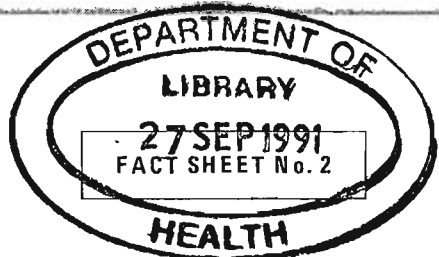


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National Council  
for the Aged



QLV : QEE 4A



CARERS:  
YOU MATTER  
TOO!

Prepared for The National Council for the Aged by PROF. JOYCE O'CONNOR and DR. HELEN RUDDLE  
to assist family carers of elderly people.

## TAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF

Another important step in taking care of yourself is to set aside, during each day, some time which is reserved solely for doing things for yourself. We all need periods of relaxation and renewal in our lives, which are not always easy to make time for.

As a caregiver, the notion of taking time for yourself may seem unrealistic. If you are committed to looking after yourself, then you will find some time in the day – even if it is only ten minutes – which you can devote to something that gives you real satisfaction.

**IT MAY BE USEFUL TO ENLIST THE HELP OF OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS TO GO THROUGH THIS FACT SHEET WITH YOU.**

**How much time do you have to yourself in a typical day? In a typical week?**

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**If you have time for yourself, how do you use it?**

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**What would you like to do during this free time?**

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## **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR FEELINGS**

An important part of taking care of yourself involves learning to deal with your feelings. Your ability to cope with your feelings not only affects your own emotional and physical well-being, but also affects your relationship with others around you, including the person you are catering for.

### **Pleasant Feelings**

Carers experience a range of emotions towards the elderly person in their care. Some of these are comfortable feelings such as love, devotion, concern. These comfortable feelings may be tinged with sadness that the elderly person is no longer as he/she used to be.

### **Unpleasant Feelings**

As well as the comfortable feelings, you may also, however, experience uncomfortable feelings such as anger or resentment. You may at times feel helpless or guilty that you cannot fulfil the elderly person's

every need. You may feel frightened of the changes that are taking place. Because these feelings are uncomfortable, carers often do not talk about them. However, in dealing with feelings, it is very important to remember that they do not go away by ignoring them.

### **Acknowledge and Accept Feelings**

It is only by acknowledging and accepting your feelings, by realising that they are normal, valid reactions to life events and by expressing them openly that you can come to terms with them. Friends, close family members, and support groups for carers can all be of value in giving you the opportunity to openly talk about the feelings you experience in caring.

## **KEEPING UP YOUR SOCIAL CONTACTS**

Like everyone else, carers also need to have a satisfying social life. It is only the rare individual who is satisfied with complete isolation. Social contact helps to prevent stress, helps us to relax, to get

involved in interests outside of working life, and provides opportunities to share our joys and concerns with others.

## WHAT KIND OF SOCIAL LIFE?

People differ in the kind of social life they find most satisfactory. You may like a very active life with many people involved, or you may prefer a quiet evening with one close friend. Whatever your preference, the important thing is that you make an effort to keep your social contacts.

You may need to involve other family members or friends to ensure that you get regular breaks from caregiving. The following describes the kinds of people who make a supportive social network. Go through the list and check how many you have available to you at the moment.

### DO YOU HAVE SOMEONE:

YES NO

- upon whom you can depend in a crisis?

### DO YOU HAVE SOMEONE:

YES

NO

- with whom you can discuss concerns or worries?

- to whom you feel close?

- who makes you feel competent and of value?

- who can give you important information you need?

- who will challenge you to sit up and take a good look at yourself?

- with whom you can share good or bad news?

- who will give you constructive feedback?

- who will help you out with daily routines?

Are there gaps in your social network? Maybe you have found that you are dependent on one or two people, or that all your contacts are of one kind. If you are dissatisfied with what you have discovered, think about the steps you might take to get the kind of social network you need.

**Steps I can take**

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## Notice what is causing you stress

One of the first steps in reducing stress is to become aware of those situations in your life that are causing it. Below are listed some common causes of stress among caregivers. Check through the list for those that apply to you and add any others that occur to you.

Source of Stress	APPLIES	DOES NOT APPLY	DO NOT KNOW
● Not knowing for how long you are going to be a caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Having had the decision of caring forced on you rather than having freely chosen it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Being of advanced age or having ill-health yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Not having the training or the information you need to provide care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Sources of Stress

Sources of Stress	APPLIES	DOES NOT APPLY	DO NOT KNOW
● Lack of free time for yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Loss of freedom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Changes in family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Family conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Competing demands between your role as a carer and other roles in your life (eg. your role as a husband/wife/friend)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Loss of social contacts and social life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Sources of Stress

_____	APPLIES	DOES NOT APPLY	DO NOT KNOW
● Feelings of guilt _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Financial losses or difficulties _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Changes in the elderly person's personality _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Lack of sleep _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Need a break from caring _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Look over those sources of stress which you have checked as applying to you. For each stressful situation, note down what steps you might begin to take to relieve the situation. **THINK ABOUT THE STRENGTHS YOU HAVE THAT WILL HELP YOU.**

### THINK ABOUT WHOM YOU COULD CALL ON TO GIVE HELP AND SUPPORT.

Note down what obstacles might come in your way and think about different ways of overcoming these obstacles.

#### Ways of overcoming obstacles

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Other family members will have their own ties with the elderly person and may welcome feeling needed and having the opportunity to be involved in care-giving.

**Write down the names of all family members, friends, neighbours, and members of the clergy, from whom you are getting support at present, or whom you feel would be willing to give help.**

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**Write a list of all the help you would like**

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Look over the two lists and see whom you can ask to give you the different kinds of help you need. Think about how you can ask for that help, and how you can let others know what sources of support they are, or can be, for you.

It may be useful to regularly bring family members together to talk about the needs of the elderly person, the kind of care involved, and your needs as the primary carer. The family could then explore together how the tasks of caregiving might be shared out.

## **USE WHATEVER SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE**

While the support of family, friends, and neighbours is vital in making the carer's task manageable, they cannot always provide all the help that is needed. Sometimes the carer needs the specialised skills and expertise available through formal supports such as medical care, legal or social services.

## **INVOLVING OTHERS**

You may find yourself having mixed feelings about involving 'outsiders' in the care of the elderly person. You may be pessimistic about the help they can provide, or you may feel guilty about strangers taking over some caregiving tasks.

It is useful to remember, however, that these services can strengthen your ability to look after the elderly person:

- **BY PROVIDING YOU WITH SPECIALISED HELP**
- **BY GIVING YOU MORE TIME FOR YOURSELF**
- **BY REDUCING THE STRESS YOU EXPERIENCE IN CARING**
- **BY INCREASING THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE ELDERLY PERSON IN YOUR CARE**

The following is a list of services which could be of use to you. Check which ones are available in your area.

Service	AVAIL- ABLE	NOT AVAIL- ABLE	DO NOT KNOW
● Home-help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Meals-on-wheels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Public health nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Occupational therapist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Chiropodist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Social worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Home alteration or modifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Medical aids (eg. walking frames)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Service

Service	AVAIL- ABLE	NOT AVAIL- ABLE	DO NOT KNOW
● Laundry service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Financial allowances payable to carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Financial allowances payable to the elderly person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Travel assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Hospital services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Nursing homes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Respite services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Day-care centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Long-term care facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Service

	AVAIL- ABLE	NOT AVAIL- ABLE	DO NOT KNOW
● Clubs/societies/recreation programmes for the elderly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Support or self-help group for carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Crime prevention programme (eg. Neighbourhood Watch)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Legal services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explore what formal supports are available in your area. Talk to your doctor, public health nurse, or social worker about local community services that may be helpful to you. Find out from them about eligibility requirements and how to make applications. If there is a support group in your area, they may be able to give you the information you require.

## TACKLING PROBLEMS

Your life as a caregiver is more likely to be easier if you learn to tackle the problems that arise in a systematic manner. Some of the steps involved in effective problem-solving are outlined below. Take some problem that you are currently experiencing and write down how you could take steps to help solve this problem.

**PROBLEM** ▷ Write down what the problem is and decide what you are going to do.

### EXAMPLE

*"I have a terrible pain in my back. I am in pain all the time and have to be careful."*

**POSSIBLE ACTION** ▷ Go to the doctor.

Well, not really. You see, the real problem is:  
*"I find it impossible to lift my mother out of bed to let her go to the toilet and to get dressed."*

continued overleaf

## DEFINE WHAT THE REAL PROBLEM IS

*"The real problem here is that I found I cannot lift my mother out of bed. What can I do?"*

## THINK OF DIFFERENT WAYS OF TACKLING THE PROBLEM

*"Ask my neighbour? Ask my G.P.?"*

## THINK AGAIN: WOULD THESE SOLUTIONS WORK?

*"They are really no help, as I need to do it at odd times. If only I knew the way to do it. The Public Health Nurse does it so easily."*

## PUT PLAN INTO ACTION

*"I know! I'll ask her to show me how to lift my mother without injuring myself.  
I should see my G.P. also, to make sure my back is O.K."*

## MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR ACTION

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

## BETWEEN YOU AND THE

## ELDERLY PERSON

The kind of communication between you and the elderly person in your care will greatly affect the relationship between you.

Sometimes we have feelings and hide them because we think that it is better not to let others know about them. This can happen, especially with people very close to us and with whom we are emotionally involved.

Be careful about hiding your feelings. It is very good to share your feelings with others as well as with the elderly person you are looking after.

Answer these questions for yourself:

- |  | WILL TELL THEM           |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | YES                      | NO                       | YES                      | NO                       |
| ● Do you often feel taken for granted by the elderly person? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

			WILL TELL THEM	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
● Do you feel you are sometimes being emotionally blackmailed by the elderly person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Do you feel sometimes you are being manipulated by the elderly person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Do you feel you need to discuss your financial situation because you have financial worries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your answer is "YES" to any of the above, you need to think about yourself and how these feelings are dragging you down. For your own sake, and that of the elderly person, you need to work out a way of handling these types of situations and feelings. You need to find a way of letting the elderly person know what your feelings are. Ask the advice of a third party about this if necessary.

You may find the following guidelines useful in improving communications between you and the person for whom you are caring.

- Show that you are listening by, for example, looking directly at the person and by responding to him/her. *Really listen.*
- Check with the person that the message you are getting is the one he/she intended to send.
- Pay attention to non-verbal clues, such as the elderly person's tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, the way he/she is sitting.
- Look for hidden meanings. Maybe he/she is trying to tell you something in a round-about way.
- Let the other person know that you empathize with what he/she is feeling.
- Encourage the elderly person. Assure him/her you want to talk or listen.
- Speak distinctly, keeping your hands or objects such as books or cigarettes away from your mouth.
- Talk in a quiet place.

- Repeat what you have said, using different words which have the same meaning.
- Talk directly to the elderly person, face-to-face.
- Take your time, presenting one thought at a time.
- Avoid incomplete messages.
- Use tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures, to make your message as clear as possible.
- Watch out that you are not giving one message with your words and another with your body language.
- Let the elderly person know how you feel, using "messages". For example: *"I feel in good form"*, or *"I don't care for that, very much"*.
- Take account of the fact that there may be differences in experience and attitudes between you and the elderly person.
- Do not talk-down to the elderly person. Be attentive and honest with him/her and with yourself.

- Often elderly people tell stories about events and people in the past. It can be hard to sit and listen to the same stories over and over. It may help to remember that these stories or "life-review" have an important function for the elderly person. They help the person to find meaning and purpose in life and to establish a sense of continuity between the past and present. They may also help him/her to resolve something in the past, or to come to some conclusion about events. It may help, also, to find someone else (a friend, for example) to sit and listen to the elderly person occasionally.

## WHAT ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL CARE?

You may wish to consider whether the elderly person may need to go into care for a short stay to enable you to get a break. Sometimes, the decision whether or not the elderly person should be placed in institutional care, be it long-term or short-term, is the most difficult that has to be faced by the caregiver, the elderly person, and others involved. The

support services available may no longer be sufficient to ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly person, or you, the carer, may no longer be able to carry on through illness or exhaustion.

The following guidelines may help in making your decisions:

- Consult with the elderly person, family members, and your doctor or public health nurse in developing a plan for the best care of the person.
- Take note of those areas where the elderly person can look after him/herself, and where he/she is dependent on others.
- Take note of the areas where you can provide adequate care, and areas that you cannot cope with.
- Explore all the support services available, and see whether there are areas of care still not being catered for.
- For further advice and information, contact your health board, talk to your doctor and/or your local public health nurse.

- Check out different kinds of institutional care available: short-term, long-term, day-care centres.
- Use all available information, including The National Council for the Aged's Fact Sheets to help in making your decision.
- Decide with the elderly person what is to be done with household articles, furniture, and personal articles.
- Decide how financial matters are to be handled. You may need to get advice on such matters as "power of attorney".
- Try to ensure that the elderly person still remains part of family life as much as possible.
- The need for institutional care, whether short- or long-term, should be periodically re-evaluated.



**T**his Fact Sheet has described different needs which you as a carer are likely to be experiencing, and has made suggestions for how you might set about satisfying those needs.

Looking after yourself is vital not only for you personally but also for the person who is depending on you for care.

## WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF?

Think over the different issues raised in this Fact Sheet. Use the following pages to describe what action you can take now in relation to each issue.

What have you decided to do?

- Adopt a positive approach

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- Take time for yourself

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- Are you eating properly?

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- Have you a means of relaxation?

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- Are you taking exercise?

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● Find support for yourself

● What about institutional care?

● What causes you stress?

● Treat yourself

● Pay attention to your feelings

● Keep up social contacts

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE AGED  
Corrigan House, Fenian Street, Dublin 2.  
Telephone: (01) 766484/5.

THE CARERS' ASSOCIATION  
c/o 68/71 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1.  
Telephone: (01) 727666 ext. 212.

THE ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF IRELAND  
St. John of God, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin.  
Telephone: (01) 881781.

FRIENDS OF THE ELDERLY  
7 Charlemont Street, Dublin 2.  
Telephone: (01) 536455/755744/755500.

NATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD  
71 Lr. Leeson Street, Dublin 2.  
Tel: 616422

### EASTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Dun Laoghaire Our Lady's Clinic,  
Patrick Street,  
Dun Laoghaire.  
Tel: 808403

Dublin Vergemount Hall,  
South East Dublin 6.  
Tel. 698222

Dublin Carnegie Buildings,  
South Central 21/25 Lord Edward St.,  
Dublin 2.  
Tel: 792611

Dublin 57 Old County Road,  
South West Crumlin, Dublin 12.  
Tel: 542511

Dublin West The Lodge,  
Cherry Orchard Hospital,  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10.  
Tel: 268101

Dublin Rathdown Road,  
North West Upper Grangegorman,  
Dublin 7.  
Tel: 302462/303444/302171

Dublin Aras Daimhin, Jones's Road,  
North Central Dublin 3.  
Tel. 731777

Dublin North Cromcastle Road,  
Coolock, Dublin 5.  
Tel: 476122/476819/476141

Kildare Poplar House, Poplar Square,  
Naas.  
Tel: (045) 76001/97414

Wicklow Glenside Road, Wicklow.  
Tel: (0404) 68400

### MIDLAND HEALTH BOARD

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Laois Courthouse, Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois.  
Tel: (0502) 21135

Offaly Health Centre, Tullamore,  
Co. Offaly.  
Tel: (0506) 41301

Longford County Clinic, Longford,  
Co. Longford.  
Tel: (043) 46211

Westmeath County Clinic, Mullingar,  
Co. Westmeath.  
Tel: (044) 40221

### MID-WESTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Limerick 31/33 Catherine Street,  
Limerick, Co. Limerick.  
Tel: (061) 316655

Tipperary John's Place, Nenagh,  
North Co. Tipperary.  
Tel: (067) 31212

Clare County Clinic,  
Bindon Street, Ennis,  
Co. Clare.  
Tel: (065) 28525

#### NORTH-EASTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Meath	County Clinic, Navan, Co. Meath. Tel: (046) 21595
Louth	Community Care Centre, Dublin Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth. Tel: (042) 32287
Cavan	County Clinic, Cavan, Co. Cavan. Tel: (049) 31822
Monaghan	Roosky, Co. Monaghan. Tel: (047) 81333

#### NORTH-WESTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Sligo	Cleveragh Road, Sligo, and Markievicz House, Sligo, Co. Sligo. Tel. (071) 60222 (both)
Leitrim	Community Care Offices, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim. Tel: (078) 20308
Donegal	Community Care Offices, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal. Tel: Ballybofey 391

#### SOUTH-EASTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Carlow	S.E.H.B. Offices, Dublin Road, Co. Carlow. Tel: (0503) 31691
Kilkenny	County Clinic, James Green, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny. Tel: (056) 21208
Tipperary South	County Clinic, Western Rd., Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. Tel: (052) 22011
Waterford	S.E.H.B. Offices, 32 The Mall, Waterford, Co. Waterford. Tel: (051) 76111
Wexford	County Clinic, Grogan's Road, Wexford, Co. Wexford. Tel: (053) 23522

#### SOUTHERN HEALTH BOARD

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Cork North Lee	Floor 4, Abbeycourt House, George's Quay, Cork. Tel: (021) 965511
Cork South Lee	Floor 3, Abbeycourt House, George's Quay, Cork. Tel: (021) 965511

North Cork	Gouldshill House, Mallow, Co. Cork. Tel: (022) 22220
West Cork	Hospital Grounds, Skibbereen, Co. Cork. Tel: (028) 21014/21722.
Kerry	19 Denny Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry. Tel: (066) 21566

#### WESTERN HEALTH BOARD

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Galway	Community Care Offices, Newcastle Road, Galway. Tel: (091) 23122/23115
Mayo	County Clinic, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Tel: (094) 22333
Roscommon	Community Care Offices, Roscommon. Tel: (0903) 6518/6665/6604

## HINTS FROM A CARER

1. I am an amateur artist and I find this pastime an enormous boon. Painting can take you out of yourself and make you completely forget about everything but the picture you are creating. My art has kept me sane, and I can sell my pictures too. So, get going at something you are good at: painting, knitting, embroidery, furniture restoring, anything which can be done from home. The benefits are endless.
2. Keep in touch with friends. Invite them over for coffee. They will show interest in whatever craft or activity you are doing. Become involved with your local Residents' Association. You could even hold their meetings in your house. Do home-typing for local organisations. Join a political party and, even though you may not be able to attend branch meetings, you can do a little local canvassing or address envelopes. Keep in touch with members and your neighbours. In other words, keep your name in circulation before a wide range of people. Don't drop out of the social scene.
3. Buy or borrow all the newspapers and magazines you can and keep up-to-date with the latest news, events, new shops opening, fashions, social trends.
4. Treat yourself to something small every day: a bar of chocolate maybe, or a paperback book, perhaps. Reward yourself. This will give you something to look forward to and will help lift your spirits.
5. Become a bookworm! Use your local library to the full and read endlessly different authors and different styles of books. Knowledge is a powerful source of pleasure and entertainment. Catch the reading habit.

PRICE: 50p