



Suddenly becoming a carer

How caring starts

People start caring for an older family member or friend in different ways. Some start caring gradually, helping their family member more over time. Others find this happens rather suddenly.

The sudden need to care for a family member or friend may arise after a health scare or accident. For example:

- ▣ a stroke or heart attack;
- ▣ an amputation;
- ▣ cancer; or
- ▣ broken bones or injuries after a fall.

Often this will involve time in hospital when staff will start talking to you about caring for your family member. They may even use the word 'carer', although the true meaning of this may not be clear to you for some time.

This is usually a time of mixed emotions. It's not uncommon to be relieved that your family member has survived the ordeal, while at the same time feeling anxiety, anger, grief and loss. So much is uncertain.

Things you might start noticing

A health scare or accident may involve significant changes for your family member on a day-to-day basis. These changes may be apparent in their:

- ▣ physical ability
- ▣ communication skills
- ▣ thinking and planning
- ▣ roles (such as parent or employee)
- ▣ relationships.

"In an instant, everything changed. He was like a different person."

You may also start noticing more subtle changes in your family member. This might include:

- ▣ less confidence
- ▣ withdrawing from others
- ▣ anxiousness
- ▣ depression
- ▣ difficulty making decisions.

Dealing with the expectations of others

Hospital staff will not be the only ones looking to you as a potential carer. Your family member may also hold this expectation. Spouses in particular seldom feel they have a 'real' choice about taking on a caring role. They see it as a duty - part of their marriage vows.

*"The decisions were automatic... we just had to manage.
Of course, all the decisions were made when we were still
traumatised by the stroke"*



Other people in your family may also expect that you will provide the care required. This may be because you live closest or are considered to have the best relationship with your family member - or it may be just because you are a naturally caring person. Whatever the reason, expectations in families need to be talked about.

You do have a choice. Caring for someone can be an incredibly rewarding, yet also an incredibly draining experience. Before taking on a caring role you need to consider what is in your family member's best interests as well as your own.

Tips from other carers

Other people who have started providing care to a family member after a sudden health scare or accident, give the following advice:

- ▣ Get all the information you need to make your decision.
- ▣ Understand what will be expected of you as a carer - look into the future if you can.
- ▣ Ask about services and equipment that may help.
- ▣ Get family involved - for support and to help make the decisions.
- ▣ Allow yourself time to carefully think things through - try not to feel pressured by the hospital.
- ▣ Have someone to talk to who can listen and support you - perhaps another family member or good friend.

Phone the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* for information, support and advice related to caring for a family member or friend.

Further information:

- ▣ [More information on dealing with hospitals.](#)
- ▣ [Things to consider when taking on a caring role](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 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