

GUIDE · 8 MIN READ

Caring for elderly parents: a UK starter guide

You've just realised mum or dad needs more help. Here's what to do in the first 30 days — in roughly the order that works.

The first conversation

Most families avoid this one until a crisis forces it. Have it earlier, in a calm moment — over a cup of tea, not over a hospital bed.

- Ask open questions: 'How are you finding things at the moment?' rather than 'You're struggling, aren't you?'
- Listen for what they're worried about losing — independence, the house, driving, dignity. Those fears shape every decision that follows.
- Agree one small next step together (a GP check, a hearing test, a stairlift quote) instead of trying to fix everything at once.
- Loop in siblings early. Decisions made by one child alone tend to come unstuck.

Get the legal admin sorted while they can

Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) has to be set up while the person still has mental capacity. Leave it too late and the family has to apply to the Court of Protection — slow, expensive, stressful.

- Set up both types of LPA: Health & Welfare, and Property & Financial Affairs. They're separate documents.
- Register them with the Office of the Public Guardian (it takes 8–10 weeks — do not wait for a crisis).
- Check for an existing will. If there isn't one, gently raise it.

- Note down account numbers, pension providers, and where key documents live. A simple shared folder saves weeks later.

Claim what they're entitled to

UK benefits for older people are massively under-claimed. Billions go unclaimed every year because nobody told the family they qualified.

- Attendance Allowance — £73.90 or £110.40 per week (2024/25) for people over State Pension age who need help with personal care. Not means-tested.
- Pension Credit — tops up low incomes and unlocks free TV licence (75+), Council Tax reduction, and Cold Weather Payments.
- Carer's Allowance — £81.90 per week (2024/25) if you care for someone 35+ hours and earn under £151 after tax.
- Council Tax discount — single-person, severely mentally impaired, or live-in carer discounts.
- Blue Badge, free bus pass, and NHS prescription exemption (60+ in England, all ages in Wales/Scotland/NI).

Ask the council for a needs assessment

This is free, legally required, and the gateway to most non-medical help. Anyone can request one — you don't need a diagnosis.

- Phone the local council's Adult Social Care team and ask for a Care Needs Assessment for your parent.
- Ask for a separate Carer's Assessment for yourself — same number, different document.
- The assessment looks at washing, dressing, meals, mobility, mental health, loneliness, and risk.
- Outcomes can include: a personal budget, day-centre placements, equipment, adaptations, respite care.

Build a safety net at home

Most older adults want to stay in their own home. Small changes prevent the falls and infections that lead to hospital admissions.

- Book a home falls check via the GP — they can refer to community OT for grab rails, raised toilet seats, and stair assessments.
- Sort a personal alarm (pendant or fall-detection watch). Age UK, Taking Care, and Lifeline 24 all offer one in the UK.
- Set up a weekly pill organiser, or ask the pharmacy about blister packs (most do them free for older customers).
- Agree a daily check-in: a 9am phone call, a smart speaker drop-in, or a neighbour with a spare key.

Look after yourself — properly, not as an afterthought

Carer burnout is the single biggest reason a parent ends up in residential care earlier than they had to. Protecting yourself protects them.

- Tell your own GP you're a carer — it goes on your record and unlocks flu jabs, mental health support, and flexible appointments.
- Register with your local Carers Centre (free). They offer counselling, peer groups, and emergency cover.
- Take respite before you need it. A week off every quarter is sustainable; a breakdown is not.
- Keep one thing in your week that has nothing to do with caring. A class, a walk, a friend. Non-negotiable.

Keep it all in one place

The Care Companion organises the benefits checklist, GP prep, council contacts, finances, and red flags in one calm dashboard — so you stop juggling notes apps and screenshots. 7-day free trial, £3.99/month after.

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Free guide from The Care Companion — practical tools for families caring for someone with dementia. More guides at thecarecompanion.com/guides