



# Gradually becoming a carer

## How caring starts

Caring for an older family member or friend starts in different ways for different people. While the need for this help can occur suddenly (e.g. after a stroke) often it is gradual.

You may start doing small things to help your family member and realise that increasingly they require more of your time. This is not uncommon as people age - the need for support from family and friends becomes greater.

For some time, your family member may not have a name or diagnosis for what they are experiencing. This may be a confusing and frustrating time when neither of you knows what to expect or how best to help.

## Things you may start noticing

There are things you may start noticing which signal that your family member needs more help. At first you may dismiss these because the changes you see in your family member are subtle.

These changes might include:

- ▣ worsening health;
- ▣ losing weight;
- ▣ starting to have falls;
- ▣ seeming 'flat' or uninterested in things;
- ▣ having difficulty organising things;
- ▣ stopping going out - or pulling away from others;
- ▣ having trouble remembering things;
- ▣ stopping doing things that used to come naturally; or
- ▣ doing things that are unsafe and potentially harmful.

*"I thought it was just old age with memory problems...  
but then I started worrying about her safety when I wasn't there."*

## Why these things are hard to address

It may take time to piece things together and fully understand the situation for your family member. In the meantime you may feel as though you are guessing - or sometimes even imagining things.

To make this harder, your family member may dismiss your concerns or try to 'hide' the difficulties they now face.

Often it can be hard to accept the changes you are seeing. It may be easier to dismiss them yourself or accept the explanation your family member provides - at least for the time being.

When you are concerned enough to talk to other family members or friends about your suspicions, they might not be ready to hear them or may not share your concerns. You may be left feeling quite alone at a time when you really need support.

*"It took 7 years for my sister to admit there was a problem."*



## How to act on your concerns

First, check your concerns with others. Speak to people who see your family member regularly - perhaps their neighbour or a friend at their day club. Try to build a clear picture of the difficulties and changes your family member is facing.

Second, start raising your concerns with others in the family. Describe the things you have noticed. Try to help them understand the situation - get them involved.

Third, talk to your family member's doctor (GP). You could also speak to a health professional or service provider who knows your family member. Ask their advice. Seek their help.

## Tips from others who gradually started caring

- ▣ Gently raise your concerns with your family member - encourage them to seek help.
- ▣ Getting a diagnosis is important - it can explain much.
- ▣ Be persistent with your family member's GP - don't let them dismiss your concerns. Speak to them privately if necessary.
- ▣ Seek a second opinion from another doctor if you need to.
- ▣ Phone the local [Aged Care Assessment Service](#) (ACAS) to discuss your concerns. They can visit your family member if necessary.
- ▣ Get others in your family involved - this might take time.
- ▣ Talk to someone you trust - you won't feel so alone.

## Further information:

- ▣ [Aged Care Assessment](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) can provide information, support and advice to people caring for a family member or friend - ph: 1800 242 636\* to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

\*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at [website@carersvic.org.au](mailto:website@carersvic.org.au)