

PIGEON POST

Keeping you informed & involved
March/April 2026



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Hello

We know how much a positive attitude to ageing can shape our wellbeing - and over the past three years, our Age-friendly team has been working hard to make Barnet a better place to grow older in.

The words we use, the images we see on TV and in adverts, and the stories we tell all influence how we think about ageing. Films are no exception. That's why, in this issue's nostalgia page, we've pulled together some of our favourite films that put older characters centre stage and show ageing in a more uplifting light.

We're also proud to support Age UK's Still Got It campaign, encouraging open, honest conversations about love, sex, relationships and intimacy in later life. On page 9, you'll find thoughtful reflections from local people on what intimacy means to them - a reminder that connection and closeness matter at every age but is expressed in many different ways.

We hope you enjoy the issue!

Helen Newman
Chief Executive
Age UK Barnet

"One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others."

LEWIS CARROLL



The new spring vegetable crop of beetroots, leeks, spring greens, watercress, and new potatoes will bring welcome colour and crunch to our meals after a long dark and very wet winter, according to dietitian Kato. “Nutritional guidelines recommend that we eat at least three to five portions of a variety of vegetables of different colours every day. Not only do they provide us with essential vitamins and minerals, but the fibre and plant chemicals they contain are feed for our good gut bacteria, which in turn make compounds that help to regulate our immune system, improve our mood, and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases.”

These tasty recipes all take less than 30 minutes to cook. They make use of seasonal spring vegetables, which are usually cheaper and taste better than out of season produce.

Borscht (beetroot soup)

1. Heat 1 tbsp vegetable oil and 1tbsp butter in a large heavy bottomed saucepan. Once melted, add 1 large diced carrot, 1 diced celery stick and 1 finely chopped onion. Cook gently for a few minutes. Then add 3 medium sized peeled and diced beetroot (450g), 1 large waxy diced potato, and 2 finely chopped peeled garlic cloves. Fry for a couple of minutes, until well coated and combined.
2. Add 1½ litres (2½ pints) of beef stock and season with salt and black pepper. Bring to just below the boil and then simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Add ½ a finely shredded purple cabbage and 2 skinned, cored and chopped tomatoes. Cover and leave to simmer for a further 20 minutes.
4. Serve the soup with dollops of sour cream or Greek yoghurt and a sprinkling of fresh dill.

Peas and greens

1. Heat 1 tbsp butter and 1 tbsp olive oil in a large, deep frying pan over a medium heat. When the butter is sizzling, add 1 cleaned, trimmed and finely sliced leek and a pinch of salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes until the leek is softened and just beginning to colour.
2. Stir in 200g of spring greens, central stalks removed and leaves shredded and cook, stirring often, for 3 minutes until the greens are bright green, then pour in 150ml vegetable stock. Bring to a simmer and cook for 1½ minutes, then tip in 150g frozen peas. Cover and cook for 3 minutes over a medium heat Stir through 1tbsp red or white wine vinegar and serve.

Watercress and new potato salad

1. Boil 750g of Jersey new potatoes until tender, drain and toss in a dish with 2tbsp butter or olive oil, the zest of a whole lemon and the juice of half. Add 3 finely sliced salad onions, 2tbsp chopped dill or flat parsley, and ¼ tsp fresh black pepper. Taste and season further if required. Drizzle with a dressing of 1tbsp apple cider vinegar, 2tbsp Dijon mustard, 1tbsp whole grain mustard, and 2tbsp chopped dill pickles. Mix in 100g trimmed watercress.



A few takeaways from a recent talk for Age UK Barnet from neuroscientist Professor Catherine Loveday, a regular on BBC Radio 4's All in the mind.



- Music can bond people – but it can also divide. Shared musical tastes strengthen social connection, yet music from a dominant culture can unintentionally exclude those who don't identify with it.
- Sad songs often lift our mood. For most people, sad music acts like an empathetic friend: it mirrors feelings, helps us process emotions and reduces loneliness. This effect is less reliable for people experiencing severe depression.
- Matching music to the moment matters. Upbeat tracks that match your walking or exercise pace can boost motivation and performance. Afterwards, calming music with slow, steady rhythms helps your body return to a relaxed state more quickly.
- Musical memories are unusually powerful. Music activates multiple brain networks at once, which is why a familiar song can instantly evoke vivid memories and nostalgia. Short bursts of nostalgia can increase feelings of positivity and connectedness.
- Live music strengthens social bonds. Hearing music together creates synchronised brain activity between listeners, increasing feelings of closeness and shared experience. It's one reason live concerts – or an Age UK Barnet musical afternoon – feel so uplifting.
- Music encourages openness. Studies show that people are more willing to share personal thoughts and have emotionally honest conversations when music is playing softly in the background.
- Music can support brain health. Regular engagement with music – listening, singing or playing – is linked to better thinking skills in later life, including improved attention and memory pathways.
- Rhythm helps the brain organise information. Repetition and predictable patterns in music make it easier for the brain to lay down and retrieve memories, which is why song lyrics are often easier to recall than spoken words.
- Music can regulate stress. Listening to music you find soothing reduces cortisol levels and slows heart rate, helping the body shift out of “fight or flight”.
- Personal playlists are powerful. Music that is meaningful to you – especially from your teens and early twenties – tends to have the strongest emotional and memory effects because the brain is highly sensitive during those years.



To make these roses, all you have to do is layer flattened cupcake liners around the rim of a cup, then turn it out and you have a rose!

What you will need

16 Cupcake cases - standard size.
Thick 16oz Styrofoam Cup , Glue Stick



Instructions



1. Use a sharp knife (a serrated one works best) to slice the bottom off the styrofoam cup to make an open circle or rim on which you'll build the rose. You want the rim to be about 2.5 inches in diameter, so cut off enough to get a circle this size. Place the cup upside-down.

2. Count out 16 cupcake liners. Flatten out the first cupcake liner, placing the coloured side down. Pick up the liner and gently fold it over the rim of the cup (remember this is the bottom rim of the cup), pressing half of the liner down inside the cup and pressing the other half down outside the cup. Make sure to press the liners down in the center so they follow the curve of the cup.



3. Next, layer another cupcake liner over the first one, overlapping about half of the first liner. Before you do that, apply glue stick to the area that will be overlapped, then press the second liner down.

5. Continue to add more cupcake liners to build your rose. Offset the liners a bit each time. It helps to look at the cup from the side to see where to add the next petal. Work in one direction for a few liners then go the other direction. The goal is to make it look a little bit random and organic.

4. Use glue stick to adhere a third cupcake liner where it will overlap both of the first two liners (make sure you only place glue on the other liners, not on the cup). At this point the bottom of the cup should be covered.



6. Continue adding cupcake liners, being sure to apply glue stick before each liner. As you work you'll see that the hole in the middle of the cup is growing smaller. This is creating the center of the rose



7. When you get to the last three liners (meaning you have used 13 already), you will flip the liners and add them with the colored side up, or facing you. Make sure to space the last three liners so they cover the entire flower.



8. Now you can tip the cup right side up and gently press the rose from the inside to slide it off the cup. You'll see that the layers of cupcake liners create lovely petal shapes.



9. Optional: if desired, use your finger or a pencil to gently loosen the first few petals that make up the centre of your flower. Don't pull too hard; you'll need to handle the rose gently for 10-15 minutes until the glue stick sets.



10. If you'd like to display these roses in a vase, you can give them a stem. Glue 1 inch wood ball caps (wood beads that only have a hole on one end) to the ends of paper straws. Alternatively you could use small styrofoam balls and bamboo skewers. Then you can glue the flowers over the balls and position them in a vase.



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Across

- 1 Scented (8)
- 6 Tear (3)
- 9 Spiral (5)
- 10 Disapprove strongly of (7)
- 11 Cut short (7)
- 13 Astound (5)
- 14 Playground item (6)
- 15 Important person (4-2)
- 19 Storehouse (5)
- 21 Appalling (7)
- 22 Legacy (7)
- 23 By oneself (5)
- 24 Regret (3)
- 25 Toll road (8)

Down

- 2 Make bigger (7)
- 3 Mend (3)
- 4 Interfere (6)
- 5 Moral corruption (9)
- 6 Spanish wine (5)
- 7 Portion (5)
- 8 Young birds (6)
- 12 Flat (9)
- 16 Poisonous plant (7)
- 17 Covering for a curtain rod (6)
- 18 Roof beam (6)
- 19 Exclude (5)
- 20 Feeling of resentment (5)
- 23 Snake (3)

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the study of mushrooms called?
- 2. What is the capital of Malaysia?
- 3. What is the name of the peninsula located in the northern part of Norway, Finland, and Russia?
- 4. In which year did the First World War end?
- 5. Who composed the music for "The Messiah"?
- 6. What is the largest bird in the world?
- 7. Who succeeded Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister in 1940?
- 8. What is the currency of Hungary?
- 9. Which animal can be seen on the Porsche logo?
- 10. Who composed the music for "Aida"?

CROSSWORD

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RECIPE TIME

STEAMED FISH WITH GINGER & SPRING ONION

Serves 4 - suitable for freezing

Ingredients

- 100g pak choi
- 4 x 150g fillets firm white fish
- 5cm piece ginger finely shredded
- 2 garlic cloves finely sliced
- 2 tbsp low-salt soy sauce
- 1 tsp mirin
- rice wine
- 1 bunch spring onions finely shredded
- handful coriander chopped
- brown rice to serve
- 1 lime cut into wedges, to serve



Method

Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Cut a large rectangle of foil, big enough to make a large envelope.

Place the pak choi on the foil, followed by the fish, then the ginger and garlic. Pour over the soy sauce and rice wine, then season.

Fold over foil and seal the 3 edges, then put on a baking sheet. Cook for 20 mins, open the parcel and scatter over the spring onions and coriander. Serve with brown rice and squeezed lime juice.

GLUTEN-FREE LEMON DRIZZLE CAKE - WITH MASHED POTATO!



Ingredients

200g butter softened
200g golden caster sugar
4 eggs
175g ground almond (switch for polenta or wheat-free flour to make this recipe nut-free)

250g mashed potato
zest 3 lemons
2 tsp gluten-free baking powder

For the drizzle

4 tbsp granulated sugar
juice 1 lemon

Method

Heat oven to 180C/fan 160C/gas 4. Butter and line a deep, 20cm round cake tin. Beat the sugar and butter together until light and fluffy, then gradually add the egg, beating after each addition. Fold in the almonds, cold mashed potato, lemon zest and baking powder.

Tip into the tin, level the top, then bake for 40-45 mins or until golden and a skewer inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean. Turn out onto a wire rack after 10 mins cooling. Mix the granulated sugar and the lemon juice together, then spoon over the top of the cake, letting it drip down the sides. Let the cake cool completely before slicing.

POTATO RICER - If you have one, use a potato ricer to mash your potatoes; it will give a fantastically light and fine texture.

MAKE IT NUT-FREE - If you'd like to make this nut-free, as well as wheat-free, switch the ground almonds for polenta or wheat-free flour.

According to NHS figures, around 1 in 3 people over the age of 65 have at least

one fall a year. Try these balance-boosting exercises at least twice a week to improve proprioception - the ability to sense different parts of the body without you having to look at them.

For example, proprioceptors in your muscles can detect uneven ground as you walk: your body can then adapt its centre of gravity to balance itself. The more you practice, the more proprioception improves!

Repeat these three exercises to help you move with confidence:

Leg balance with weight

Passing an object back and forth while standing on one leg causes your body to adapt to subtle shifts in weight, improving your balance.

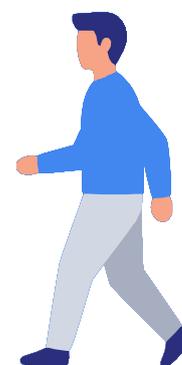
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart, close to a sturdy chair or counter.
- Hold a weight (such as a bottle of water or food can) in your hand.
- Slowly lift one leg, either keeping your toe resting on the ground, or raising your foot completely off the floor.
- Slowly pass the weight between your hands in a circle around your body. Try to keep your foot raised as you circle the weight around you.
- After 5-10 circles, slowly lower your foot and repeat on the other leg.

Tip: If you need to, hold onto a chair in front of you and pass the weight from each hand back and forth.

Tightrope walk

Placing your feet precisely without looking is a great way to improve your coordination!

- Stand with your feet together, holding onto a wall or walking aid if needed. Look straight ahead.
- Put your right foot directly in front of your left foot, with your right heel touching your left toes. Make sure you keep looking forward.
- Slowly shift the weight from your heel and then shift your weight to your toes.
- Move the heel of your left foot to the top of your right foot.
- Repeat for 10-15 steps forward.



Ball on the wall

This exercise improves your spatial awareness and strength – best with an exercise ball, but any ball works.

- Place your ball against a wall, keeping it in place with one hand. Keep your arm extended but not locked.
- Move the ball in small circles, keeping the arm extended.
- Continue for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then repeat with the other arm.

Tip: Some physiotherapists recommend drawing the alphabet with the ball to cover a wider range of movements.

EVENTS

TALK: paying attention - what's really going on in the brain? Wednesday 1 April from 6.45-8pm
Professor Catherine Loveday on how attention works, why it slips, and how it shapes our everyday memory. FREE but donations welcome. Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. To book contact Teresa on 07502 989 403 or email teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk

Tech talks - a series of useful talks as part of Age UK Barnet's free weekly digital support sessions on Mondays from 2-4pm at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT.

13 April - Understanding AI and ChatGPT; 11 May - How to download and use bus and travel apps; 1 June - How to use a new Guided Tours App; 6 July - Phone security. For more info contact Howard on 0208 432 1415 or email howard.chapman@ageukbarnet.org.uk

RAF tour - Cold War Aircraft! Thursday 16 April, 2.00–3.00pm Highlights include some of the era's most iconic jets - including the legendary Vulcan, the sleek Vampire, the groundbreaking Meteor, and the formidable Hunter. The tour takes place at the RAF Museum, Grahame Park Way, London NW9 5LL. Contact Helen for booking on 0738 446 6840 or Email: activities@ageukbarnet.org.uk

SAVE THE DATE Summer Music Festival - Saturday 4 July (11am-3pm) at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT



Each month former journalist Ed Newman has a lovely chat with a Barnet resident and shares their story with the rest of us. This time Ed chews the fat with our volunteer receptionist and fellow Tottenham supporter MaryIn.

It seemed very appropriate that on the day I was due to meet Marilyn Bessor for the latest Pigeon Post interview, our beloved Tottenham Hotspur had just sacked manager Thomas Frank.



Over the years, we have often debated the merits of our team, both the highs and the lows, It would have been very easy to have talked football for the duration of our conversation but, thankfully for the sake of writing this article, that didn't happen. There's far more to Marilyn than her passion for Spurs.

Marilyn is a familiar face at the Ann Owens Centre where she volunteers as one of the brilliant team of receptionists, the first welcoming point of contact for anybody attending activities and events. She's a very enthusiastic advocate of all things Age UK Barnet.

"I'm always telling people about all the great work they do," Marilyn told Pigeon Post. "In fact, I never shut up about them.

"I first got involved when I saw an ad on Nextdoor looking for people to help lead a walking group. During lockdown, I'd started walking a lot and I'd always wanted to volunteer so it sounded like a great thing to do. We set up a new route in Oak Hill Park and people started to come along. Before long, friendships began to form and we met for cups of tea and quiz nights. Sadly, some of the group have passed away and we've been to their funerals.

"Then, I decided I wanted to do a bit more and so I applied to be one of the receptionists. Now I'm there between 10.30-2.30pm on a Thursday. That means I'm there when many clients living with dementia attend a session at the Ann Owens Centre. Being on the front desk is very intense but I've learned so much doing important and fulfilling work for a wonderful charity in Age UK Barnet."

One other very useful job that Marilyn did was to invite Rob Rinder to be a guest speaker at Ann Owens last autumn. She's related by marriage to the popular television personality and he was only too happy to accept her request to visit Age UK Barnet and made several affectionate references to Aunty Marilyn during a very entertaining evening.

"Rob's a very good person," says Marilyn. "He's highly intelligent and generous, particularly when it comes to charity. I asked him for a favour for Age UK Barnet, and he was happy to help."

Marilyn was brought up in what she describes as a typical Jewish household, first in Wood Green before they moved to Cockfosters. Her father had an off-course betting business and her mother was a stay-at-home mum. They lit candles on a Friday night and they'd always have family round for tea on a Sunday. She attended East Barnet Grammar School and, having decided university was not for her, she found herself a job working for British Leyland.



Helen Newman CEO, Age UK Barnet and Rob Rinder



"When I was 21 I bought myself a brand new Mini," Marilyn recalls. "They cost £1,600 but I only paid £1,350 with my discount. I had to go to the Longbridge plant to pick it up and I can remember the locals giving me a funny look when I asked where it was because it was a very big place. I loved that car, nobody was allowed to smoke in it and I would change the water and oil every week.

In those days you could drive into town and park so, instead of going to the pub, we'd go to clubs like Countdown in Wells Street.



"I also drove my car to Spurs games and we'd be back in time to listen to Sports Report on the radio. One of the best games I can remember was a 2-2 draw with Manchester United who had Bobby Charlton, Denis Law and George Best playing for them. I can remember all the girls screaming whenever Best came close - he was a fantastic player and very good looking as well."

Marilyn also had a spell working in Fleet Street for the Evening Standard before getting married and having two sons, one of whom she has recently been visiting in Australia. It was while she was at home looking after her children that a friend introduced her to the world of market research, which she made into a successful business over a number of years.

"I got to a stage when I needed to earn, as I had recently divorced and financially life was a bit tough, which meant either going back to London or try something else," she continues. "I heard about qualitative market research which involves focus groups and I've been involved in that line of work for over 25 years now. I've worked with a number of different clients with products ranging from Comfort fabric conditioner to viagra!

"It was one of the best decisions I made. I wouldn't say I was a captain of industry but I know how things work, even though it's changed a lot with social media and AI. One way or another, it helped me get through some difficult situations. I guess you'd call me one of life's survivors."

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX!

WHAT INTIMACY MEANS TO YOU

Age UK has launched a new booklet, **Sex, Relationships and Intimacy**, alongside a campaign encouraging open, honest conversations about these topics in later life.

Research from Age UK highlights that, despite three in five (59%) over 50s believing that a healthy sex life is important for a relationship at this age, 10 million (39%) feel uncomfortable discussing this.

Many people assume that sex and intimacy fade with age, but for countless older adults they remain meaningful, comforting and deeply personal parts of life. At the same time, illness, hormones, bereavement and disability can all shape how we experience closeness and connection.

And as we found when we spoke to a few of our clients, intimacy is expressed in many different ways – not only through conventional sex.

What intimacy means to us:

"Intimacy for us can be a kiss, a hug, holding hands – or just sitting and talking together."
May, 83

"It took me a long time to adjust after having surgery, but talking to my wife about it helped."
Jakob, 72

"Sex is not part of my life any more since my husband died, but touch is still very important to me. A hug from a friend, holding hands – all these count, and I really missed them during lockdown."
Gina

"Sex is still an important part of a relationship. Not everything works quite as well as it did when we got together – but we just laugh."
Jimmy, 78

"I've stopped worrying about what's 'normal' in a relationship. What my partner and I do – or don't do – is our business."
Ife, 60



Get your free guide! The Sex, Relationships and Intimacy guide covers changes in sexual function, the impact of health conditions and medication, shifting relationships, new partnerships and online dating.

To request a copy, call 0800 169 6565 or email orders@ageuk.org.uk.

National Trading Standards has identified a worrying new scam. It starts with a cold call, where a fraudster asks you to participate in a non-existent 'lifestyle survey', created to gather your personal details.

While you answer the questions, this information is used to create an AI-generated replica of your voice (voice cloning), which can be used to set up direct debits, such as payments to banks and other financial providers, without your knowledge.

Any unexpected call should be treated with caution. If the caller asks you to provide sensitive information or make a payment, you should always verify whether the call is genuine. You can do this by ending the call and using a different phone, or waiting at least 15 minutes to use the same phone and to contact the organisation they claim to be from.

And use a number from the organisation's website or from a recent official letter.



Here are some more ways you can protect yourself from phone scammers:

- Never disclose your financial information over the phone.
- Register with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). This will stop legitimate companies from making unsolicited sales and marketing calls to your phone number. So when you do receive a call, you'll know a scammer is on the other end. You can register your mobile number on the TPS by texting "TPS" and your email address to 85095 from your mobile phone
- Call 159 if you receive a call claiming to be from your bank. When you call, you'll be put through to your bank's genuine customer service line

Free one-to-one scams prevention support

1-hour consultation for anyone aged 50+

The Age UK Barnet service offers

- tailored guidance
- confidential support
- security advice
- practical tips



Book your free session with a member of our trusted friendly team today

Tel: 0208 129 7615 and 0208 129 7627

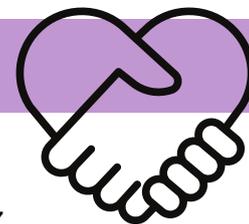
Email: scamsawareness@ageukbarnet.org.uk

Age UK Barnet is a registered charity (1080458)





Older people perform better in daily tasks. New research from the University of Glasgow has found that older people - those aged 55 to 87- took longer to complete a task, but were more likely to get it right than 18 to 27-year-olds!



- For advice about benefits, grants, housing and money concerns, phone our **Later Life Planning Service** on 020 8432 1417.
- For scams advice and support, call our **Scams Prevention Service** on 0208 432 2217.
- If you can't get out without help and would enjoy a regular chat with a friendly volunteer, try our **Befriending Service** on 020 8432 1416
- Unable to get out to the shops and cannot shop online? We have a **Shopping Service*** for people who need a light weekly shop. For more info, Tel 020 8150 0963
- **Living Well Dementia Hub—dementia adviser service** and **day clubs*** for people living with mild to moderate dementia and their carers. Phone 020 8203 5040. Our **Dementia Befriending Service** offers companionship—phone 020 8150 0967.
- Our **Stepping Out Service** for those who have early stages of dementia or confirmed memory issues, we offer short weekly walks with a volunteer. Phone 020 8150 0963.
- **Foot care*** We offer basic nail-cutting (£15) at the Ann Owens Centre in East Finchley and, for people with diabetes, taking steroids or warfarin, we have nailcutting with a podiatrist (£20). For an appointment, phone 020 8203 5040.
- **Advice clinics at Chipping Barnet Library** - 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month. The Age UK Barnet advice team will be giving benefit checks, pension credit checks and winter fuel payment advice. Drop in from 10am-1pm and bookable appointments in the afternoon (you need to book during the morning drop in). Speed up the process by bringing rent, service charge and bank statements. Takes place at Chipping Barnet Library, 3 Stapylton Rd, Barnet EN5 4QT
- **Advice Clinic Burnt Oak Library**, 99 Watling Ave, Burnt Oak HA8 0UB - 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month. The clinics are open from 10am-1pm and 2-4pm. To book an appointment, please call us on 0208 432 1417 or email us at laterlifeplanners@ageukbarnet.org.uk
- For essential jobs in the home please phone our **Handyperson Service*** on 020 8150 0963. Some jobs such as changing a lightbulb are free of charge.

*There is a charge for this service

MONEY SAVING TIPS

- Use physical cash for daily spending to make parting with money more emotional and tangible, helping you stick to a budget.
- Adopt the "Decide Once" rule: Simplify gift-giving to make life easier and avoid over spending. For example, decide that all children's birthday parties get the same £10 book.



TITANIC TALE

FROM ICY WATERS TO OLYMPIC GOLD



In 1912, Richard Norris Williams survived the titanic sinking, having spent hours in freezing water and suffering from frostbite on his legs. Doctors wanted to amputate his legs, but he said no and walked every two hours to get blood flowing - he fully recovered and won the US tennis titles in 1914/1916, Wimbledon doubles in 1920, and Olympic gold in 1924.

Writer Lee Janogly, an 86 year old semi retired fitness instructor and author, shares the conversational highlights of her regular meet-ups with a group of good friends. This time they welcome someone new to their group.



I opened the front door to my new neighbour. "I've just popped by to give you the keys," she said, then glanced over my shoulder to where my usual group of friends had gathered for our regular Wednesday 'coffee 'n' cake' chat. "Sorry, I didn't realise you had company..."

"That's fine," I said, "come and join us" and ushered her into the living room. "This is Cynthia who has just moved into number 32," I announced, and Cynthia gave a little awkward wave in response to the general hellos. "I'm going to feed her cat while she is away. What's his name again?"

"Houdini," said Cynthia "because he keeps escaping back to the old house 'but he's settled now."

"Come and have some coffee," I said "and some of my special lemon drizzle cake."

"Which is her entire baking repertoire," said Jessica with her usual tact, the filter between brain and mouth having seemingly disintegrated with age.

"Well, just a little slice," said Cynthia as Pauline made space for her on the sofa. "I'm trying to lose weight and I've been doing quite well."

"Me too," said Deely and Jess gave a snort of disbelief. It was true that Deely was endowed with an abundance of adipose tissue - I believe the medical term is 'large-of-knicker' - due to having eaten her weight in cake over her lifetime.

"What diet are you on?" she asked.

"I've been seeing a nutritionist," explained Cynthia. "She's very good. She says that everyone has one 'trigger' food, such as chocolate or crisps, that once they start eating, they can't stop. If they cut that out, they'll lose weight."

She turned to Deely, "For example, what's your trigger?"

"Marks & Spencer food store," said Deely.

"No, which one food would you be prepared to cut out?"

"Marmite."

"But Marmite isn't fattening."

"I know, I hate it."

We all groaned. "Oh, come on, I'm very healthy," protested Deely. "I take loads of vitamins; I take calcium for my bones and vitamins D and C, gelatin for my brittle nails, vitamin B6 for menopausal whatsit, turmeric, that stuff that improves your memory - what's it called? - iron in case I'm anaemic, garlic pills and -"

"Why are you taking all those vitamins?" I asked, incredulously. "Why not buy more healthy food?" She shrugged, "Too expensive."

Cynthia stood up, "I better get back," she said. "I left my husband, William, doing the packing. It's been lovely meeting you all, and when I get back from my trip, I'd love you to come and have coffee at my house."

She turned at the door. "By the way, do any of you need a deodorant?"

We looked puzzled and there were a couple of surreptitious sniffing of armpits. She laughed. "I didn't mean to imply anything, it's just that I ordered my favourite deodorant online and there were only two left in stock, so I quickly ordered them. I thought it was a rather large box for two roll-on deodorants when it arrived, but it contained two boxes of twelve! So -?"

We all shook our heads and Cynthia unconsciously employed one of our regular sayings whenever we bought anything new: "I guess that'll see me out."

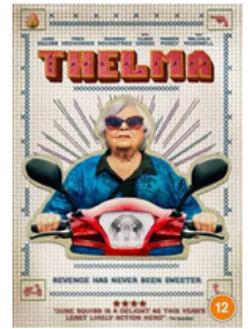
I think Cynthia will fit in with our little group very nicely. I wonder if she can bake...

Lee's book, 'Getting Old, Deal with It' is published by Mensch Publishing.



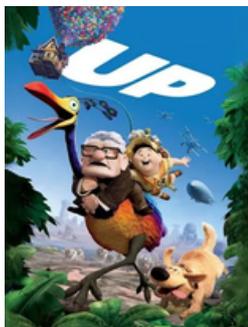
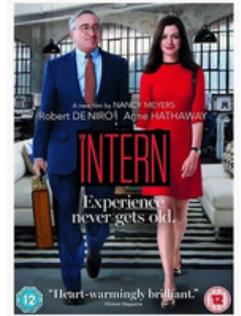
Films that feature positive and inspiring older characters.

Thelma (2024) – A 93-year-old woman uses her wits and a mobility scooter to hunt down phone scammers, providing an empowering, action-packed story about aging with power and independence.



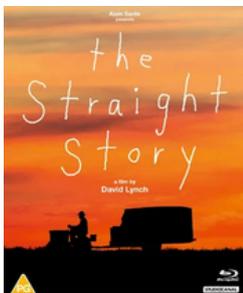
The Great Escaper (2023) – Based on a true story, a 90-year-old WWII veteran escapes his care home to attend the 70th D-Day anniversary, exemplifying honor, courage, and determination.

The Intern (2015) – Robert De Niro plays a 70-year-old widower who breaks the monotony of retirement by becoming a senior intern at a fashion website, serving as a mentor with wisdom and grace.



Up (2009) – An animated adventure featuring 78-year-old Carl Fredricksen, who refuses to let his age stop him from fulfilling a lifelong dream of adventure, demonstrating resilience and love.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) – A group of British retirees moves to India, finding new beginnings, romance, and purpose in their later years.



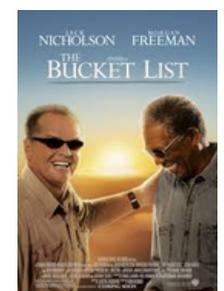
The Straight Story (1999) – A 73-year-old man rides his lawnmower across state lines to reconcile with his ill brother, showcasing dedication, stubbornness, and family love.

Finding Your Feet (2017) – After discovering her husband's affair, a judgmental woman finds a new, liberating lease on life through dancing with her sister's bohemian community.



Harold and Maude (1971) – An iconic film where 79-year-old Maude teaches a death-obsessed young man to live life to its fullest, representing a free-spirited, positive approach to life and death.

The Bucket List (2007) – Two men from different walks of life meet in a hospital ward and decide to live their remaining days to the fullest, creating a powerful testament to friendship and seizing the moment.





Since retiring, our gardening columnist Kevin loves spending time in the garden and his allotment. Each issue he lets us know what he's been up to and shares a few seasonal gardening tips...



March and April in the garden used to be a gentle warm-up for spring. Thanks to climate change, it now behaves like a weather-themed lucky dip. Across the UK, gardeners are finding that the old rhythms they relied on are shifting, sometimes subtly, sometimes not, you could be sowing seeds in sunglasses and then next you are worrying about late frosts or persistent downpours.

Like the winter just gone, in our area they are generally milder now, which can sound like good news until you realise pests have read the forecast too. Slugs, snails, aphids and vine weevils are all surviving in greater numbers, emerging earlier and with renewed enthusiasm.

Gardening jobs in March now begin with checking the forecast, then checking it again, then ignoring it completely. The soil could be frozen solid, but more likely soaking wet, or suspiciously dry. You can step outside dressed for rain, wind, sun and still manage to be wrong.



Now is the traditional time to sow the seeds that you have carefully selected, but even this has become an exercise in risk management. Sow too early and an unexpected cold snap wipes out your optimism. Wait too long and a sudden heatwave turns your carefully prepared seed trays or allotment beds into a desert nightmare. Plants, it seems, have also noticed climate change and are responding by germinating whenever they feel like it.



March pruning is equally confusing. Traditional advice says "cut back now", but climate change whispers, "Are you sure?" Buds appear weeks early, birds have started nesting with alarming enthusiasm, and you're left holding the secateurs, worried by the responsibility.

Weeds, meanwhile, are thriving. They love warmer winters and arrive in March in full vengeance. Weed seeds germinate freely with no concerns and dandelions bloom cheerfully, clearly delighted with the new arrangement.

By the end of March, climate change is now teaching every gardener the same lesson; flexibility. The old rulebook is outdated, the seasons are confused and success now means adapting, observing, and laughing slightly while doing it. In many ways, UK gardening is becoming less about tradition and more about resilience. The garden, after all, is still growing. It's just doing so on its own unpredictable schedule.

A few jobs for March/April.

Soil & Preparation

Add compost or well-rotted manure to beds to boost soil nourishment and retain moisture. Healthy soil holds more water in drought and drains better in floods. Avoid digging if soil is too wet. Ground compaction reduces soil health and increases runoff.

Planting & Sowing

Climate change means frost dates are less predictable. Before sowing outdoors check that the soil is warm and workable.

Vegetables to sow outdoors include broad beans, carrots, beetroot and parsnips. Summer-flowering bulbs like gladioli and freesias can also go into the ground. Sow some wildflowers in trays or modules now for later planting.

Pruning & Tidying in the garden or containers

Prune roses, clematis and other shrubs to shape them and encourage vigorous spring growth. Cut back ornamental grasses and dogwoods to ground level. Top-dress containers with fresh compost as plants wake up.





Before you go

1. Check what immunisations you might need, by talking to your doctor or pharmacist. Always make sure you carry any medication in your hand luggage, in case your hold luggage gets delayed, and in the original packaging, in case you need to get more or if customs want to check them out. If you are on medication and will be travelling between time zones you may want to think in advance about when you should be taking your medication.
2. Download Google Translate or a similar app onto your phone. It will prove invaluable if you fall ill and you don't speak the local language.
3. Consider a medical alert bracelet. If you have a serious medical condition or allergy a medical alert bracelet could literally be a life-saver if, for example, you fall unconscious. There's a fabulous range of designs now available.

While you're away

4. Keep hydrated. Drink plenty of water while you are away, especially in hot countries, and on any flights. Long flights, in particular, are very dehydrating.
5. Get plenty of sleep. Take an eye mask to block out intrusive light, earplugs to muffle noisy environments and, if flying, a neck pillow to help you sleep on flights.
6. Guard against deep-vein thrombosis (DVT). Sitting still on a plane, train or coach can contribute to DVT and as you get older you are more at risk. Wear compression socks and try not to sit still for too long.



7. Pace yourself. Don't try and see everything in one day. Firstly, you'll have time to appreciate and soak everything in and secondly, you won't exhaust yourself.

8. Drink alcohol in moderation. Not only is alcohol dehydrating, it also disrupts sleep, so it is best to keep the number of alcoholic drinks you consume to a minimum. You don't need to avoid them completely but do drink sensibly.

9. Protect your skin and eyes from harmful UV light but don't forget your skin needs some sunlight to produce vitamin D. Make sure your sunglasses offer protection against both UVA and UVB light and wear sun cream with a high protection factor.



When it gets too hot in Australia, the nectar in certain flowers will ferment and turn into alcohol. The bees that get "drunk" from the nectar aren't allowed back into the hive until they sober up.

If you have enjoyed this newsletter, or have any suggestions, please let us know. Just drop us a line at Pigeon Post, Age UK Barnet, Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT



“You wanna have some fun, Fred? Watch...I’m gonna go over and stare and growl at the closet door.”

8	5	4	3	2	7	6	1	9
2	6	1	9	5	4	7	3	8
3	9	7	6	1	8	2	4	5
5	7	3	2	8	1	9	6	4
9	2	8	4	3	6	5	7	1
4	1	6	7	9	5	3	8	2
7	8	5	1	6	2	4	9	3
1	4	9	5	7	3	8	2	6
6	3	2	8	4	9	1	5	7

**Knowledge is knowing
what to say. Wisdom
is knowing whether or
not to say it.**



GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ANSWERS

1. Mycology, 2. Kuala Lumpur, 3. Kola Peninsula
4. 1918, 5. George Frederic Handel, 6. Ostrich
7. Winston Churchill, 8. Forint, 9. Horse,
10. Giuseppe Verdi



“Disgusting! ... it’s just a sort of heavy huffing and puffing.”

	1	2	3	4	5		6	7							
8	C	N	I	E	E	I	I								
9	H	E	L	I	X	10	D	E	P	L	O	R	E		
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	K	G	P	E	V										
14	S	E	E	S	A	W	15	H	I	G	16	H	U	17	P
				R	18	R	T	E	E						
19	D	E	20	P	O	T	21	A	B	Y	S	M	A	L	
	E	I	M	F						L	M				
22	B	E	Q	U	E	S	T	23	A	L	O	N	E		
	A	U	N	E	S	C	T								
24	R	U	E	25	T	U	R	N	P	I	K	E			