social Care**, can offer:

- Up-to-date information on whether and how you need to pay for care.
- Free assessments for you ('needs assessment'), and for anyone who supports you ('carer's assessment') to see if extra help is needed, and what sort of help would be most appropriate.
- A list of care agencies and care homes in your area, or an online directory of local services. They will not be able to recommend one particular agency or home.
- Information about other benefits you might be entitled to, including Attendance Allowance (a non-means-tested benefit for people over the age of 65 with care needs).
- Equipment to make living in your home easier, such as grab rails and bath handles. They can assess what is needed.
- Details of local voluntary organisations and community facilities.

> **"I did find Social Services very helpful."**

You can telephone or visit **home care agencies and care homes** yourself to ask questions. Alternatively, you have the option of **a support broker**, who can help you find the specific care you're looking for, including making recommendations of particular services and arranging those services. There may be a charge for this. A broker might be offered through your local council, or you could approach one independently.

Your GP can offer support if you are struggling to cope, and direct you to local organisations who can help. The GP can also offer you a referral to your Local Council for an assessment of your needs. The GP cannot tell you what sort of help at home or elsewhere you need, tell you what benefits you are entitled to, or recommend specific places to go for care.

> **"My GP first suggested I might need some help."**

Keeping track of your progress

Once you've spoken to someone, you may find it helpful to note their contact details and any advice given, along with the date you spoke.

Keeping track of your progress

Useful contacts

- **Your local authority's adult social care department**
  Find their number in the phone book or look them up online.
- **NHS Choices guide to care and support**
  http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/what-is-social-care.aspx

Other useful numbers:

Print or listen to this information and view the film at:

www.gettinginformed.net

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