



# A story of being a carer

Ivan had been a carer to his wife Margie for the past four years. Ever since her car accident he had watched her struggle to do things that used to come so easily to her. He suffered with her as she realised that things were getting worse but inside he also worried. How much worse could things get before he could no longer cope with her?

After Margie was in bed that night, Ivan rang his daughter. She was a good support to him and he updated her on the week's events. As he talked he could hear his own voice getting louder and sounding more frustrated. The day had been long and difficult and Ivan cringed as he heard himself share how he lost his temper at Margie over dinner.

Guilt was part of his daily life now. He felt guilty about not being the perfect husband when she was so helpless, but he also felt guilty that no matter what he did, it was never enough and he could never make her better.

As Ivan talked he realised he felt angry that the focus was always on Margie and her needs. Ivan couldn't remember the last time that any of his needs were discussed, much less met. His need for intimacy, a break from the routine, even a coffee with his friends felt long gone.

The losses in his own life were mounting up along with the medical bills and Ivan despaired for the future.

## Things you can do to help yourself

- Dealing with difficult feelings can be overwhelming and lead you to act in ways that you don't like. Talking to someone is the key way that many carers say has helped them cope.
- Join a support group. You will meet others in a similar situation; get information; find understanding and have a break away from the routine.
- Talk to a counsellor who understands and can work with you to give you the encouragement, support and ideas to improve your situation. The TOMNET Professional Support Team can assist you with counselling and referrals.
- Plan to keep your own health in good shape. Get regular exercise, sleep and nutritious food.

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- Learn to relax by listening to music, meditating or using relaxation exercises.
- Find a way to laugh. Read a funny story, watch a comedy at the movies or invite a fun friend over.
- Keep your own identity separate from the person you care for. You still need your friends, your interests and your plans. Don't feel guilty about engaging in these just because the person you care for can no longer participate. Your life has value too.

## What else can help?

Becoming a carer can happen in stages or it may happen all at once. A gradual caring role that gets more and more involved can mean you don't realise the small changes that are happening to your life. One day you may realise that your life is not what you expected it to be and feelings of resentment can take over.

Feeling resentful at times is a normal part of caring and it may feel worse if you think about your old life all the time. Sometimes friends and family forget that you still need their support. They think you are used to it and they need reminding that you still need them to ask about you.

- Taking a break from caring is crucial if you want to maintain your own mental and physical health. The break may be taken in your own house or away from it. You may need a few hours, a day, overnight or longer. It might be a regular weekly event or something that happens once a year.
- Contact the Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre on 1800 052 222 to discuss the respite options available for you and the person you care for.


## When you stop being a carer

Your caring role may stop if you move someone into residential care or adjust to their death. Feelings of guilt that you are now relieved of the responsibility of caring are normal and often happen at the same time as you miss their companionship.

You have not failed if you cannot provide care at home any longer. The decision of what is best for everyone is not made easily. Only you can decide if the responsibility of caring is too much for you. You can still be a valuable and important person to a person living in a residential facility.

**You will have good and bad days but speaking to other men or a member of the TOMNET Professional Support Team is one step towards being heard and supported.**

## The TOMNET Centre

 **(07) 4638 9080**

223 Hume St Toowoomba QLD 4350  
PO BOX 7801 Toowoomba QLD 4350

Email: [tomnet05@tomnetinc.org.au](mailto:tomnet05@tomnetinc.org.au)

### Open:

Monday - Thursday 9:00am - 4:00pm  
Friday 9:00am - 3:00pm

**FOR IMMEDIATE HELP, call:**

**Lifeline 13 11 14**

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**Talk to us. We understand.**  
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