



Respite Care



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Introduction - What is respite care?

Respite care is a planned or emergency short-term stay in a care home. Care homes offer a wide variety of alternative approaches to respite care, depending on the type of care they specialise in. This can vary from low needs residential care to nursing care or specialised care for people living with dementia.

Respite care usually fulfils a need for people living in the community who decide that they want to move into a care home for a limited time period. Respite stays typically extend over a short period of time, normally a week or two, although lengths of stay can often be varied on the basis of individual need.

Respite care is often a sensible option to consider for people who care for or who are being cared for by family or friends.

There are a number of reasons why respite care can be useful: some of which are explained overleaf.



The benefits of respite care

Respite care can be beneficial for both people acting as carers and people being cared for.

Although caring for someone can be a rewarding job, it can take a toll on the carer's health and wellbeing. Carers need breaks as much as anyone, and perhaps more than most when caring has become a 24-hour responsibility. If you are perpetually stressed or tired, then the quality of care that you'll be able to provide will be reduced. Even if it is difficult to think through how a break might work, it is still an option that is worth exploring.

The first consideration for many carers is finding an option for a break that will give peace of mind in terms of guaranteeing that a relative or friend is being cared for well. What better place for people in need of support than a care home, where professional and caring staff look after people 24 hours a day?

Many people find that they come back from a break refreshed and rejuvenated, which means they can provide the best possible care, in turn this is beneficial to both parties.

When a carer is ill, needs to visit a hospital or has other medical needs, respite care can be the perfect way to ensure the cared-for individual is properly looked after. Knowing that the individual is safe and comfortable can help people to focus on recovering from illness or tackling problems efficiently and effectively.

Similarly, carers may find they have an urgent need for time off, for instance to deal with a personal or family crisis. In this situation, carers will often need to put caring responsibilities on hold temporarily.



From the perspective of the person being cared for, respite care can also be a welcome break. Many people in this situation know how much the person caring for them will benefit from a break. A respite stay provides chance to make new friends, be in a different environment and take part in activities that the care home offers. Many good homes offer a wide variety of activities, ranging from trips to the local shops through to visits to the theatre or the seaside, together with involvement with local churches and community organisations. In addition, friendships can be kept up through visits. It can be a pleasant change to be cared for in environments specially designed for care, with good food and drink, and well-qualified staff on hand 24 hours a day.

If the individual has an operation or simply requires more care than usual, respite is a good option as looking after them may be difficult for the carer, due to the individual either having higher demands or needing further specialist support.

Most homes are able to offer respite care on a regular basis when it is needed (two weeks every three months, for example), which has the benefit of allowing all parties familiarity with one another's needs and a sense of pattern.



For people who are considering full-time support, a short respite stay can provide an ideal way to get to know a home and to decide whether or not it is suitable.



Assessment

Everyone who needs support and care, both carers and those being cared for have a legal entitlement to an assessment of their needs and advice about the opportunities available to them. This assessment is provided by the local authority (your local council). The first thing to do is to let the council know that an assessment is needed. Carers and people being cared for will usually be seen together. The assessment will be carried out by a Care Manager, who will understand the problems that individuals face and will be familiar with local options for help, which can vary from respite care to help with transport or with aids and adaptations to homes.

Is there any financial support?

Respite care is not provided by the NHS, so it is an option that needs to be paid for, although help with costs (including covering the full cost of care in some cases) may be available from the council or through increased benefits. Prices vary considerably depending on services offered and location, amongst other factors, so the financial aspect of respite care can be a concern. An assessment helps people explore what type of respite care is most appropriate and the options available. The Care Manager will also carry out a financial assessment, sometimes called a 'means test', based on income, needs and expenses. They will work out what support is available on that basis.

For a small number of individuals in the more advanced stages of dementia, the NHS may provide short-term care, so this can be an avenue worth exploring.

Both your local authority and your council may provide support for residential care through a direct payment. Advice on direct payments is available on websites or through organisations like [Age UK](#) and [First Stop](#), both of which offer free telephone advice lines. They will also offer guidance on respite care and help generally.

Certain charities (such as [Independent Age](#) and [Turn2us](#), for example) may be able to assist with the financial aspect of respite care, particularly for those living with dementia.



Deciding what's important and what to look for: can the home look after certain clinical conditions?

Once you've decided to use respite care, it's important that you don't rush into the process, even though it's only for a limited period of time. Homes offer many different types of care - such as residential care, nursing care or specialist dementia care - and it is vital to establish whether or not homes you are considering can cater for specific clinical conditions.

Here are some more general factors that you need to bear in mind:

- The quality of the care
- The cost of the care
- The range of activities that are available every day
- The quality of the food and drink
- The quality of the environment, gardens and general surroundings
- The management of the home
- Can the individual bring a pet or certain items of furniture with them?
- The location and accessibility of the home for anyone who might visit the individual during this timeframe



Not all homes offer respite care, and homes that do may offer very different respite care packages. This is an area you will need to talk through.

It's just as important that you visit a few homes to get an idea of what the general atmosphere is like. It can be useful to take a friend or family member with you to provide another pair of eyes and to offer a second opinion.



Prepare a list of questions and don't be afraid to ask the staff as they show you around - a good home will be pleased to learn about any concerns and help with them, so don't be nervous. Here are some things to consider:

Medical factors:

- Can the home manage the individual's particular needs?
- Do staff discuss care planning and review dates with you?
- Are GPs, nurses, dentists, opticians, chiropodists and other therapists available?
- Is the call system answered quickly?
- Is there space for wheelchairs in corridors and bedrooms?

Dignity factors:

- Do staff take a personal interest in residents and use this information to tailor their stay?
- Do staff address the individuals as they wish?
- Is privacy upheld? Do staff knock before entering a bedroom?
- Are visitors welcomed?
- Can individuals cook and/or wash for themselves if they want?
- Are links with friends and family actively encouraged and facilitated?
- Can you come and go as you please?
- How are complaints dealt with?



Homeliness factors

- Are bedrooms spacious? Is furniture provided?
- Is there an *en-suite* bathroom? Can the individual take a bath or shower when they want to?
- Is the food home-cooked well with lots of choice?
- Does the home smell pleasant? Is it light and airy?
- How is laundry managed?
- Is there a garden? Is it accessible?
- What do people on respite stays need to bring with them?
- What do Care Quality Commission reports say about the quality of the home? (The Care Quality Commission - often called CQC - is the independent regulator for care homes, carrying out inspections on the government's behalf. Reports on the latest inspection visit are available on their website or in homes themselves, and they must provide a copy if you ask.)

Practical factors

- Is it convenient for visitors?
- Will community links be upheld?
- Are there local pubs, shops and churches?
- Is there internet access, a TV and music?
- Can friends or relatives stay overnight?



Moving in

Even though respite care is for a limited time period, it can still be a daunting process for the individual, particularly if they are living with dementia. Therefore, it's important to ensure you help the initial process go as smoothly as possible.

Here is some basic preparatory advice for you:



Make sure the individual has all of their medicines with them - and discuss with staff how these should be best managed.



Label clothes. Most homes have communal washing facilities and having a name visible can prevent items being misplaced.



Take in any aids, such as walking sticks, hearing aids and glasses and make sure that staff know they are needed.



Ensure staff record any property that the person brings in.



Check beforehand if relatives or friends can bring in personal items for the bedroom - pieces of furniture, pictures, books etc - and make arrangements for these to be brought in.



Draw up a list of contacts for the home to have access to - personal details and details for family members or friends.







Decide what to do with any pets.



If the stay is for a longer period, you could consider redirecting the post.

It's understandable for carers to be concerned about discussing this topic with the person they care for.

Here are some ways to make the discussion easier:

-  • Don't talk about arrangements too far in advance of the date when the respite care is planned.
-  • Very occasionally people will be brought in for respite stays without having been told what is happening to avoid an awkward or difficult conversation. No home will permit this to happen, so be honest about what is going on and why.
-  • Don't forget that respite care is a positive experience for many people, so be positive about it. If a carer is feeling insecure or worried about a respite stay, it will be communicated to the person preparing for a respite stay. It may help to prepare for any discussion in advance.
-  • Reassure the person that they will be well looked after and that they will be coming home again.



Respite care is not for everybody

Respite care does not suit everyone. Most people find coming into a care home a bit daunting, even if they know it's for a short period (though it's equally true to say that the vast majority of people adapt very quickly: a very high percentage of care home residents say that they are well supported and happy).

For many carers and the people they care for, the choice of respite care has elements of compromise. Often it helps both parties but sometimes one or the other finds it very difficult to live with. It is worth persisting with - perhaps trying new approaches with staff or through a different home - but for some people, the disruption involved simply isn't worth the trouble.

Sometimes a carer finds that the person who has gone in for a respite stay has difficulty readjusting to life at home following a visit. Usually this is brief-lived but it can be a real problem. Talking about it often helps.

It is important to talk about the potential pitfalls of respite care because - for a small number of individuals - it is not the solution they had hoped for. However, for many people it is a positive experience and for almost everyone it is a helpful option that will help recharge batteries. Good luck!



About Barchester

Barchester Healthcare is recognised as a major UK care provider that is committed to delivering high-quality care across its care homes and hospitals.

The organisation has adapted and grown over the last 22 years, focusing on older people needing nursing care in high-quality environments and providing personalised support for adults of all ages with a range of disabilities.

We pride ourselves on our expert dementia care. Our Memory Lane Communities are designed to encourage people living with dementia to stay as independent and active as possible. We understand that no two people are the same and take a person-centred care approach, recognising and celebrating each person's individuality.

Barchester employs almost 17,000 people to care for more than 10,000 individuals at more than 200 locations in the UK. We are the only care provider listed in The Sunday Times 25 Best Big Companies To Work For 2014 and are certified as one of Britain's Top Employers for 2014.

For more information on choosing a care home [click here](#)

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