

Health services



Understanding your rights
to healthcare

*Health &
wellbeing*



*Age UK is the new force combining
Age Concern and Help the Aged.*

*With almost 120 years of combined
history to draw on, we are bringing
together our talents, services and
solutions to do more to enrich
the lives of people in later life.*

The new force combining

AGE and **HELP THE AGED** **WE WILL**
Concern

This information leaflet has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be useful. Nothing in this leaflet should be construed as specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Age UK does not accept any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that the information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time.

Date of publication: April 2010 © Age UK 2010



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Introduction

Regardless of age, very few people feel 100 per cent all of the time. Fortunately, there are lots of ways you can get help when you are ill or when you need advice about your health. You can, for example, contact:

- your GP (family doctor)
- your local pharmacist
- an NHS Walk-in Centre, or
- NHS Direct.

This guide aims to help you get the help you need if and when you do feel ill. It tells you what NHS services are available and how to find them, as well as practical advice on the best ways to get the treatment you need.

You will also find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice: for contact details see ‘Useful organisations’ (pages 22–26). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in your local phone book, and your local Age UK/Age Concern* should be able to help (page 22).

The information given in this guide is relevant for people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Different arrangements apply in Scotland. If you live in any of those countries, please see the ‘Useful organisations’ section on page 22 for details of the nearest national office.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

*Many Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK

Your GP

Your family GP (general practitioner) is usually your first contact with the National Health Service (NHS). Talking to your GP is a good starting point if you, or the person you care for, has any health-related problems. Your GP can give you medical advice, treatment and can prescribe medication. GPs can also refer you to other community-based professionals, such as those listed on pages 8–12, or a specialist in a hospital.

Everyone should be registered with a GP. If you do not already have a GP you should join a practice as soon as possible, even if you don’t currently have any health problems. This is important because you should have a GP close by who has access to your medical records, who is aware of your medical history and who can provide home visits. **Don’t wait until you are ill to register with a GP.**

If you are joining a new practice, ask about services that may be important to you, such as:

- wheelchair and other access issues
- availability of male and female GPs and nurses
- staff who speak languages other than English
- support for your particular condition, such as a specialist nurse who offers regular monitoring of your health and treatment
- healthier lifestyle advice
- how to obtain repeat prescriptions
- how the appointment system works
- how far in advance you can book a non-urgent appointment
- how to contact a GP out of hours.

GP surgeries do have a maximum number of patients that they can look after. If the practice you want to register with is full, contact your local primary care trust (if you live in England) or local health board (in Wales) – it is their responsibility to find one for you.



If you need to see your GP when the practice is not open, call as you usually would to book an appointment. Although you will not be able to speak directly to a person, a recorded message will tell you what you need to do to speak to a GP.

what next?

If you live in England contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647 to find a practice in your local area or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk



If you live in Wales contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647; if you live in Northern Ireland, you can visit www.nidirect.gov.uk

What if I'm too ill to visit my GP?

If you or your partner are unable to visit your GP surgery for medical reasons, you can ask your GP to make a **home visit**. Your GP may be able to give you advice over the phone or will visit you if they think it is necessary. If possible, try to call your GP in the morning if you think you need a visit the same day.

What if I'm not registered with a GP or am away from home?

You should always be able to see a GP if you need urgent attention. If you are away from home or have not registered with a GP and you fall ill, you should contact the nearest surgery and ask them to see you. You can register with a GP surgery away from home as a **temporary patient** for up to **three months**. You will still be able to remain registered as a patient with the GP where you normally live.

what next?

You could keep details of your medical condition(s), medication you are taking, contact details for your GP and other key health professionals in a free LifeBook produced by Age UK. The LifeBook is an easy-to-use and safe method of recording the practical details of your life. Contact your local Age UK/Age Concern to order a copy.

Getting the most from your medicines

You may be prescribed medicines to cure or to help manage your illness. NHS prescriptions are free for everybody in Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, the qualifying age for free prescriptions for men and women will gradually rise from 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020. This is to keep it in line with the gradual rise in State Pension age for women that takes effect from 6 April 2010. No one currently receiving free prescriptions will be affected and there will be no change to age exemption criteria in April 2010. We do not yet know when this change will be introduced.



If your GP suggests new medicines, it's a good idea to find out more about why it's been prescribed, for example:

- what does it do?
- why is it important to take it?
- when and how is it taken?
- how long will it need to be taken for?
- what should you be aware of when taking it?
(Can you take it with non-prescription medicines?)
- what to do if you forget to take it.

Always read the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) that comes with the medicine. You can request large print/Braille or CD versions of PILs from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Medicine Information Line on 0800 198 5000.

If your medicine seems to have unwanted side effects, discuss this with your GP. If you take four or more medicines, a six-monthly review is recommended.

what next?

Speak to your pharmacist if the timing of your tablets causes problems or you have difficulty with the packaging.

Deciding on treatment

Health professionals will want to help you understand your illness better. You should always discuss your options with them to help you decide which treatment is right for you. Ask about:

- any different ways to treat your condition
- what will happen if you don't have any treatment
- what treatment they recommend
- how effective the treatment is
- are there any side effects or risks
- how long treatment will be required
- how you will know if it's working
- if there are things you should avoid doing
- if there are things you can do to help yourself

what next?

If you live in England and you have a long-term medical condition, you could visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk/YourHealth for help managing it. You could also order a copy of *Help and advice for living well with a long term condition* from the Department of Health publications order line, 0300 123 1002.

Visiting your pharmacist

Your local pharmacist can advise on minor illnesses, including:

- aches and pains
- allergies
- common drugs
- eye infections
- stomach problems
- skin conditions
- women's health issues.

Your pharmacist can also help you to decide whether you need to see a GP. You can talk to your pharmacist in confidence and don't need to make an appointment. Your local pharmacist may also be able to carry out a medication review to help you manage what you are taking and the timing of your medication.

what next?

Find a pharmacy close to you where you can seek advice when you need to, and keep its phone number handy in case you need to call them.

You and your dentist

As well as regular brushing, to keep your teeth and gums healthy you should also visit your dentist regularly. You don't have to register with a dentist to get treatment.

All necessary treatment, like keeping your mouth, teeth and gums healthy, is available on the NHS. Dentures are also available on the NHS. If you want to have cosmetic treatments, such as tooth-whitening or large white fillings, they are not covered by the NHS.

If you need emergency treatment, your dentist has a responsibility to provide it if you're a regular patient. If you are not a regular patient at a dentist and need emergency treatment, you will need to visit a Dental Access Centre. NHS Direct can give you contact details for one closest to you.

If you can't leave the house to visit the dentist, contact your local primary care trust (in England) or local health board (in Wales) to ask for a community dentist to visit you in your home. Their contact details should be in your local phone book.



what next?

To find an NHS dentist in England, contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit www.nhs.uk. If you live in Wales, call the same number or visit www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk. If you live in Northern Ireland, visit www.healthandcareni.co.uk

If you cannot find an NHS dentist in your local area, you need to contact your local primary care trust (in England) or local health board (in Wales); it is their responsibility to make sure you are able to get treatment.



Paying for dental care

Check whether you are getting NHS or private treatment – NHS treatment is usually cheaper than private dental treatment.

Dental treatment from the NHS is **not** free for everyone, so ask about cost before treatment. If you are not entitled to free treatment or some help towards health charges through the NHS Low Income Scheme (see page 20), you will have to pay one of three charges according to the type of treatment you need.

To get an idea of current NHS dental charges, see NHS leaflet HC12, *Charges and optical voucher values*. You can pick up a copy from your dentist or local benefits office or order a copy from NHS help with health costs on 0845 610 1166.

what next?

For free, impartial dental advice you can contact the British Dental Health Foundation on 0845 063 1188 or visit www.dentalhealth.org.uk. You may also like to order a copy of our free factsheet *Dental care: NHS and private treatment* by calling our free advice line 0800 169 65 65.

Accident and emergency (A&E) departments and minor injuries units

The priority of accident and emergency (A&E) departments is to treat serious, life-threatening cases. It is often obvious when emergency treatment is needed – for example:

- loss of consciousness
- persistent chest pain (15 minutes or longer)
- difficulty breathing
- heavy loss of blood
- suspected broken bones
- symptoms that may indicate a stroke.

Signs of a stroke? Remember the FAST test:

Facial weakness – can the person smile?
Has their mouth or eye drooped?

Arm weakness – can the person raise both arms?

Speech problems – can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?

Time to call 999, if the person cannot do just one of these.

In any of these circumstances, you should phone 999 for an ambulance or take the person to the nearest A&E department.

For less serious injuries, such as sprains, cuts and grazes, there are an increasing number of minor injuries units. Call NHS Direct for advice and to see whether there is a unit nearby (see details in ‘Useful organisations’ section). In Northern Ireland call the Health and Social Care Business Services Organisation on 028 9032 4431 for details of the nearest unit.



Chiropodists

If your feet are painful, sore or red, you may need chiropody treatment. You should discuss this with your GP and, if you qualify for NHS treatment they will be able to refer you on. However, the pressures on this service may mean you have to wait some time before seeing an NHS chiropodist.

what next?

Speak to your GP about NHS Chiropody. Your GP may also recommend a local Health Professions Council (HPC)-registered chiropodist doing private work. Or visit the Feet for Life website at www.feetforlife.org

If you have problems cutting your toenails because they are hard to reach, try contacting your local Age UK/ Age Concern office; it may offer a nail-cutting service.

Continence advisers

If you have a bladder or bowel weakness, you do not have to put up with it. There are many different reasons why this happens and there are often treatments to help you manage or cure the problem, particularly if it is diagnosed early.

what next?

Speak to your GP, district nurse or local NHS continence adviser. You could also contact the Bladder and Bowel Foundation on its nurse helpline on 0845 345 0165 or visit www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org for more information (page 23). You could also order a copy of our priced book *Taking control: bladder and bowel problems*.

Flu vaccinations

You should have a flu jab if you're 65 or over, live in a care home, and/or have any of these problems: a chronic heart or chest complaint, including asthma; chronic kidney disease; diabetes; lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment. You will also be invited to have a one-off 'pneumo' jab once you reach 65 for protection against pneumonia.

what next?

Ask your GP for details of the vaccination programme.

Getting a hearing check

If you're concerned about your hearing, your GP can check to see whether there is a medical reason for your problem. If necessary, they can refer you for a hearing test.

what next?

Speak to your GP if you are concerned about your hearing. You could also check your hearing using RNID's telephone hearing check by calling 0844 800 3838. You could also contact RNID for information and advice (page 25).

Help to stop smoking

If you are thinking about stopping smoking, your GP practice may offer support on a one-to-one or group basis. There are different types of support and medication to help you give up smoking.

what next?

Ask your GP for details of smoking services it provides or call the NHS Free Smoking Helpline (details are in the 'Useful organisations' section). In Northern Ireland call the Smokers' Helpline on 0800 85 85 85.



NHS Direct

If you feel ill and want to talk to a nurse, or want some health information, you could contact NHS Direct. NHS Direct is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It has information about local health services such as dentists and GPs, and details of late-opening pharmacies.

If English is not your preferred language, ask to use NHS Direct's confidential translation service. There is a textphone service for anyone who is deaf or hard of hearing.

what next?

Keep the NHS Direct number to hand: 0845 4647. Or visit the website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk if you want to use its online symptom checker or self-help guide.

NHS Walk-in Centres

NHS Walk-in Centres have opened in some towns and cities in England. They are for people who have minor injuries and illnesses and can also offer health information and advice. The centres are run by NHS nurses, have long opening hours and you don't need to make an appointment.

what next?

To find out if there is an NHS Walk-in Centre in your area call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit www.nhs.uk

'I called NHS Direct to find out about painkillers for my mum. The information they gave me was very clear and we could act upon it immediately'

'I joined a local walking group to help lose a bit of weight and between that and the medication my blood pressure has gone down to a level the nurse is happy with.'

Anne, 67, changed her GP when she moved house last year.

'I registered with my current GP practice when I first moved into the area. I was offered a new patient health check with the practice nurse. She told me about some of the services I might be able to get, like a flu jab in winter. She also asked a lot of questions about how my health had been in the past.

'Generally I've been pretty healthy but I did mention that both of my parents had high blood pressure. The nurse took my blood pressure

and it was a bit high so she asked me to come back the next week to have it checked again. As it was still raised when I went back she told me to make an appointment with the GP, who prescribed some medication.

'I joined a local walking group to help lose a bit of weight and between that and the medication my blood pressure has gone down to a level the nurse is happy with. I see the nurse for a check-up every six months but so far we haven't had any further problems.'



Opticians

You are entitled to an NHS-funded sight test if you are aged 60 or over. It's recommended that you have a sight test every two years between the ages of 18 and 69. If you are aged 70 or over, you are advised to have a sight test every year. Ask whether your eye test includes checks for conditions that are more common in older people such as glaucoma.

If you need glasses, you do not have to buy them from the optician who tests your eyes. You can take your prescription to another optician who offers a wider selection or cheaper range of glasses. If you receive certain benefits or are on a low income, you may be entitled to help with the cost. See the 'Help with health costs' section, page 20.

what next?

Contact RNIB for more information and advice about sight loss (page 25). If you have both sight and hearing loss, contact Sense (page 26).

'I used to put off getting my eyes checked because I was worried about the cost of new glasses. When I had a benefits check they told me I could get help with this as well as things like rent and Council Tax. I wish I'd asked sooner.'



Screening for breast and bowel cancer

Women between the ages of 50 and 70 are invited every three years to take part in the NHS breast screening programme. They are not invited once they reach 70 but have the right to be screened every three years on request.

Between the ages of 50 and 64 women registered with a GP are invited every five years for cervical cancer screening through the NHS call and recall system.

In 2006, the NHS launched a screening programme for bowel cancer. Between the ages of 60 and 69, you should be invited for screening every two years. If you are over 70 you can ask for a screening kit every two years.

what next?

NHS Direct has details of local breast cancer screening centres. If it is more than five years since your last cervical screening, ask NHS Direct who you can contact. For further information about screening programmes in England go to www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk; for Wales go to www.screeningservices.org.uk and for Northern Ireland go to www.cancerscreening.n-i.nhs.uk



Help with health costs

In England, the qualifying age for free prescriptions for men and women will gradually rise from 60 to 65 between 2010 and 2020. This is to keep it in line with the gradual rise in State Pension age for women that takes effect from 6 April 2010. No one currently receiving free prescriptions will be affected and there will be no change to age exemption criteria in April 2010. We do not yet know when this change will be introduced.

If you receive the **Guarantee Credit** part of Pension Credit, you are entitled to:

- free prescriptions
- free dental treatment
- vouchers towards glasses or contact lenses
- wigs and fabric supports
- help with costs of travel to hospital.

If you do not receive the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit but have a low income, and less than £16,000 in savings, you may still be entitled to some help with health costs through the **NHS Low Income Scheme**.

what next?

If you receive Guarantee Credit, take your 'award notice' with you next time you go to the NHS for one of the items listed above. You can pick up claim form HC1 at your dentist, optician or GP practice if you think you may be eligible for help through the NHS Low Income Scheme. Try to fill this in before you need treatment. If you would like more information about the NHS Low Income Help Scheme, call its helpline (see 'Useful organisations' section).

Getting involved in your local area

If you want to be able to influence the health and social care services in your local area in England, you could join a Local Involvement Network (LINK). If you join a LINK, you can:

- get attention for issues you think are important in your local area
- influence people who make decisions about current or future services, and
- help services provide better care.

what next?

To find out about LINKs in your area, contact the local council social services department, which should be able to provide more information. Alternatively, you could visit Directgov at www.direct.gov.uk for more information and download a copy of *Help build a better health and social care service*.

Complaining about the NHS

If you are not happy with the treatment you have received, or have been refused treatment on the NHS, you can make a complaint. Often it is best to try to sort it out informally if you can, by talking to the staff at the service involved.

But if you do not want to do this or it does not help, you can use the **NHS complaints procedure**.

what next?

If you need to, ask your NHS service provider for a copy of its complaints procedure. If you live in England and want more information on making a complaint, see our free factsheet *Resolving problems and making a complaint about NHS care*.



If you live in Wales, call the Board of Community Health Councils on 0845 644 7814 for details of your nearest NHS Complaints Advocacy Service.

Useful organisations

Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65
www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65
www.agecymru.org.uk

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732
www.agescotland.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575
www.ageni.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society

Offers advice, information and support to people with dementia, their families and carers through its helpline and local branches.

Devon House
58 St Katherine's Way
London E1W 1JX

Helpline: 020 7423 3500
Email: enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk
www.alzheimers.org.uk

Arthritis Care

Has local branches around the country and runs a helpline for people living with arthritis and produces range of useful leaflets and factsheets.

18 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2HD

Email: info@arthritiscare.org.uk
Helpline: 0808 800 4050
www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Bladder and Bowel Foundation

The UK's largest advocacy charity, providing information and support for people living with bladder and bowel control problems.

SATRA Innovation Park
Rockingham Road
Kettering
Northants NN16 9JH

Tel: 01536 533255
Nurse helpline: 0845 345 0165
Email: info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org
www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Health Professions Council

Regulates a range of health professionals working for the NHS and those you may see privately including chiropractors, dieticians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists.

Tel: 0845 300 4472
www.hpc-uk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

Provides information, advice and support for people with cancer and their families.

89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ

Helpline: 0808 808 00 00
Email: postmasters@macmillan.org.uk
www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS Choices

Website that enables you to find out about local NHS services and also provides information to help you choose which hospital to go to for treatment.

www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct

A 24-hour telephone service staffed by nurses who offer advice on the most appropriate action to take if you are feeling unwell.

Tel: 0845 46 47
Textphone: 0845 606 4647
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Free Smoking helpline

For information on stopping smoking and details of support.

Tel: 0800 022 4332
www.smokefree.nhs.uk

NHS Low Income Help Scheme

Provides full or partial help with health costs if you have a low income.

Tel: 0845 850 1166 (England and Wales);
0800 587 8982 (Northern Ireland)

Patient Advice and Liaison service (PALs)

Provides information, advice and support to users of health services. To find your nearest PALs, contact NHS Direct using the details above.

Tel: 0845 4647
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Patient and Client Council

Provides information, advice and support to users of health services in Northern Ireland.

Tel: 0800 917 0222
Email: info.pcc@hscni.net
www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net

RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

Provides a range of services, advice and information, including leaflets and publications, many of which are available in large print, audio CD or tape and Braille. It can also give details of local sight loss support organisations.

105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999
Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk
www.rnib.org.uk

RNID (Royal National Insitute for Deaf people)

Provides advice and support for people who are deaf or hard of hearing through an information line, tinnitus helpline and range of factsheets.

19–23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 0808 808 9000
Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk

Sense

Supports and campaigns for people who are deafblind.

101 Pentonville Road
London N1 9LG

Tel: 0845 127 0060
Textphone: 0845 127 0062
Email: info@sense.org.uk
www.sense.org.uk

The Stroke Association

Provides community support in some areas and provides patient leaflets for people affected by stroke.

Stroke House
240 City Road
London EC1V 2PR

Helpline: 0845 3033 100
Email: info@stroke.org.uk
www.stroke.org.uk

Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, FREEPOST LON13041, PO Box 203, London N1 9BR. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 80 80 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/donate. Thank you.

Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
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Address:
Postcode:

Tel:	Email:
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By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick) MasterCard Visa CAF CharityCard
 Maestro American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature X
Expiry date	<input type="text"/>	/	<input type="text"/>	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Gift Aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: ___/___/___
(please complete). *Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you in line with Data Protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.

Age UK publishes a range of books on issues relevant to people as they get older. Browse our online bookshop at www.ageuk.org.uk/bookshop

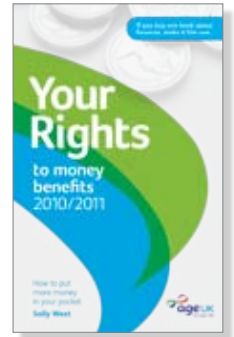
Your Rights to money benefits 2010/11

Sally West

Updated each year after the Budget, this book contains comprehensive details on the benefits you may be entitled to in retirement, including:

- pensions and retirement
- financial help for those on low incomes
- benefits and financial support for disabled people and their carers
- other types of financial support.

Paperback £5.99



How to thrive past 55

Edited by Deanna Wilson

We are all living longer and we want to remain fit and active for as long as possible. This guide shows how it's never too late to start – often by making simple changes to our lifestyle.

Paperback £8.99



What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing**

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Going into hospital*
- *Healthy living*
- *Staying steady*

Age UK offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life, for more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK/Age Concern* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



Age UK thanks Sanofi Pasteur MSD for funding the production of this leaflet.

*Many Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK

Age UK is a registered charity (number 1128267) and company limited by guarantee (number 6825798). The registered address is 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. VAT number: 564559800. Age Concern England (charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (charity number 272786) and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009. Together they have formed Age UK, a single charity dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. Age Concern and Help the Aged are brands of Age UK. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI, Age Cymru. ID8669