

Respite Care

Caring for another person is challenging. Taking a break every so often is important for both the physical and mental health of carers. In the September 2013 edition of *The Parkinsonian* we talked about getting funding for respite services. In this edition we talk about arranging respite care at a residential care facility.

WHY IS RESPITE CARE IMPORTANT?

Respite care is important for both the person being cared for and the carer.

Caring for a friend or loved one can be hard work. From time to time you might need a break to allow you to take some time to attend a special event, follow an interest or just have some time where you aren't responsible for anyone but yourself.

Respite also gives the person you care for a break and a change of scenery. By spending this time in a care facility they will meet new people, have a change to their routine and be involved in different activities they may not otherwise have an opportunity to try.

Once the respite care is over you will have new stories and experiences to share with each other.

HOW IS RESPITE CARE FUNDED?

The Ministry of Health provides two types of funding. To see if you qualify for a subsidy, and to determine how much you are eligible for you will need to be assessed by a Needs Assessment Service Coordination (NASC) organisation. Your Parkinson's Community Educator, GP or local DHB can give you details of who to contact in your area. The assessor will advise you how many days you are eligible for. For further details about funding please see *The Parkinsonian* September 2013.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TAKE RESPITE CARE?

This will be somewhat dependant on the allocation of days you have been given. Respite care breaks take quite a bit of time to plan and pack for so you probably want to take at least a couple of days each time. You should aim to spread the breaks across the year to ensure you get a break when you need it. Make sure you use up your allocation each year as your respite days don't get carried over to following years.

HOW TO CHOOSE A FACILITY

You can get a list of the facilities that provide respite care in your area from the NASC assessor, your Parkinson's Community Educator or your GP. It is best to phone the facility first to see if they have availability for the dates you wish to book. You can then arrange to visit the facility and meet with a staff member.

Ideally you should bring the person you are caring for along to this meeting so they can help decide which facility best suits

them. You should talk to the staff member about the needs of the person you care for. Make sure you ask them about their experience of caring for people with Parkinson's. Can residents manage their own medications? If not, what systems do they have in place to ensure medications are given to people with Parkinson's on time? You may like to take a copy of Parkinson's New Zealand's wallet card *Get it on time* which explains why timing of medications is so important for people with Parkinson's. If you feel the facility staff are not knowledgeable enough about Parkinson's to care for your family member/friend, suggest they contact the local Parkinson's Community Educator who can arrange to run in-service training for the staff at the home.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO PREPARE FOR RESPITE CARE?

The facility you have booked will give you a list of things to pack. Make sure you label or name clothing so it doesn't get lost. Mementos from home like a family photo, favourite pillow, books or magazines might also help them feel more at home.

MEDICATIONS

Ensure you provide a list of medications and the time of day the person you care for takes them. Talk to the facility, they may ask you to get these prepared into blister packs from your pharmacist for the duration of the stay. Make sure they fully understand the need for the person with Parkinson's to get these medications on time.

SHOULD I VISIT THE PERSON I CARE FOR DURING THIS RESPITE PERIOD?

You need to ensure you have a proper break, and the person you care for needs to adapt for this time too, so visiting every day, especially during short breaks is usually not recommended. You can always call the home and ask how they are getting along. For longer stays you may want to agree to call and speak to them or visit throughout their stay. You should also ask other members of the family or friends to pop in and visit or call.