

It's OK to share the care

Finding support for older relatives and loved ones can seem like a daunting task, but help is at hand

Care is a four-letter word, and is often viewed as such by those who most need it. Older people tend to be stoic, adamant that they can cope, and often display huge resistance to any suggestion of them needing help – until something happens which leaves no alternative.

Many think that having a carer will take away their independence, but in many cases it does the opposite, and enhances their lives.

The delicate broaching of the subject and the decision to explore what would be best to put in place can take months. Sometimes this process is brought to a swift conclusion simply because the need has become a necessity rather than a precaution.

Seeking care for older relatives is not something many of us have done before. Somehow it doesn't feel right – when we were children it was our parents who cared for us. As a result, we lack the basic knowledge about how to organise a care package.

So where do you start? Here are some pointers about the different levels of care that are available to help you make the right choice.

Basic care

This is for people who don't need any help with personal care, just someone in the house for reassurance because they may get a bit wobbly and need someone to keep a watchful eye.

This level of care is appropriate for those who might need help with hearing aids, monitoring their fluid intake, cooking, driving to medical appointments, shopping, dog walking and general companionship.

Intermediate care

This is for people who need more support. The carer's duties might include: helping with personal care and hygiene; administering medication; rehabilitation; operating stair lifts, bath lifts, transfer boards, wheelchairs, zimmer frames and hospital beds; cooking; shopping; light

housekeeping; going to medical appointments, and social events; pet care; walks and companionship.

Complex care

This level of care is needed for people who have a debilitating illness such as dementia or are suffering the after-effects of a stroke or heart attack. The carer's duties may include: help with administering medication; end-of-life care; personal care; night calls; waking or sleeping night care and bed baths.

They will be experienced with operating standing or ceiling hoists; catheter care; stoma care; commodes; hospital beds; rehabilitation; taking blood tests and slide sheets. They will also be able to cook from scratch, provide administrative support and help with shopping. ➤