

iSupport for Rare Dementias

Part 3 Caring for me



CARING FOR ME

- Session 1. Making time for enjoyable activities
- Session 2. Thinking differently
- Session 3. Reducing stress in everyday life

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Session 1. Making time for enjoyable activities

Why is this session important?

It is important to take care of yourself while caring for another person. This session will help you to keep providing care.

How will this session help me?

This session will help you to take time for yourself and do enjoyable activities to relax.

What will I learn?

1. The importance of enjoyable activities.
2. Barriers to doing enjoyable activities.
3. Making enjoyable activities achievable.
4. Doing enjoyable activities together.

1. The importance of enjoyable activities



Enjoyable activities are important because caregiving can last a long time and doing enjoyable activities can help you to relax and continue providing care. Enjoyable activities can be small things such as going for a walk or talking to a friend. This may not always be easy, because providing care can be time-consuming and someone might have to

take over the care for your family member or acquaintance while you are not there.

Let's see how Amy, Jose, and Umit experience caregiving and the importance of planning enjoyable activities.

Amy

Amy takes care of her partner who is living with frontotemporal dementia. She dedicates most of her time to caregiving and rarely takes time for herself. Amy notices that recently she is more tired than usual and feels that she is not able to care for her partner as she did before.

Jose

Jose takes care of his brother who is living with posterior cortical atrophy. Jose does not get a lot of sleep and rarely has time to go for a run. He recently started asking his sister to come by and help with caregiving so he can go for a run and spend some time relaxing in the afternoon.

Umit

Umit takes care of his wife who is living with primary progressive aphasia. Recently, he has hired a professional carer who visits three times a week to help him care for her. When the professional carer is there, Umit listens to an audiobook or goes for a walk.

Remember

- If you are not able to make time for yourself, you can get very tired which may make you less able to continue providing care.
- You can ask family and friends to help care for the person living with dementia so that you can take some time for yourself.
- If it is affordable, you could hire a professional carer to help you care for your family member or friend so you can take some time for yourself.

Which enjoyable activities would you like to do?



Once you have some time for yourself, it can be hard to think of the things you would like to do. There are many possibilities and even in a short amount of time, you can still do an activity that you like.

1. Activity

Please check at least two activities that you would like to do more often. If your favourite activity is not listed below, use the 'other' box to write your own activity.

- Exercise
- Visit friends and family
- Watch TV
- Gardening
- Go out for a drink or dinner
- Read
- Go shopping
- Go for a walk
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

2. Barriers to doing the things you love

Let's go back to Amy's example

Amy dedicates most of her time to caring for her partner who has frontotemporal dementia. She does not receive any help and is tired all the time. She is struggling to care for her partner and has stopped doing the things she likes because she feels that she does not have enough time nor energy.

Eventually, Amy is so tired that she decides to ask her friend for help. She is now able to make some time for herself and engage in activities that she enjoys. Amy feels more energised afterwards. She also feels that she is better able to handle the care for her partner as a result.

Other reasons you may feel unable to do enjoyable activities

Not having time was the reason that Amy did not feel as though she could do any enjoyable activities.

However, there are several other reasons.

2. Activity

Do you recognise any of the following?

Please select any that may apply to you.

- No time.** You might feel that you are too busy trying to manage caring responsibilities, work, children etc. and not able to find any spare time. It is really important that you try to make some time to do something you enjoy. If you have little time, there might be some enjoyable activities that do not take up a lot of time and which you can fit in around your day (e.g., staying under the shower a little longer, have a cup of tea looking out of the window).
- No energy.** You might have less energy because caregiving can be tiring. Doing something that you enjoy and value can help you feel more energised.
- No money.** Enjoyable activities do not have to be costly. You can keep the activities as simple as you want them to be. For example, things like going to a friend's house for a cup of tea, taking a flask of coffee and biscuits to sit in the park, going for a walk, do not cost money.
- Not in the mood.** You might not feel like doing anything. Although it might be hard to imagine, it is likely that your mood will be better after doing something you like.
- Physical limitations.** If you have physical limitations, think of activities that you can do despite your limitations. There are many possibilities, such as reading, playing a game, listening to music, or talking to a friend.
- Guilt.** You might feel guilty that you are taking time for yourself or that it feels and looks like you don't want to spend time with the person you care for. You need time to do things you like, relax and recharge so that you can provide adequate care for them. Being a good carer means taking care of yourself as well.

Suggestions for doing enjoyable activities

- Consider asking someone to help you with some of your day-to-day tasks.
- Try to do one activity at a time and finish the things you have started as much as possible. If you leave something unfinished, it may make you feel dissatisfied. You may not be able to focus entirely on your next activity. You could feel more energised if you complete an activity before taking on another.
- Think about ways to manage your time. Consider using an agenda or calendar to schedule ten minutes to have a cup of tea or something enjoyable.
- Talk to someone about how you might be able to manage your time. Seeking another opinion or suggestions may be helpful.

3. Making enjoyable activities achievable

Now rate how achievable it would be for you to do the enjoyable activities that you chose earlier in this session.

Read every activity and consider whether the activity is:

1. Unachievable
2. Unlikely to be achievable
3. Somewhat achievable
4. Achievable
5. Very achievable

3. Activity

Select at least two activities that you would like to do more often. If your favourite activity is not listed below, use the "Other" answer and make a note of the activity.

- Exercise
- Visit friends and family
- Watch TV
- Gardening
- Go to a café or pub
- Read
- Go shopping
- Take a walk
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

Which of your activities can you do today?



It is a good idea to start with your enjoyable activities as soon as possible and incorporate them into your routine.

Which of your activities can you do today? If it is inconvenient to start an activity today, think about the enjoyable activities you could do tomorrow.

Remember

Start with small goals and you can add more activities when you feel able to. Rethink the activities that you would like to do to help make them more achievable. Perhaps adjust the time you allocate to them or do them in a different place (online vs in person).

4. Doing enjoyable activities together



It can be very rewarding to do enjoyable activities with the person that you care for. However, it might be difficult at first to think of enjoyable activities that are suitable for both of you.

In this exercise, we will make a list of the enjoyable activities that you can do with the person you care for. First, take a look at Jose's experience from the previous exercise.

Jose

Jose takes care of his brother who is living with posterior cortical atrophy. In addition to going for a run while his sister takes care of his brother, Jose takes his brother out for walks around the neighbourhood. His brother enjoys the walks and Jose is also able to get some more exercise and fresh air.

What would you like to do more often?

Take a look at the list below for examples that you can do with the person that you care for.

4. Activity

Please select at least one activity that you would like to do together more often. If an activity is not listed below, use the 'other' box at the bottom of the list to add the activity that you would like to do.

- Listen to music
- Go to the cinema
- Go for a walk
- Listen to or read stories, newspaper articles, poems, etc.
- Go out to eat together
- Cook and prepare snacks
- Watch birds or animals
- Do handiwork or crafts
- Do a sport together
- Have friends over to visit
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____



Keep in mind that despite the challenges, enjoyable activities are good for you and are necessary to ensure that you are able to keep providing care to your family member or acquaintance.

Tip

Try to do activities that are or have been of interest to that person. If they liked hiking, try to keep doing that. The routes may need adjusting as the dementia progresses but it's important to tailor the activities to the individual.

Session 2. Thinking differently

Why is this session important?

Your thoughts determine how you feel. Unhelpful thoughts can make us feel bad.

How will this session help me?

This session will help you think differently and change your unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones.

What will I learn?

1. Thoughts influence how we feel. You cannot change what is happening, but the way you think about what is happening influences how you feel and that has an impact on how you respond to situations.
2. Learning to think differently by evaluating potentially unhelpful thoughts and thinking about alternative ways to approach the challenge.
3. Thinking differently can make you feel better.

1. Thoughts determine how we feel

There are different ways to deal with stressful events. One way is to think differently. Let's look at an example.

It is not an event that makes you feel angry, sad, happy or guilty, it is how you think about it.

An event can be anything. Here are a few examples:

- The person you care for becomes angry when you ask him/her something.
- Your family member who promised to help you does not turn up or cancels on you.
- The person you care for cannot find something.
- Your family member is blaming you for not providing the right care.

Many people think that their feelings are a direct consequence of an event. However, it is the way that you think about the event that determines how you feel.

Lost keys

Jo is married to Max who is living with primary progressive aphasia. She is about to leave the house to visit a friend. Max says, "I can't find my keys! You cannot leave me without keys!" Jo thinks to herself: "I cannot leave him alone anymore." She starts to feel miserable.

1. What could you do?

Thoughts and feelings

Jo could:

✓ Think to herself, "Max has dementia and finding things is harder for him with his visual problems. I can take some time to help and then go." Then call her friend and explain that she will come later.

This is helpful advice. It is not the fact that Max has lost the keys that is making Jo miserable, but her concern that she can't leave him alone anymore. After Jo has called her friend, she can help Max search for the keys, which will make him feel safer. Then she can go to see her friend.

Deciding to keep objects in a bowl that has a high contrasting colour may help people who have visual problems.

Keep in mind

- There are many different ways of dealing with events.
- Negative thoughts can make us feel bad.
- By thinking differently, you might feel better and be able to better deal with events.

Jo's unhelpful and helpful thoughts

Jo thinks to herself when Max cannot find his keys: "I cannot leave Max alone anymore." This makes her feel miserable.

This means that Jo is thinking in an unhelpful way. Unhelpful thoughts can make it harder to respond in useful ways to situations like this.

Instead, Jo could think: "Max has dementia and is sometimes worried when he loses things. I can take some time to help and then go." This different way of thinking will probably make Jo feel better and help her stay calm and compassionate.

Helpful thoughts can make it easier to respond in useful ways to situations like these.

Keep in Mind

- It is not the event itself that makes you feel angry, sad, happy or miserable.
- Helpful or unhelpful thoughts can influence how you respond to a situation.
- By being more aware of your thoughts, you may be able to change some of your ways of thinking, which might help you feel a bit better. When you feel a bit better, you may be able to respond differently to the situation.
- This advice won't work for everyone but it's worth trying to see if it will work for you.

Change the thought, change the feeling

Aryan has been caring for her family member who is living with Lewy Body dementia for several years now. She has many thoughts. Some make her feel worse, some make her feel better.

2. What could you do?

Thoughts that can make you feel better

Below are some helpful thoughts that might help Aryan feel better.

✓ Making time for myself helps me to provide better care.

While feeling guilty when taking time for myself might be a common feeling, it is likely to help me to continue providing care longer.

✓ Dementia is a disease, it is not mine nor anyone else's fault.

This thought is helpful and might prevent feelings of guilt.

✓ Asking others for help can help me to share the duties of care.

This is a helpful thought that may make me feel more in control. Involving other people in caregiving has lots of potential benefits. For instance, I will be able to take breaks more regularly and provide care for a longer time.

Keep in Mind

- Unhelpful thoughts usually create difficult and unpleasant feelings.
- Helpful thoughts are important to feel better and can open up alternative ways in dealing with situations that can be more helpful.
- It can help you feel better to identify unhelpful thoughts but this might not suit everyone.

2. Learn to think differently by changing unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones

Xavier meets his friend Gabriel

Xavier takes care of his son, who is living with primary progressive aphasia. While he is shopping, he meets his friend Gabriel, who asks, "How are you? Do you need any help caring for your son?"

Xavier thinks to himself, "if Gabriel thinks I need help, he must think that I am a bad carer".

3. What could you do?

How thoughts influence our feelings

Xavier could be feeling:

- ✓ Upset
- ✓ Lonely
- ✓ Sad
- ✓ Angry
- ✓ Guilty

Keep in Mind

Sometimes you cannot change the things that happen (events), but you can change your response (thoughts).

1. Activity

Which unhelpful thoughts do you have?

In an earlier example you indicated which thoughts are helpful and which may be unhelpful. Below you will find a list of unhelpful thoughts. Please check the unhelpful thoughts that you have or provide additional examples.

- I have to do everything alone.
- The person I help care for does not care about me anymore.
- When the person I care for is not happy, it means that I am a bad carer.
- Maybe the person I care for will get better.
- I must always be available for the person I care for.
- I should not consider my own needs if I want to be a good carer.
- No one understands how hard it is to care.
- No one can provide care the way I do.
- He/she being diagnosed with dementia has complicated my life.
- I have no time for others as a carer.
- I feel sorry for the person I care for.
- Other people are better off than the person I help care for and I.
- Other _____

2. Activity

Which helpful thoughts do you have? In an earlier example you indicated which thoughts are helpful and which may be unhelpful. Below you will find a list of helpful thoughts.

Please check the helpful thoughts that you have or provide additional examples.

- It is okay to take time to relax as it will help me to provide a good standard of care.
- Sharing my feelings with others helps to take the pressure off.
- Asking for help from others can help me to share the burden of care.
- Making time for myself helps me to provide better care.
- Dementia is a disease; it is not my or anyone else's fault.
- I do not have to give others their way all the time.
- Other _____

Keep in Mind

Changing your unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones can make you feel better but if you feel like you're not coping:

- Ask to your GP about speaking to a therapist
- Reach out to support groups
- Some charities provide helplines to give you someone to talk to; such as MIND, Alzheimer's society, Samaritans and Rare dementia support

What if Xavier instead thinks to himself, "if Gabriel thinks I need help, he must care about me and my son and wants to make sure we are doing well"?

4. What could you do?

How thoughts can influence our feelings.

Now Xavier might feel:

- ✓ Happy
- ✓ Supported

Keep in Mind

Sometimes you cannot change the things that happen (events), but you can change your response (thoughts).

3. Thinking differently makes you feel better

Thinking differently can make you feel better. You cannot change the things that are happening, but you can change the way you think about them.

Example 1: Wei

Wei takes care of his wife Xu, who is living with frontotemporal dementia. He writes the following:

Name:	Wei
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	Yesterday my wife Xu and I visited some friends. We had tea together. Xu dropped her cup on the floor. When they started to clean the floor, Xu did not help, but she stood in the way. She did not apologise for her behaviour, but laughed.
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	Our friends are upset with my wife and won't invite us to their house again.
What would be more helpful to think?	My wife has frontotemporal dementia and is unable to think and act in the same way that she used to. Our friends won't blame my wife as I have explained to them that she has dementia and that her behaviours have changed.
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	Instead of feeling worried and ashamed, I would be pleased that I had explained my wife's diagnosis to them, so they understood. Despite the incident we spent a lovely time with our friends.

Example 2: Helen

Helen takes care of her brother Matty, who is living with Lewy Body dementia. She writes the following:

Name:	Helen
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	A week ago, our sister came to visit us. At the end of the day, I said to Matty, "it was a great day, don't you think?" Then he said that he was not sure, and that he was tired and wanted to sleep.
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	Nothing we do is worthwhile because Matty doesn't care. Everything is ruined because of his dementia.
What would be more helpful to think?	Even though he seems uninterested, I know that he had a great day too. He smiled a lot today and that is what counts. It must be so tiring for Matty as the dementia makes it harder for him to understand and keep up with the pace of the conversation.
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	Instead of feeling sad and deflated, I am pleased that we spent the day with our sister and had a nice time. The photos we took can help remind Matty of our time together.

Now it's your turn. In the next exercise you will work to change your unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones.

Try to think of a recent event that made you feel upset and answer the questions below. You can refer back to the examples on the previous page for some help. You can either write this on a notepad or in the text box.

Name:	
What was the event that made you feel upset or miserable?	
What were your unhelpful thoughts?	
What would be more helpful to think?	
How could the helpful thoughts make you feel?	

Let's review what you have learned

- You cannot change what happens, but you can change your response.
- You can learn to think differently by changing your unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones.
- Thinking differently makes you feel better.

Keep in Mind

There are events in which feeling upset, scared, sad or angry is inevitable. Especially if the person you care for needs to go to the hospital or if you lose someone close to you. In these circumstances, just being aware of your thoughts and feelings might be more helpful than trying to change them.

Session 3. Reducing stress in everyday life

Why is this session important?

It is important to take care of yourself while caring for another person. This information will help you to keep providing care.

How will this session help me?

This session may help to reduce stress and renew your energy with exercises that do not take much time.

What will I learn?

1. The importance of relaxing.
2. Different ways to relax:
 - Basic breathing.
 - Mindful breathing.
 - Neck movements.
 - Number counting.
 - Imagery.
 - Total stretching.
 - Muscle relaxation.
3. How to relax at any time and any place.

1. The importance of relaxing

Let's look at an example

Diana: no time, no energy

Diana takes care of her husband Dan who has posterior cortical atrophy. She feels increasingly tense. A friend advises her to try to relax and not ask too much of herself. Diana feels that she does not have the time or energy to relax. Her friend explains that there are ways to relax that do not take much time, and that relaxing might give Diana renewed energy that could help her get tasks done more easily.

Diana succeeds in relaxing

Diana decides to try the breathing exercises her friend showed her, whenever she remembers and can combine them with another activity (e.g. breathing while washing the dishes). When Diana sees her friend again she says: "Thank you for the advice. Although I still have a lot to do, I feel less tense." Diana

decides to keep practising her breathing exercise, so she can use them when she is feeling overwhelmed.

Relaxation:

- can help you feel less tense;
- might give you renewed energy;
- may make it easier to get tasks done; and
- does not have to take much time.

2. Different ways to relax

There are different ways you can relax. Try and see which one(s) suit you best.

Before you try an exercise ask yourself: "How tense am I feeling"? After the exercise, ask yourself again. This might help you see whether this type of exercise is helping you relax.

You will find seven relaxation exercises. The first three exercises will take only a few minutes (i.e. 5 minutes max.). The other exercises will take a little longer (i.e. 10-15 minutes max.). Have a go and see which one(s) works best for you!

Use the scale below of 1-10 and tick what number describes how tense you are feeling now: 1 is very small amount of tension and 10 is very high amount of tension.



Keep in Mind

Relaxing after feeling stressed for a prolonged time period may make you feel emotional. This is normal. Caring for someone with dementia can be physically and emotionally difficult.

1. Relaxation activity - Basic breathing

Focusing on your breathing is relaxing. By doing a breathing exercise you could reduce tension.

This exercise will take: less than 5 minutes.

Caution: if you experience difficulty breathing, this exercise might not be the best option for you.

This is how you do it:

- When sitting down, sit up straight in your chair with your back against the back of your chair.
- When standing, stand up straight.
- Put both of your feet flat on the surface.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Keep breathing like you are used to.
- Try to feel how you breathe. Put your hand on your stomach to feel how you inhale and exhale.
- Exhale from your mouth and pull in your stomach as much as possible.
- Follow your breathing in this manner a couple of breaths and then stop the exercise.

2. Relaxation activity - Mindful breathing

This exercise will help you feel calm and reduces stress. You will breathe with your stomach according to a rhythm.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

Caution: if you experience difficulty breathing, this exercise might not be the best option for you.

This is how you do it:

- Sit straight in a chair and make sure your face and shoulders are relaxed.
- Bring your hands to your stomach and breathe into it.
- Breathe in for 4 counts and out for 8 counts, at a comfortable pace.
- Your stomach should expand with each inhale and contract with each exhale.
- Return to your normal breathing and spend one minute just observing yourself breathing and noticing how you feel.
- Practice listening to your own thoughts without negative judgement.
- If your mind wanders, refocus on breathing and meditation.

3. Relaxation activity - Neck movements

With this exercise you will feel less tension in your neck. It will also increase the blood flow to your brain.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

Caution: if you experience difficulty breathing, this exercise might not be the best option for you.

This is how you do it:

- Bend your neck forward and backward
- Inhale while you lift your head up and back. Exhale while you drop your chin to your chest.
- Rotate your chin from side to side.
- Inhale when your chin is in the centre. Exhale when you look to the side.
- Drop your ear towards your shoulder.
- Inhale when you are in the centre. Exhale when you drop your ear to your shoulder.
- Repeat 5 times.

4. Relaxation activity – Number counting

You can relax by focusing on your breathing and counting back from 20 to 1.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
- Breathe slowly.
- With each breath, take at least 3 seconds to breathe in and 6 seconds to breathe out.
- Focus on your breathing and your lower stomach when you breathe until you feel calm and peaceful inside your heart and mind.
- Say the word 'relax' whenever you breathe out.
- Tell yourself that you will start counting down from 20 to 1.
- Tell yourself that you will double your level of relaxation for each and every count, and will be totally relaxed when you reach 1.
- Start counting down from 20 to 1 slowly. Say the word 'relax' whenever you count (that is, take a deep breath, say '20', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', take a deep breath, count '19', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', and so on).
- Now repeat this exercise but with your eyes closed.

5. Relaxation activity - Imagery

You can relax by imagining you are in a place or surrounded by people and things you like.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

Before completing this exercise, take a look at the helpful guidelines below.

- Only imagine places, people and things you like.
- Imagine what you can hear, feel, smell, and/or taste if you were in that place.
- Try to think of very specific details of the place, thing or person. For example, how does the surface of the thing feel and how does it smell?

Now try to relax while imagining that you are in a place or with the people or things that you like.

This is how you do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
- Breathe slowly.
- With every breath, take at least three seconds to breathe in and at least six seconds to breathe out.
- Focus on your breathing and your lower stomach when you breathe until you feel peaceful inside
- Imagine you are in a place or surrounded by things or people you like.
- Now do this exercise again but close your eyes.

6. Relaxation activity – Muscle relaxation

This exercise is particularly helpful when your muscles feel tense. This exercise will help you relax by tensing and relaxing your muscles.

This exercise will take: 10-15 minutes

Caution: if you have any injuries or any other physical limitations, this may not be the best exercise for you. Try one of the other exercises.

Below are some general instructions for you to keep in mind.

- When you are ready to begin, tighten the muscle group described. Make sure that you can feel the tension, but no pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say 'relax' as you relax the muscle.
- When you have finished the muscle relaxation, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

This is how you do it:

- **Right hand and forearm:** make a fist with your right hand. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Don't forget to breathe. It might be helpful to inhale while tensing your muscles and exhale while relaxing your muscles. Do the same for your left hand and forearm.
- **Right upper arm:** bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to 'make a muscle'. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Do the same for your left upper arm.
- **Forehead:** raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Eyes and cheeks:** squeeze your eyes closed. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Mouth and jaw:** open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Neck:** be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Shoulders:** tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring them up towards your ears. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.

- **Shoulder blades/Back:** push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Chest and stomach:** breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Hips and buttocks:** squeeze the muscles in your buttocks. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Right upper leg:** tighten your right thigh. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left upper leg.
- **Right lower leg:** do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left lower leg.
- **Right foot:** curl your toes downwards. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left foot.

7. Relaxation activity - Total stretching

Stretching your muscles can help to decrease tension. Stretching exercises are very convenient since you can do them anywhere and anytime.

This exercise will take: 10 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Stand up or do this exercise in your chair.
- Take a deep breath, all the way down to the bottom of your stomach, and slowly let it out.
- As you exhale, feel the tension drain from your body.
- Take one more breath and hold it for a moment... and let it out slowly.
- With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.
- Now, gently reach your arms out to the sides as though you were trying to touch the walls.
- Relax your shoulders and stretch yourself a little.
- Gently reach your arms out in front of you.
- Feel the muscles in your back and shoulders loosen up.
- Stretch out in front a little further.
- And now reach up as high as you can.
- Push up your arms towards the sky, as if you were trying to reach the sun.
- Again, reach your arms out to the sides as though you were trying to touch the walls, as though you were trying to push them outwards.
- Reach out in front of you.
- Feel your muscles in your back and shoulders become looser and less tense.
- Reach towards the sky one more time.
- Reach as high as you can.
- Try to touch the sun.
- Lower your arms to your sides.
- Now, roll your shoulders back.
- Feel the tension drain from your body.
- Roll your shoulders back again. One more time roll your shoulders.
- Now roll them forward. Forward again. One more time forward.
- Now shrug your shoulders, lifting them up and then pushing them down. Shrug your shoulders again. Shrug them one more time.
- Now another deep and refreshing breath and exhale all of the tension in your body.
- Take one more breath...and exhale letting go of any remaining tension.

3. Relaxing at any time and any place

You can take some time to relax at any time of the day and in any place.

Let's look at an example

Diana: relaxing while waiting in line

Diana often feels tense when there is a long line in the store, as she is aware she still has many other things to do. She decides to do the breathing exercise while waiting in line.

Afterwards, she feels less tense.

You can also plan a specific time to relax, for example every day after lunch or while you do the washing up. You can choose whatever suits you best and if it helps, use a reminder to block out some time to relax.

Keep in Mind

- You can take some time to relax anywhere and at any time of the day.
- Set a goal: try to do a relaxation exercise at least once a day.
- Caring for someone with dementia is hard, it's understandable to feel frustrated but taking time to relax can help you feel better.
- You can plan a specific time to relax every day (if necessary, use a reminder).
- It can feel easier said than done but even a five minute exercise in the shower can make a difference.
- You will be able to reduce feelings of tension, helping you to continue caring for your family member or acquaintance for longer.

Useful links for relaxation

- The family caregiver alliance (US) have a relaxation video series that you might like to try: <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-relaxation-exercises-series-english/?via=caregiver-resources,caring-for-yourself,relaxation-and-meditation>
- Carers UK offer online sessions of yoga, pilates and other relaxation tools: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/share-and-learn->

[online-sessions?gclid=Cj0KCQjwjbyYBhCdARIsAArC6LKPEHREF-Ss6wl-UwzG2v5oS-W8RraXGlv7wnzQZB6pXViVeg8RFVsaAnbMEALw_wcB](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/carers-friends-family-coping-support/)

- MIND have a section on taking care of yourself as a carer:
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/carers-friends-family-coping-support/>
- Dementia Carers Count offer advice on relaxation:
<https://dementiacarers.org.uk/vcc/health-promotion/relaxation/>

Was this for you?

If not, there might be different reasons why relaxation was not helpful to you:

- Perhaps you could not focus on relaxing. Try again at another time.
- Maybe you like an exercise, but you need some more practice to really benefit from it. Try to do this exercise regularly.
- The exercise you chose may not have suited you. Try a different exercise.
- The exercise felt too short. Try this exercise again or do another one.

If the exercises are still not helping you after these tips, try to do an activity you enjoy. Have a look at Session 1 Making time for enjoyable activities in this part to find out which activities you may enjoy.

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