

# Sweet Life

Edition 1

“Every  
**CARE**  
journey is  
unique”

*Barry Sweetbaum*

## In this issue

- Staying well with dementia
- 3 questions for family carers
- Meet Joe – our featured client
  - Positive risk taking
  - Cultivating confidence
  - Food for the brain



**SweetTree**  
Home Care Services

National  
Dementia  
Carers Day  
13 September 2015

# National Dementia Carers' Day 2015

## Sunday 13th September

To live well with dementia means having the right care. It's time to recognise and share what it means to be a dementia carer.

National Dementia Carers' Day is a UK-wide awareness day, falling within World Alzheimer's Month. National Dementia Carers' Day 2015 will take place on Sunday 13th September.

There are over 800,000 people today living with dementia, many of whom are cared for by loved ones, friends and other important people in their lives. National Dementia Carers' Day has been created to recognise and celebrate the vital role of informal dementia carers.

National Dementia Carers' Day has been founded by a coalition of partners, including Dementia UK, Alzheimer's Society and SweetTree Home Care Services. The founders are all dedicated to improving quality of life for those living with dementia, but also the quality of life of those caring for a loved one living with the condition.

Join in and support National Dementia Carers' Day. Find out more at:

[www.nationaldementiacarersday.org.uk](http://www.nationaldementiacarersday.org.uk)

[@Dementia\\_Carers](https://twitter.com/Dementia_Carers)



Alzheimer's  
Society  
Leading the  
fight against  
dementia

 SweetTree  
Home Care Services

Dementia UK  
Improving quality of life

# Contents

● <b>Expertise:</b> Staying well with dementia	4	● <b>Hot topic:</b> Positive risk taking	12
● <b>Advice:</b> Three questions for family carers	6	● <b>Spotlight:</b> Care farming in focus	14
● <b>How to:</b> Finance your care	8	● <b>Brain break:</b> Mindfulness explained	16
● <b>Caring conversation:</b> Meet Joe and Jairo	10	● <b>Networks:</b> Community living	18
● <b>Lifestyle:</b> Food for the brain	11		

## Foreword

by Barry Sweetbaum

Welcome to the first edition of *Sweet Life*, a forum for the SweetTree team of professionals to share with the community their deep experience and knowledge of caring for people with age related frailty, dementia, a brain injury, learning disability, neurological condition or palliative care need.

In this issue the team talks about caring for people with dementia, how important 'self-care' is for family carers, the joys of care farming, and the ways in which supporting people to take risks can be a powerful way of showing you care. At the heart of all of these conversations, and the thread that unites all of the talented people sharing their expertise in these pages, is the recognition that every care journey is unique and matters.

At SweetTree we believe that all individuals in our care should be empowered to determine how they live their life. We make great effort to match our carers with clients according to their respective passions and interests, and constantly adapt our services to nurture expression of personality and ambition. Sometimes things don't work out as we would like, and sometimes we shine in unexpected ways. Regardless, empathy and understanding must remain at the core of who we are and our relationship with those around us.

We are always grateful for the warmth and brilliance of the clients, staff, families and friends who make up our world here at SweetTree and hope you find this edition of *Sweet Life* to be both informative and stimulating. As always at SweetTree, your feedback would be welcome.

*Thank you for reading.*

*Barry*

Barry Sweetbaum

Founder

barry.sweetbaum@sweettree.co.uk



To subscribe to future editions of *Sweet Life* please email us at [sweetlife@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:sweetlife@sweettree.co.uk) or contact the office on 020 7624 9944.

# STAYING WELL

## With Dementia

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and holding on to community connections is key to dealing positively with dementia.

You've probably heard the phrase, 'Living Well With Dementia' a lot in the last few years. In public education initiatives, national policy, and health and wellbeing services, the term is used to reflect not only an increasing interest in improving outcomes for people with dementia, but also a growing body of knowledge that surrounds the disease, how it develops, and how carers and support services can improve the lives of people experiencing it.

But the reality for people with dementia, and their carers, is that 'Living Well' can some days feel like a stretch. The cognitive degeneration that accompanies dementia is challenging and confronting, the lifestyle changes it triggers are many and significant, and the disease can affect the wellness of a whole family or community.

*"But a dementia diagnosis does not mean you shrink away!"* says Rikki Lorenti, SweetTree Admiral Nurse. *"At every transition along the disease's path, people must work to maintain as much of their functioning as possible. Stay well, eat well, exercise, and hold onto those social connections that make you who you are."*



### Make Staying Healthy a Priority

Dementia will affect many corners of a person's life, and individuals and their carers must prioritise preventative health amidst a tide of gradual lifestyle changes. Sleep, nutrition, exercise, and maintaining medical wellness become more challenging in a dementia context, and preparing your family and home to address this challenge is a positive leap towards living well with the disease.

*"After a good dinner, one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations."* – Oscar Wilde

A healthy and hydrating diet is the foundation of physical and mental wellbeing, as is retaining the emotional joy of eating good food. Regular snacks and small meals of enjoyable, tasty foods can be preferable to large, set meals for people with dementia. Individuals may respond to sweet flavours more acutely, so fruits, sweet sauces and chutneys can substitute for high-sugar foods. Colourful, useful dining aids and adapted crockery can also make mealtimes simpler and more enjoyable. From special straws to easy-grip cutlery, dementia-specific eating tools are widely available.



*"An early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day."*

Henry David Thoreau

Regular exercise can alleviate stress and can help to promote feelings of happiness through the production of endorphins. Walking, gardening, or participating in the outdoors can have the added impact of stimulating the delights of being in nature, the sun, and the rain – great human joy can be found in simply feeling the rain! Seated and indoor exercise with the help of a CD or video can also tick endorphin boxes, and just 30 minutes of exercise is known to help cognitive function.

*"Sleep is the best meditation."* – The Dalai Lama

It's important that people with dementia get enough sleep, and good sleep practices can help to minimise restlessness, discomfort, and disorientation. Reducing daytime naps, maintaining physical exercise, keeping regular sleep and waking times, and avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evenings are great steps towards decent rest. Pain due to secondary conditions may also be a factor affecting sleep – be alert for the need for possible pain relief, especially in the morning on waking.



## Keep an Interesting Calendar

Whether going out or staying in, engaging in meaningful activities prevents boredom, supports a quality of life, and encourages stimulation and natural conversation.

*"The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance." – Alan Watts*

Thanks to an increasing awareness of the positive effects of cognitive stimulation activities for people with dementia, groups and occupational services for people with the condition are increasingly open for participation. 'Memory cafés', care farms, pet therapy groups, and initiatives such as 'Singing for the Brain' provide a friendly and supportive environment for people with dementia and their carers.

*"We are what we repeatedly do." – Aristotle*

When dementia enters the home, the use of lists, calendars, and memory aids become an automatic response to the effects of the disease. What is less automatic is the populating of the weekly calendar with activities and plans. Socialising with family and friends, working, enjoying music, visiting favourite places, reading, playing board games, engaging in crafts and hobbies, or going out for lunch or coffee are all good for the brain and the soul.

*"People might forget what you said, but they never forget how you made them feel." – Maya Angelou*

For many people with dementia, emotional memories of past experiences and places can have a powerful effect, even where detailed memories have faded. Simple sensory experiences such as smelling foods cooked in childhood, feeling rain on the skin, or the warmth of a pet can recall great emotional joy. Add sensory recall to your revisiting of photos and scrapbooks.



## Simplify Self Care

Maintaining practices of self care is key to the maintenance of independence for people with dementia. Carers and support workers can make a significant impact by simplifying daily rituals of washing, dressing, and grooming, and by supporting these habits with creativity and patience.

*"Out of clutter, find simplicity." – Albert Einstein*

As a person's dementia progresses, they may find activities such as washing and bathing a source of anxiety. Making the experience as organised, but also as relaxed and pleasant as possible, can greatly reduce stress. Having everything ready before bathing – soaps, towels, combs, non-slip mats – sets up an environment of capability. Keeping a bathroom at a warm temperature, using fragrant bubble bath, or even playing relaxing music can make the experience more enjoyable than confronting. Deep bath water and sometimes overhead showers can cause some people with dementia discomfort and concern, so being attentive to small changes – shallow baths and hand-held shower fixtures – can be valuable.

*"A friend's eye is a good mirror." – Celtic proverb*

Helping a person choose how to dress is an opportunity to help them express their identity and personal style, while also keeping them comfortable, clean and warm. Laying out a small selection of simple clothes – with zips, buttons, or Velcro undone – encourages choice, as does being accepting when someone chooses to wear what might otherwise seem unusual.

**Lastly, remember and accept that your dementia journey is entirely unique. While there will always be advice, activities, and actions to take that will make your path less challenging, acceptance of what you cannot control can be like sunlight for your travels. The dementia journey is a difficult one, in particular for family members who are trying to feel their way for the first time. At SweetTree we have been privileged to support 1,000s of people with dementia through the years and are always pleased to impart our experience to those needing a little help or guidance.**



## What is an Admiral Nurse?

Admiral Nurses are specialist dementia nurses who give much-needed practical and emotional support to family carers, as well as the person with dementia. They offer support to families throughout their experience of dementia that is tailored to their individual needs and challenges. They provide families with the knowledge to understand the condition and its effects, the skills and tools to improve communication, and provide emotional and psychological support to help family carers carry on caring.

SweetTree Homecare Services, with the support of Dementia UK, are one of the first Homecare providers in the UK to develop an Admiral Nursing Service.

Families receiving care packages from SweetTree, automatically have access to the Admiral Nurse Service at

no extra cost. If you would like further information on the Admiral Nursing Service you can contact Rikki directly.

Rikki Lorenti  
SweetTree Admiral Nurse  
Rikki.lorenti@sweettree.co.uk



**Dementia UK**  
Improving quality of life

# Three Questions for Family Carers

Self care for carers is about  
less guilt and more balance

According to Carers UK, there are 6.5 million carers in Britain today. The same source estimates that 45 per cent of these people have given up work to care, 61 per cent have faced depression, and 49 per cent are struggling financially because of their caring role.

“The biggest piece of advice I can give family carers is ‘Don’t feel guilty’, says Polly Landsberg, SweetTree Care Services Manager. “Don’t feel guilty for getting frustrated, guilty for feeling angry, guilty about the things you haven’t done, or about those that you can’t.”

“Look at your caring role as a set of scales. Your life needs should be evenly balanced with those of the person you are caring for. Doing things for yourself, getting proper exercise, and looking after your own health are not reasons for yet more guilt. Let it go. Guilt is only an emotional drain, and as a carer, you need to be thinking proactively and practically about your own wellbeing to sustainably support someone else.”

Carers of people with disabilities or degenerative illnesses that require a high level of daily support should ask themselves these questions:



## 1. What's your sleep strategy?

Sleep interruption is the most commonly reported effect of being a primary carer. Caring can be stressful and sometimes relentless, and if the person you are caring for is also experiencing sleep problems, it's very likely that you too are suffering. While negative for your health and wellbeing, lack of sleep can also affect your resilience, making it harder to cope and kick-starting a vicious cycle.

- To get better rest, implement and respect a regular sleep routine; retiring and waking at the same time every day.
- Eat well and make time for light exercise. It might seem counter-intuitive to put your body through more work, but light exercise such as walking or swimming can relieve stress, help you sleep deeper, and help ease muscle tightness from lifting, bending, and physical caring.
- Take regular time out to catch up on your week's lost sleep. If you have a block of time away from your caring role, prioritise sleep over responsibilities that can be postponed. With more rest, you'll be better equipped to handle them later.

## 2. When are you going to give the person you care for a break?

When it comes to finding respite and time away from the demands of being a primary carer, consider that it is not only you who needs a break! The person you care for may also benefit from a change in company – especially if it means that you return refreshed, rested, and more able to manage.

- If the person you are caring for can participate in regular activities, day trips, and organised social groups, then take these opportunities to also have a break yourself.
- Find a system of 'replacement care' – through your local services or informally with friends and family. Having a carer to replace you for regular periods gives everyone the chance to enjoy a change.
- Find a daily ritual that you can treat as your own time. Take a regular task such as gardening and add music, radio, or an al fresco cup of tea to claim that time for yourself. If you can't take a true break from your working and caring schedule, you can look forward to some special corners of it.

## 3. How are you going to involve others?

Assumptions about what should be expected of family and friends, what is unreasonable, and what is unenjoyable for others, can be a source of unnecessary exhaustion for carers. Communication is key to understanding what care activities your family and community are capable of, what they are comfortable with, and more importantly, what they might find personally rewarding.

- Holding a 'Friends Of' meeting can help share the responsibility of caring for a loved one with other friends and family. Joining together to take care of a family member can give you a new sense of capability and confidence. It's an opportunity to focus on each of your strengths, and a chance to support one another that many families go without.
- 'Don't do anything someone else can do' should be a rule of thumb for primary caregivers! Delegating tasks such as shopping, gardening, or cleaning to friends and family is not an easy process – especially if you take pride in doing most tasks yourself – but it is vital to you being able to provide your best level of personal care.
- If you provide care to an adult friend or family member, you may be eligible for support from your local council. This might include funding for things that make caring easier, or practical support, such as arranging for someone to step in when you need a short break. Your council can also put you in touch with local support groups for yourself – where caring for carers is the order of the day.

**Caring is an expression of humanity, not a just a job! Social rules, regular routines, and personal expectations might offer us frameworks for living, but in a care context, are often unrealistic. Some days you have to let go of the challenges, care with chaos, and stay in your pyjamas. Whatever works!**

Polly Landsberg  
Care Services Manager

[polly.landsberg@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:polly.landsberg@sweettree.co.uk)



## Introduction of The Care Act

On April 1, 2015, the first stage of the new UK Care Act came into force, changing the way that local authorities carry out carer's and needs assessments, and giving carers – for the first time – the same rights as those they care for. Carers are now entitled to an assessment

regardless of their needs or financial circumstances, and may be eligible for support in their own right. For more information on your rights as a carer, and the support options available to you, visit [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) or [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org).

# How To: Finance Your Care

By Andrew Dixon-Smith, Director and Care Fees Advisor of ElderCare Solutions

Juggling the costs of receiving home care can feel like a circus act. But do your research, and speak to the right people, and you'll find balancing your business simpler than expected.

## Step 1

### Contact your council for a care assessment

If you are at the beginning of your care journey, one of your earliest actions will be to contact your Local Authority or council for an assessment of your care and support needs. If your council believes that you need support it can provide, it will also complete an assessment of your finances – a means test against national eligibility criteria.

The means test will determine how much you can afford to pay towards the cost of services, as well as how much your Local Authority might provide. Your financial assessment will consider income, tax credits, disability-related expenses, personal expenses, and your capital, such as savings and property. Currently, Local Authorities won't contribute to the cost of your home care if you have more than £23,250 in savings and property. From April 2016 this threshold will change to £27,000.

If you're not eligible for financial help from the council, or from the NHS, you'll have to fund your own care.

## Step 2

### Get advice on your care funding options

According to independent care fees specialists Eldercare Solutions Limited 85 per cent of people in the UK facing home care costs get no advice, or receive fragmented advice, about their funding options.

*"Funding the cost of care at home can be confusing and challenging,"* says Andrew Dixon-Smith, Director and Care Fees Advisor of Eldercare. *"It is critical that you understand all of your options and that your final funding plan is based on what is most suitable for you and your situation."*

You may be entitled to free financial advice from your local council, even if you are not eligible for financial assistance itself. In some circumstances it is possible to pay the council to arrange care services for you. Independent, charitable, and private advisers are also readily available to assist you in your decision-making. If it is elderly care that you are in need of, be sure to look for specialists who are 'Later Life' accredited through the Society of Later Life Advisers (SOLLA).

## Step 3

### Explore available funding models

If you are a self-funder of care, paying for all or part of your care services, there are many structures, products, and models available to you for leveraging the best outcome from your assets and income.

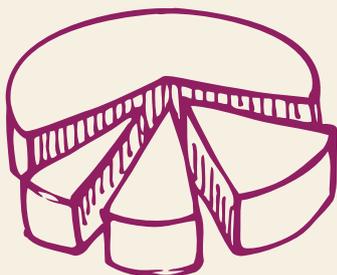
For some people, paying for care directly from the sale of assets or investment of capital may be an option, as might be 'downsizing' into a smaller home and using the profits to support care costs.

### Equity Release

One option for funding your care is an 'equity release scheme' with a financial organisation, which uses the value of your home to help pay for care services, while you live in it.

*"Today's Lifetime Mortgages – a form of equity release scheme – are tightly regulated,"* says Andrew of this form of funding. *"The rights of individuals are better protected now than in the past; new guarantees include the right to remain in your home for life, and the 'no-negative equity guarantee', which ensures that your family can never inherit your debt if your home later sells for less than an outstanding loan amount."*

Lifetime Mortgages are becoming increasingly popular, Dixon-Smith says, mainly due to the 'flexible drawdown' feature, which can allow homeowners to access regular withdrawals of cash for expenses as they arise. Unlike ordinary mortgages, he adds, a Lifetime Mortgage requires no repayments during the borrower's lifetime, and interest is charged at a fixed rate.



“It’s your care.  
And it’s your  
money. Get the  
best for yourself  
out of both.”



“A drawdown type of Lifetime Mortgage can be very useful,” says Andrew, “but the money can run out. An alternative, and in some cases more secure option, is to take a one-off lump sum and invest in a Care Fees Payment Plan.”

### Care Fees Payment Plan

Care Fees Payment Plans are ‘impaired life annuity’ plans specifically designed to meet the cost of care in your own home or in a residential care environment. A Care Fees Plan is usually employed to pay the gap between the income you have available, and the cost of your care.

“A Care Fees Plan is suitable for anyone in need of care on an indefinite basis, who wants certainty of payments for their care,” Andrew explains. “This kind of plan will pay out a guaranteed, tax-free

income for life. The lump sum cost to purchase is fully underwritten and is calculated on an individual’s age and health. In this respect they differ from standard annuities, such as those used to provide pension income.”

Impaired life annuity plans are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and are portable between care service providers. Deferred options are also available, meaning that you can defer income payments for a cheaper plan cost. Any money spent on a Care Fees Plan will also immediately reduce your estate for the purposes of any Inheritance Tax calculation



### Step 4

#### Consider who will help in your decision making

In addition to seeking the advice of your Local Authority and financial advisers, consultation with family members and loved-ones is a critical element of making care-related decisions. For some people it is also a sensible precaution to set up a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) if it is possible that at some time in the future you may not be able to look after your own affairs.

“In care funding, as with all care conversations,” says Andrew, “better outcomes are reached when the discussion is started early, when everyone is on the same page, and when the needs and wants of the individual are put at the centre of the plan.

“It’s your care. And it’s your money. Get the best for yourself out of both.”

## Choosing your care

“Choosing a quality care provider for yourself or a loved one is a life-changing decision,” says Nicki Bones, SweetTree’s Director of Operations

“Spend as much time as you can doing your research, speak to families of existing service clients, and make flexibility of service a priority. In the end, you must be fully satisfied by your choice of care, and have the freedom to make changes whenever you want. Family members should be able to trust that their loved one is in good hands. Being an equal partner in the care is an important factor for the individual themselves and their families and friends”

#### Some top tips for quality care services:

- Meet with at least three potential care providers and ask challenging questions, especially about hidden entry and exit costs. Some providers charge for the setup of care and also have termination periods and fees.
- If looking for in-home care, visit a care home for comparison, and vice versa. You might be surprised by alternative options.
- Trial service providers for a week’s respite care, to get a true sense of their services in action.
- Look for companies that invest heavily in training and development for their carers, and quiz services on their recruitment processes.
- Word of mouth is the most credible reinforcement of a quality provider – speak to friends, GPs, and other community members. Ask for the last client feedback reports and contacts for references if possible.
- Review inspection reports online at the Care Quality Commission website; [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk). It is a trove of independent feedback on services near you.

Nicki Bones,  
Director of  
Operations  
[nicki.bones@  
sweettree.co.uk](mailto:nicki.bones@sweettree.co.uk)





*“Jairo’s stimulation prompts Joe’s long-term memory and enables him to retain his identity.”*

# “Dementia doesn’t restrict my life!”

At 94, Joe’s dementia means the comforts of home and a busy calendar.

In 1939, 18-year-old electrician Joe Behrens fled war-torn Germany to live in Zambia, where he worked on a range of projects, including the country’s first open air cinema. While in Africa he met his wife Eva, and together they went on to have three sons. In 1973 the family resettled in the UK.

## Dementia diagnosis

It was when he was in his late 80s that Joe’s family first noticed signs of dementia in his behaviour, including his increasing disorientation about places. Joe was referred by his GP to Hertfordshire’s Barnet Hospital for a formal assessment, and he was finally diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease almost a year later.

## Support options

Joe and his family openly discussed his Alzheimer’s diagnosis, and have continued to work together to manage the condition as it has progressed. In November 2012, in light of Eva’s deteriorating physical

health, the family decided to contact SweetTree about possible care and flexible support options. This led to an initial period of emergency live-in care, then to blocks of short-term live-in care, tailored to Joe and Eva’s needs.

When Eva sadly passed away in April 2013, Jairo – a SweetTree team member – joined Joe as a long-term live-in carer. This support has enabled Joe to remain at home, while reducing risk and worry for his family.

“Any action we considered had to be what Joe wanted,” says Helen, Joe’s daughter-in-law. “The main benefits of the live-in care arrangement are that Joe maintains his independence, and risks relating to safety are minimised.”

Jairo helps Joe with a range of support; from managing housework, to helping with cooking and nutrition. Together, they regularly go for trips and long walks, enjoy sightseeing, and look at scrapbooks of past holidays – activities tailored

to Joe’s interests.

During the week, Jairo also assists Joe in visiting The Sam Beckman Centre – an activities centre for people with memory impairment and/or a diagnosis of a type of dementia.

“Jairo’s stimulation prompts Joe’s long-term memory and enables him to retain his identity,” Helen says. “He finds music, documentaries, and movies that Joe enjoys. It would not be possible for Joe to remain at home, where he is most content, without the live-in care that Jairo provides.”

“If you’re facing this situation yourself, be prepared and plan ahead,” Helen says to fellow family members of people living with dementia. “Be pragmatic and practical, so decisions can be made early on. Even if support isn’t needed immediately, it’s important to explore all the options.”

“Forget about it!” Joe adds. “Dementia doesn’t restrict my life.”

## Why I Care: Jairo

*"Mr Behrens and I could not come from more different backgrounds!"* laughs SweetTree live-in carer Jairo about his friend and client Joe. *"I'm from Columbia, I'm 61 years old, and both sides of my family come from very Catholic heritage - we definitely see the world from different perspectives!"*

Jairo says he knew his relationship with Joe would work from the beginning of his role within the Behrens family. "I wanted to be sure from the very start that Mr Behrens understood who I was, and that I was there to help him," he says.

"I believe that if you explain what you are doing and why you are doing it, you cement trust between people. I wouldn't work in this job if I didn't enjoy it, and Mr Behrens trusts me to do the best for him."

"I'm always asking his opinion on things; his thoughts on what I am doing and how. This means I have his blessing, and he is at the centre of his decisions."

"Mr Behrens is an intelligent and very honest man; he reads widely and watches the news. On one deep level we understand each another because we were both migrants to the UK. He arrived from Africa in 1973, I arrived in '75, and sometimes he corrects my English. He is also open-minded enough to try my green vegan vegetable smoothies!

"Not long ago a group of people asked Mr Behrens who I was, to which he replied, 'He's my brother.'"

"It was good of him to say that. In many ways, he's an older brother to me too."

# Food for the Brain

## The best nosh for your noggin

A smorgasbord of science shows that making positive changes on your plate can not only reap brain benefits by protecting against the risks of developing dementia, but may also support the brain health of people already diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment.

To get a healthier head, regularly tuck into these brain boosters:

### Oily fish, seeds and nuts

Omega-3 fatty acids play an important role in healthy brain ageing. Good sources of Omega-3 are seeds, nuts, and fresh oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and tuna. Eat oily fish three times a week or slip a fish oil supplement into your day. Fish benefits also include vitamin D - a defensive element against vitamin D deficiency, linked to memory decline.

### Veggies, olive oil and pulses

The 'Mediterranean diet' - high in vegetables, fish, olive oil, pulses, fruits and whole grains, and low in sugar, meat, dairy, and trans fats - is another brain back-up. High levels of natural antioxidant nutrients such as vitamin E, C, and phytonutrients (plant-based nutrients) pack the Mediterranean diet with neurological punch.

### Leafy greens, eggs and grains

Green leafy veggies are loaded with folate and folic acid (forms of vitamin B), eggs are little B-12 bombs, and whole unrefined grains are B-eautiful for your brain. B vitamins have been shown to lower homocysteine - a naturally occurring amino acid found in the blood, which in high levels is associated with an increased risk of dementia. B-complex supplements are available from health food shops; speak to a specialist about the best supplement for you.

### Keep the red, ditch the white

The fun news: Small amounts of alcohol, and particularly red wine (overflowing with polyphenols such as resveratrol) are proving to be positive for the brain if consumed in reasonable amounts (think one bottle of wine spread over a week).

The less fun news: Sugar is out. One of the most important changes you can make to support your brain health is to cut out sugar and refined carbohydrates (white flour, white bread, white rice etc.). Research is increasingly showing that sugar is linked to hippocampal atrophy, meaning memory at risk!



**FOOD FOR THE BRAIN**  
Championing optimum nutrition for the mind

Deborah Colson MSc DipION is a Nutritional Therapist at the Brain Bio Centre clinic and Food for the Brain. She works with people of all ages to identify the specific steps they should take to best support their brain health.

Visit [www.foodforthebrain.org](http://www.foodforthebrain.org) for further information and advice on diet and nutrition to support optimum mental health.

# Risk New Rewards

A central pillar of person-centred care, Positive Risk Taking is a handrail for personal development.



*"A safe life may be a cosseted life, but does it offer good quality of life?"*

*Steve Morgan, Practice Based Evidence*

'Positive Risk Taking' (PRT) is a model for approaching choices that asks us to weigh-up potential benefits as well as possible harms. It brings positive outcomes out of the shadow of risk, and asks carers and support workers to focus on goals and aspirations alongside harm prevention. A concept that developed in adult mental health services in the mid-1990s, PRT recognises that risks are opportunities for learning and growth, and that it is the right of all people to develop through risk taking.

"As support workers, it is our role to acknowledge the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the people we support," says Dela Begum, SweetTree Learning Disabilities Service Manager.

"And for many people, achieving new outcomes means taking some risks - doing things differently, testing new abilities, or creating new ways of living. In assessing risk, we must consider the needs of the person, their family, and their place in the community as much as their safety and wellbeing."

Rewards are what make risks worth taking

"Positive Risk Taking is about finding the environments, tools, and supports that best serve individuals when stepping out of their comfort zone," says Barry Sweetbaum, SweetTree founder.

"Our travel training is a great example. Over time, and according to individual needs, we work with our service users to help them to become confident and equipped to travel on public transport. This might involve extensive route and map research, role-playing possible scenarios on the bus, practice with money handling and conversation, a shadowing process, and any number of rehearsed contingency and back-up plans.

"Eventually, when the time is right for an individual, travelling on public transport is no longer a risky process - it is routine. And the independence, confidence, and problem-solving skills that have been gained are invaluable. From a Positive Risk Taking perspective, the rewards of independent travel for some people far outweigh the possible risks, meaning their PRT



## Positive Risk Taking in Dementia Care

As well as shaping support services for people with learning or physical disabilities, PRT is a well-recognised element of person-centred dementia care. Complex tasks such as eating or personal hygiene are broken into smaller, more achievable elements to reduce risk of failure and discomfort. Daily experiences that might carry risks of disorientation - such as going shopping or on an outing - are minimised through good planning and familiar routines.

*"Positive Risk Taking is simply setting someone up to feel successful in their day - to feel fulfilled in themselves,"* Barry says. *"And that's a reward that's well worth the risk management."*



Positive Risk Taking acknowledges that:

- Risks are a part of everyday life experience.
- It is a denial of individuality to deny risk taking.
- People have different strengths and needs.
- Although risks can never be eliminated, they can be minimised.
- Positive collaboration is central to good risk management.
- If handled well, risks are opportunities for learning and development.

journey is more than worthwhile – it is transformative.”

### Risk taking can be a workout for parents and carers

Two years ago, 25-year-old Kelly moved from residential care into her own London flat, where she now resides with live-in support workers. Until last year, Kelly and a support worker would visit the local gym once a week to workout together, but recently, Kelly expressed a desire to do her exercise unaccompanied.

To Kelly’s mother, the risks of her daughter visiting the gym alone were too great: Kelly was not used to travelling on her own; she found conversation with strangers confronting; and she had become lost in the city in the past. But Kelly was determined that she wanted her exercise time to herself, so SweetTree worked with her mother and family to follow a Positive Risk Taking strategy.

“The most important thing that can be achieved between individuals in care, their families, and their support workers, is transparency and honesty,” says Dela. “A person-centred approach to risk management is far greater than the traditional model of care, because the approach means better outcomes for the individual, and the chance to develop skills and increased community participation.”

“Together with Kelly and her mum we talked about what we were hoping to achieve, our step-by-step plan to slowly build Kelly’s confidence and independence,



and how we would manage each identified risk. We went through a shadowing process, lots of role-play, and employed a ‘Buddy Watch’ as an emergency GPS identifier in the case that Kelly was late in coming home. After each session we reviewed what worked or didn’t work with Kelly, her support worker, and her mum. In the end, the plan was comfortable for both Kelly and her family, and Kelly achieved her goal – she lived how she wanted.”

“While past behaviour is usually a good predictor of future behaviour, it doesn’t deny our ability to grow,” adds SweetTree Advisory Board Member and clinical neuropsychologist, Sonja Soeterik. “Parents and family can inadvertently assume that their child is incapable of adopting new behaviours, simply because they have never seen it themselves. Like letting go of a child’s hand when they are learning to walk, parents must sometimes hold their breath – and believe that something new is possible.”

### Not taking risks can be the greatest risk

“At SweetTree we ask, ‘What are the consequences of not taking risks in life?’” says Barry. “And the simple answer is true for all people: That there will be less change. There will be less learning, less personal development, and less of an ability to handle life’s challenges in the future if some controlled risks are not taken now.”

“If we remove from people the opportunities to take risks, we are denying them their rights as equal and valued adults,” adds Begum. “And depriving them of life experiences that can be enjoyable, meaningful, and valuable for many years to come.”



Dela Begum, Learning Disabilities Service Manager  
[delabegum@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:delabegum@sweettree.co.uk)



---

# CULTIVATING CONFIDENCE

---

Nature AND nurture are the forces at play in a care farming environment.

“We’re not trying to grow better farmers or gardeners out of our programme participants,” says Jude Allen, founder of care farming service, SweetTree Farming For All.

“We’re using farming and gardening to help them grow themselves.

“Whether you call it horticultural therapy, ecotherapy, nature therapy, or one of many other labels, being outdoors – planting, harvesting, having practical connections with nature and animals through a farming or gardening experience – is simply therapeutic by nature.”

Jude’s London and Hertfordshire care farming programmes are literally “For All”; accommodating people of all ages and additional needs. Clients include people with physical and learning disabilities, individuals with dementia, young people on the autistic spectrum, and people experiencing social exclusion. Through a range of one-off and ongoing workshops and programmes, SweetTree Farming For All offers participants opportunities to build self-esteem, confidence, and social connections.

“Most people are familiar with the mental health benefits of *looking* at nature,” Jude says. “And many people will have experienced the effects of *being in* nature – walking or eating their lunch in a green

space. But to have a *purpose* in your engagement with nature – to have a meaningful relationship with the outdoors, and know that you are making a valuable contribution – this is magic.”

Farming and gardening activities have wide-reaching potential to be vehicles for personal development and physical skill, Jude says – through organised programmes, as well as in home and community gardens.

While a participant might be thinning out seeds or planting bulbs, they are also developing their dexterity and fine motor abilities; their capacity to follow sequential instructions; and their confidence in communicating with others.

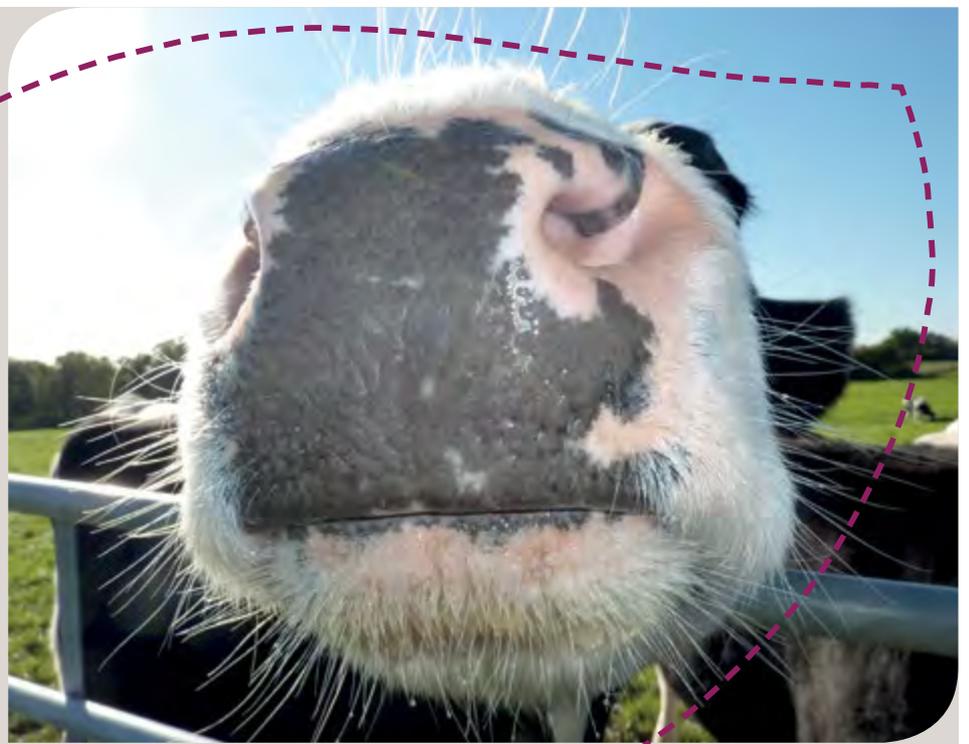
Skills such as numeracy, literacy, problem-solving, and taking responsibility for projects on the farm are transferable into home and community environments, and the satisfaction of contributing to something tangible – from animal health, to bird box construction – spills into greater self-esteem.

“All of our programmes are tailored to fit each client,” Jude stresses. “After a casual trial visit, when the participant has expressed a willingness to return, we work with carers, parents, and service providers to address what it is that the client most wants to achieve or experience.

“We have Safe Spaces to gradually ease some clients into the stimulations of the farm and the outdoors, and we have musical instruments in the woodland for others who want to engage in a completely different way. Some people want to work with horses; others find collecting chicken eggs a fulfilling exercise – the care farming experience is entirely dependent on an individual’s needs and wants.”

“I like farming because it means I’m not alone,” says Katie, a weekly face at SweetTree Fields Farm, the care farm in Mill Hill. “When I’m farming, I have friends.”





*“I like farming because it means I’m not alone. When I’m farming, I have friends.”*



## The deep roots of care farming

The physical and mental health benefits that come of engaging with natural environments aren't groundbreaking news.

When the NHS was created in 1948, the UK was ripe with hospital farms, gardens, and more than 16,000 hectares of land dedicated to recovery and respite – treatments of a kind that have been prescribed by health practitioners since the thirteenth century. It was only from the 1950s, during a popularisation of pharmaceutical interventions for mental health, that the UK fell out of step with Europe and let its fervour

for health-by-horticulture thin out.

Happily, a regrowth of 'green care' projects in the 1980s has seen the number of horticultural and agricultural projects available for people with support needs in the UK shoot up from 45 to more than 900, and the services that exist today are drawing on sophisticated research, consolidation of knowledge, and cross-pollination across health, care, and social sectors.

Want to know more? Visit [www.sweettreefarmingforall.org.uk](http://www.sweettreefarmingforall.org.uk)

## A care farm near you

SweetTree Fields Farm is a beautiful 14-acre care farm and woodland site situated in Mill Hill, North London. It offers a unique range of engaging and inspiring courses and practical training in land and animal based topics.

For referrals or further information please contact Jude Allen: [judeallen@farmingforall.org.uk](mailto:judeallen@farmingforall.org.uk) or 020 7644 9505



# Worth Thinking About: *Mindfulness Meditation*

Free relief from pain, anxiety, depression and stress? Don't mind if I do.

## What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that has been shown to help reduce stress, manage anxiety, and improve mood. Often practised through deliberate slow breathing, mindfulness is increasingly being used as a wellness therapy by people with neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Parkinson's disease, Motor Neurone Disease (MND), challenging behaviour, and chronic pain. In some palliative and end-of-life care contexts, both carers and individuals employ mindfulness as a way of handling distress and nurturing acceptance.

With roots in ancient Chinese and Indian health philosophies, mindfulness can be explored with the help of a guide, or alone in a self-directed space. It can require dedication and practice, but even a small dose can be a balm for the mind and body.

## How does it work?

Mindfulness meditation is about becoming more aware of each moment; noticing the sensations, smells, sounds and tastes of our experiences, as well as noticing the thoughts and feelings that occur from one moment to the next. Unlike some other forms of meditation, it is about accepting and observing the mind's busy chatter, rather than quieting it.

*"Mindfulness means waking up to the present,"* says Mark Williams, professor of clinical psychology at the

Oxford Mindfulness Centre. *"That might be something as simple as being aware of the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs."*

Types of mindfulness meditation include mindful breath awareness (usually done in a sitting position), mindful body awareness (usually done in a lying position), and mindful movement, involving simple yoga or tai chi postures.

*"When people train in mindfulness, we see brain patterns changing,"* Williams says. Alterations to networks and associations in areas of the brain linked to emotion, decision-making, attention and empathy can have positive psychological and physiological effects.

## Who is it for?

Nemone Jakeman, Occupational Therapist and SweetTree's Neurological Conditions Manager is an advocate for mindfulness techniques in all care environments.

*"Working with clients with neurological conditions, I have certainly seen the benefits of mindfulness - not only among the clients themselves, but among family carers and in myself,"* she says.

*"It is too often the case in all our lives that we lose sense of our self-care and forget to be present in our own experiences. Mindfulness can assist in readdressing our sense of balance and provide some mental 'time out' from the tunnel vision of working through each day. Anyone can try it, and everyone can benefit from it."*

-----  
*“It’s not a matter of letting go – you would if you could. Instead of ‘Let it go,’ we should probably say, ‘Let it be.’”*

Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme, University of Massachusetts Medical Center.  
-----

## One Mindful Minute:

Are you a meditation beginner? No problem, says Nemone. Take a seat and read aloud or record this reading onto a media device to play back to yourself. Make the most of this minute to relax in times of pain or stress:

- Gently close your eyes and take a deep breath.
- Exhale.
- Inhale and feel your chest expand.
- Breathe out and feel the air leave your chest.
- Breathe in ... and breathe out ...
- In ... and out ...
- Imagine being surrounded with a warm, vibrant light. Imagine the warmth of the sun on a spring day touching your skin.
- As you breathe in, let this warm light fill your lungs.
- As you breathe out, imagine the light spreading around your chest.
- Breathe in and let the light move further this time.
- Breathe out and let the light go up to your neck and down past your stomach. Breathe in and swallow even more of this warm, vibrant light.
- Breathe out and let it fill your head.
- Breathe in and fill your entire upper body with this warm, vibrant light. Feel the warmth in your arms and fingers.
- Allow this vibrant energy to intensify in your upper body. Think of nothing but this warm, vibrant light.
- If a thought comes by, allow yourself to acknowledge its presence, but then refocus on the light.
- Breathe in ... and breathe out ...
- In ... and out ...
- On your next breath in, let the warm, vibrant light reach your thighs.
- Breathe out, and allow it to reach your knees.
- Breathe in ... and breathe out ...
- Breathe in, and let the light fill your legs all the way down to your toes.
- Breathe out ...
- Breathe in ... and breathe out ...
- Focus on your breath and the warm light – nothing but your breath and the light.
- Relax ...



Nemone Jakeman, Occupational Therapist and Neurological Conditions Manager  
[nemone.jakeman@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:nemone.jakeman@sweettree.co.uk)

# Community Living

*At SweetTree, we're passionate about helping you stay in your own home, and part of our purpose is to help you and your family find the community services that best allow you to do this.*

“Build your care journey with small blocks of services and adjust them over time to meet your needs. You can always make changes as your interests widen, your financial situation fluctuates, or your care needs change”, says founder Barry Sweetbaum.

Look outside of your immediate area for diversity of services and be unafraid to test new things. Request a trial with a service before you commit, and have fun meeting new people!



Since 2002 the SweetTree team have provided the highest quality care and support to clients in their own homes and the community. For some, this may be the reassurance and companionship gained from having a carer visit for a few hours a day and for others it is the specialist support we can provide for individuals with **dementia, learning disabilities, acquired brain injuries, neurological conditions or palliative care needs.**

Through high quality, innovative care, we support our clients to lead active and fulfilling lives.

- Bespoke care packages, hourly, daily, live-in and live-out
- 24 hour on-call support

- Accredited induction and advanced dementia training programmes for all care team members
- Access to a range of in-house clinical experts
- Therapeutic care including horticulture and farming, pet therapy, cognitive stimulation therapy and more
- In-house Admiral Nurse service offering expert advice, information, and psychological support to family carers and clients

If you would like an informal chat, further information on our services or a free care assessment please give us a call on **020 7624 9944** or email us at **[info@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:info@sweettree.co.uk)**

## Age UK London Business Director

The Age UK London Business Directory is the first online, one-stop services directory developed specifically for older people. The aim of the directory is to make it easier for thousands of older people, their carers, and families to find products and services tailored to their needs.

The Age UK London Business Directory team carries out thorough checks to make sure that all companies listed on the site are reputable. From accountants to cleaners and hairdressers, all traders must meet a robust checking process to become eligible for membership.

[www.aublondon.co.uk](http://www.aublondon.co.uk) | 0800 334 5056

## Carers Trust

Carers Trust works to improve support, services, and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled, or has mental health or addiction problems. Together with network partners, the charity provides access to desperately-needed respite breaks, information, and advice – helping carers to maintain their own health and wellbeing, and minimising isolation.

Resources available through Carers Trust include a local service directory, benefits and financial advice, online discussion boards, and access to 144 Carers' Centres across the UK – hubs for advocacy, advice, and social connection.

[www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org) | 084 4800 4361

## SweetTree Admiral Nursing Service

Admiral Nurses are specialist dementia nurses who give much-needed practical and emotional support to family carers, as well as to individuals with dementia. Admiral Nurses offer support that is tailored to families' individual needs and challenges throughout their experience of dementia.

Rikki Lorenti is SweetTree's Admiral Nurse, and brings with him experience working with both younger and older people with dementia. Rikki's role is to help people live positively with the disease, and to help develop skills to improve communication and maintain relationships.

[rikki.lorenti@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:rikki.lorenti@sweettree.co.uk) | 020 7624 9944

## The Mulberry Centre, Richmond

The Mulberry Centre, Richmond, is a lifeline for individuals and family members coping with the effects of cancer. Its mission is to provide support and information for anyone affected by cancer, offering practical ways of enhancing physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing.

From counselling and complementary therapies, to a library and relaxation garden, the range of services available through The Mulberry Centre is wide. Access to Mulberry support is not restricted by postcode; so regardless of your home or hospital location, its doors are open.

[www.themulberrycentre.co.uk](http://www.themulberrycentre.co.uk) | 020 8321 6300

## Headway

As well as building awareness and understanding of all aspect of brain injury, Headway works to support survivors of brain injury and their family carers. It assists individuals in their return to community living, including accessing appropriate accommodation, social outlets, and productive activities.

Headway provides guidance on rehabilitation and continuing care services across the UK, and its free helpline can be a source of legal, financial, and care advice.

[www.headway.org.uk](http://www.headway.org.uk) | 011 594 0800

## The Silverlining

The Silverlining Charity is a group of likeminded people who wish to help anyone affected by brain injury rebuild and better their lives while supporting their communities. The Silverlining supports clients to participate in, and organise, charity challenges that provide a context for goal-setting, social inclusion, and skills development, as well as benefits to the wider community.

Challenges facilitated by The Silverlining include creative projects, educational challenges, and physical or sporting feats that promote friendship and build networks between people with brain injury and those caring for them.

[www.thesilverlining.org.uk](http://www.thesilverlining.org.uk) | 020 3174 2051

## Pet Therapy Service

Pet therapy is a unique and powerful form of therapy that uses dogs or other animals to help people recover from, or better cope with, a range of health issues.

SweetTree's resident pet therapy dogs, Rusty and Billy, have both been specially trained to visit people with dementia, brain injury, and learning disabilities.

Each pet therapy session is intended to meet the different abilities and preferences of our clients. This could simply be petting, grooming and companionship, or a brisk walk in the local park. Planned visits can cheer up the day, and improve mood and feelings of wellbeing.

[pettherapy@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:pettherapy@sweettree.co.uk) | 020 7624 9944



**SweetTree**  
Home Care Services

**North London**

Coleridge House  
2-3 Coleridge Gardens  
London NW6 3QH  
T 020 7624 9944  
E [info@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:info@sweettree.co.uk)

**South West**

2 Sheen Rd  
Richmond  
TW9 1AE  
T 020 7644 9522  
E [info@sweettree.co.uk](mailto:info@sweettree.co.uk)

