

PIGEON POST

Keeping you informed & involved
March/April 2024



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Welcome

We hope you enjoy our new look Pigeon Post.

We have lots of events coming up over the next couple of months – including a disco for the young at heart to mark Action Against Ageism day on 20 March.

Just because we're over 50, we don't stop enjoying what we loved doing when we were younger. There aren't many opportunities to dust off our dancing shoes as we get older, so we thought we'd invite you along for a boogie - or a toe tap if you'd rather sit back and listen. Check out this our other events on page 11.

We've also got an interview with our very glamorous cookery class participant Gilda who proves that getting older doesn't mean you have to give up on taking pride in your appearance.

And if you'd like to find your inner Muhammad Ali, try out our seated shadow boxing routine on page 7!!

Enjoy the issue.

Helen Newman
Chief Executive
Age UK Barnet





We need vitamin D for healthy bones, teeth and muscle, as well as for our immune and nervous systems,' says volunteer and trainee dietitian Kato.

'If we don't have enough, our risk of falls, bone fractures and infections increase.'

We get vitamin D from food and exposure to sunshine. 'It's called the sunshine vitamin because, in summer, we can meet most of our needs by exposing our skin to the sun for at least 15 minutes a day,' says Kato.

However, between October and March, the UK winter rays are not strong enough for the skin to make pre-Vitamin D. This is why the government advises everyone to take a Vitamin D supplement (preferably Vitamin D3) of at least 10 micrograms during these months, while also eating foods rich in Vitamin D. This is especially important for people who:

- are over 65 as our skin's ability to produce pre-vitamin D slows down as we age
- have dark skin, as the skin's pigment melanin shades the skin from the sun, so it needs longer exposure.
- follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, as vitamin D is only present in animal foods (with the exception of mushrooms)

Not many foods contain vitamin D – fatty fish, egg yolks and fresh mushrooms exposed to sunlight or ultraviolet rays are the best sources, whereas foods fortified with vitamin D such as orange juice, porridge oats, tofu, plant milks, and margarine can also add to your intake.

The table below shows that even if you eat a lot of vitamin D-rich foods, you are unlikely to get more than a third of what you need from food.

Food	Portion (g)	Vitamin D (mcg)
Trout	150	12.3
Smoked mackerel	150	12.3
Canned salmon	100g	11
Canned tuna	150	1.65
Pork	150	1.65
Milk	200	0.2
UV exposed fresh mushrooms	100	10

Try out these recipes to help you get enough Vitamin D in winter, alongside your supplement.



Mushroom omelette for one

Wash and slice 125g of UV exposed mushrooms and fry in a mix of 1 tsp olive oil and 1 tsp Vitamin D fortified margarine. Add a handful of spinach and steam for 1 minute until wilted. Leave the vegetables to cool in a bowl. Beat 2 eggs with 2 tbsp of fortified milk and season to taste. Heat 1 tsp of margarine and 1 tsp of olive oil in the same pan, add the eggs and cook until set. Add the vegetable mix and a tablespoon of strong cheddar cheese on one side of the omelette and fold over the other side.

Smoked mackerel spread

In a bowl, add together 250g flaked smoked mackerel, 150g Greek yoghurt, 100g cream cheese, 2tsp horseradish sauce, 1tbsp lemon juice, and ½ tsp ground pepper. Mix with a hand blender (or in a food processor) until smooth. Serve with wholegrain rye crackers or bread, or as a topping for baked potatoes.





Scam calls make up around half of all unsolicited phone calls reported to call blocking service Unknownphone.com. Sales calls were the second most common, accounting for 30% of the total, while surveys and debt collection calls made up the remainder. Our new scams awareness coordinator Joyce offers a few tips to reduce the number of nuisance and scam calls you receive.

Register your number - Landlines and mobile numbers can be registered with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) free of charge. This won't stop scammers but it should reduce unwanted sales and marketing calls. To register your mobile number on the TPS, simply text "TPS" and your email address to 85095 from your mobile phone. To register your home phone, you will need to go on the website or email tps@dma.org.uk

Home phone call blocking - Ask your landline provider if it offers call blocking which allow you to screen unrecognised numbers and block unwanted callers. Call-blocking phones are another option.

Mobile phone call blocking - iPhones and Android phones offer call blocking, spam protection and caller ID verification. Third-party apps are also available.

Call 159 to stop bank scams - Don't give out sensitive information to anyone on an incoming call. Hang up, wait for five minutes and either call the firm on a trusted number (such as on their website) or dial 159. This will connect you to your bank's fraud team, under a scheme most banks have signed up to.

Don't trust caller ID - Number-spoofing technology enables scammers to easily clone the telephone number of a bank or other trusted company, meaning you can't trust the caller ID alone. This is true of text messages too, so don't assume a text is from your bank even if it appears that way. If in any doubt, contact the relevant business using a trusted method such as the number printed on the back of your bank card.

Our scams awareness team can help you with any questions- phone us on 0208 129 7627. And if you would like help setting up call blocking on your mobile phone, come along to one of Age UK Barnet's digital support groups – just phone Howard on 0208 432 1415

DITCHING TECHNOLOGY FOR THE BRIGHTON MARATHON

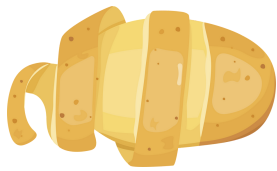
Our Age-friendly co-ordinator Pippa will be running the Brighton Marathon to raise money for Age UK Barnet - she will also be doing it old style, without using any gadgets!

'In April, I will be running the marathon naked. By 'naked' I don't mean naked of clothes, but naked of technology. You might think that this is not as scary, but coming from a generation that believes that 'if it's not online, it didn't happen' – it might be easier to ditch my shorts. According to our Age-friendly Barnet survey, 62 per cent of Barnet residents over 55 feel confident with using digital technology such as tablets and laptops. It also showed that being at ease with technology correlates with feeling safe and taking part in social groups.

The results made me think how I use technology. When I normally run, I use Google Maps on my phone, measure my speed with a digital watch, and upload details of every run to social media for people to 'like'. Technology certainly made it easier to track my training, but I started to become concerned about my reliance on it. So, I decided to ditch technology and train for a marathon without it. My training has refreshed my skills in map reading and long multiplication,

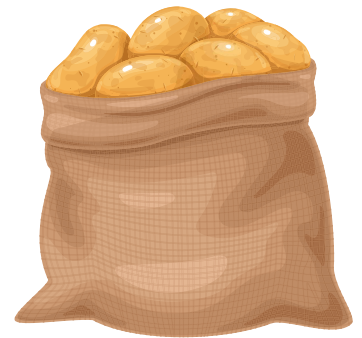
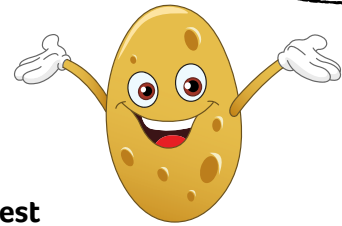
I have become less obsessive about statistics and more concerned about how I feel. It may sound silly, but I am surprised by how great my experience without technology has been. For me, it shows how much young people can learn from other generations when we meaningfully engage and work together.





POTATOES

I love potatoes it really is a fact
 Prepared washed and neatly packed
 No scrubbing soil, all ready to cook
 No need to refer to a cookery book
 Maris Piper spuds are best
 Cooked different ways they pass the test
 Creamed, mashed with lots of butter
 Yummy you hear me utter
 Tasty chips done in the oven
 Salt and vinegar no need for discussion
 Crispy roasties with lots of gravy
 Easily pleased seems quite crazy
 Jackets with grated cheese on top
 Nothing better that I would swap
 By now you can tell how I feel
 Spuds certainly are the real meal deal!



NUTRITION Q&A

HOW CAN I LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE BY CHANGING MY DIET



‘Your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body if you have high blood pressure,’ says dietitian Caroline Morrison. **‘Most people don’t experience any symptoms, but if left untreated, it increases your risk of heart attacks, stroke, kidney and eye damage. That’s why it’s so important to get your blood pressure checked regularly.’**

Along with lifestyle changes such as reducing stress, exercise and keeping a healthy weight, there are plenty of dietary changes you can make to reduce your risk of high blood pressure.

Cut down on salt: There is a link between having eating too much salt and high blood pressure. Try cooking without any salt and don’t add salt to your food at the table. As most of the salt you eat is hidden in processed foods, check the ingredients labels to find out which have less salt. Experiment with alternative flavourings such as garlic, ginger, herbs, lemon juice and black pepper when cooking. Include foods high in potassium (Leafy greens, beans, nuts, dairy foods, and starchy vegetables like winter squash are rich sources), magnesium (avocados, nuts, seeds and yes, dark chocolate), calcium and fibre which will help to lower blood pressure.

Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. Fresh, frozen, dried, juiced and canned all count. If you are using canned varieties, look for those with lower salt and sugar. Include 2-3 servings of dairy foods per day which are a good source of calcium. Opt for lower fat versions such as semi skimmed milk, low-fat yoghurts and low-fat cheese.

Aim for 2-3 servings of wholegrain foods per day such as wholegrain breakfast cereals and breads, brown pasta and rice and oats which are high in fibre, potassium and magnesium.

Have oily fish at least once a week – that’s salmon, pilchards, sardines, mackerel, herring or trout. They are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce blood pressure.

Don’t use dietary supplements such as calcium, magnesium and potassium for reducing blood pressure, as consuming more than you need can be harmful.

Drink less alcohol: Drinking more than the recommended amount of alcohol can increase your blood pressure and damage your heart muscles.



Each month former journalist Ed Newman has a lovely chat with a local resident and share their stories with the rest of us. This month Ed speaks to Gilda who proves that you can still look good - whatever age you might be.

Gilda, a regular visitor to Age UK Barnet, always makes sure she's looking her best every time she goes out. Even at the age of 87, she takes great care in what she wears but insists she would never be seen in designer labels.

Why should I pay to advertise their clothes,' Gilda took delight in telling me when we met at the Ann Owens Centre recently. 'I still enjoy buying clothes but I don't spend a lot of money. There are a lot of reasonable shops around where you can buy some nice things. 'I used to sell ladies' clothes at East End markets for many years. People knew me and they would come to see me on the stall and we'd do very well. It was a hard life though getting up at 5 o'clock every morning to get to the market and set up. I must have been very strong to do all that heavy lifting. There were always plenty of characters around and I certainly became more worldly from the quiet girl I'd been.



'Working on the markets all those years is probably why I'm so good with people. I've got a positive attitude to life and I like meeting people like those I see at Age UK Barnet. 'Sadly, not all older people are as fortunate as me with the support group I have of family and friends, including my son Adam who is a medic and makes sure I'm well looked after. Many people are very lonely on their own and I think that's terrible. They're not always shown a lot of respect and feel ignored but I don't think you'd call me invisible.'

It was a bad experience when she was just sixteen that changed Gilda's attitude to how she looked for ever. At the time she was working at a shop owned by her brother-in-law. Also on the staff was the boss's brother and it was his hurtful comments about her appearance that altered her whole outlook.

'He was a very handsome man and I had a massive crush on him,' Gilda tells me. 'But one day he said to me "look at the way you're dressed, all the girls next door look better than you". He was very rude to me but from that day on I changed everything about the way I looked and even now, all these years later, I still take care with my appearance. I go to the hairdressers in Finchley every week, I wear make-up and get my nails done and it's important to me that my clothes always blend together. Some people might say I'm vain but I wouldn't say so, it just makes me feel good.'

One man who certainly liked the way Gilda looked was her husband Len, who she met when she was just nineteen. Introduced by her brother, they hit it off very quickly and within fourteen months they were married. They would have three children together and Gilda now has six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Len had both kitchen and property businesses. That meant Gilda always had a nice kitchen and a lovely house. After 36 years of happily married life, Len sadly died at the age of 63.

'That was thirty years ago and I still miss him,' says Gilda. 'He was a good man.'

It was after Len died that Gilda moved across London to be nearer her family in this part of town. She loves spending time with them and her friends, including those at Age UK Barnet. Gilda was first encouraged to attend after she took a very nasty fall.

'I looked like I'd been in a fight with Mike Tyson,' Gilda jokes. 'At first, I went to flower arranging and pottery classes and then yoga and now cookery on a Monday. I've always loved cooking for other people more than myself. When I came back from working on the market, I would always cook the children a three-course meal. Cooking is very therapeutic, and I really look forward to the group, meeting my friends and trying something new. The way Age UK Barnet looks after everybody is fantastic!'



Ingredients

- 60ml olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 400g beef mince
- 60ml chipotle chilli sauce or other hot sauce
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- Bunch roughly chopped coriander, plus extra to serve
- 1kg (about 4) desiree potatoes (unpeeled), scrubbed, coarsely grated
- 50g unsalted butter, melted
- 4 eggs
- 1 jalapeno chilli or long green chilli, thinly sliced

Method

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large frypan (with a lid) over medium-high heat. Add onion and a pinch of salt, then cook, stirring, for 3-4 minutes until soft. Add the beef and cook, stirring, for 5 minutes or until browned. Stir in the chipotle sauce, tomatoes and coriander, season with freshly ground black pepper and reduce heat to medium. Cook for a further 5-6 minutes until slightly thickened.

Meanwhile, to make the potato hash, place grated potato in a clean tea towel and squeeze to remove excess water. Place potato in a bowl with the melted butter, then season and stir to combine. Heat another 1 tablespoon oil in a separate frypan over medium heat. Using a 80ml measuring cup, place 4 mounds of potato in the pan, flatten with a spoon and cook for 3-4 minutes each side until golden and cooked through. Repeat with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil and potato mixture.

Using a spoon, make 4 indents in the beef, then crack an egg into each. Cover and cook for 7 minutes or until whites are cooked. Garnish with the chilli and extra coriander, then serve with the hash.



Don't worry – you are not going to hit anyone (no matter how much you might, from time to time, wish you could!) But shadow boxing has, in recent years, become increasingly popular, according to former physiotherapist Gillian Jordan. 'Not only do participants have a good work-out, it improves co-ordination, focus, muscle tone, mobility and even memory,' she says. 'And regular participants report increased confidence.'

First things first, it's important to warm-up. 'As you are not going to actually hit anything, your movements should be controlled – not wildly lashing out!' says Gillian. 'And, if you feel the need, do take a rest at any time during the routine and take a couple of deep breaths until you feel ready to continue.'

Sit in a firm, stable chair or sofa in which you can safely move your whole body. And have enough room around you so that you don't hit somebody, the furniture, or your favourite ornament!

Warm-up

Start with several whole arm circling, forwards and backwards. Then do some sitting marching on the spot, lifting you knees as far as you can and 'march' your arms as well. Next try some trunk bending forward and from side to side and finally sit as straight as you can and take a couple of deep breaths.

The boxing routine

If you've watched boxing you'll see the boxer always holds both hands in front of his or her face below eye level to protect it from unexpected punches. So every 'punch' starts and ends from this guard position. Boxers are constantly 'bouncing' on their feet as they advance and retreat, so if you can, try to keep your feet moving as you punch and jab. 'They also do lots of grunting and hissing as they punch so add some of those too!' says Gillian.

We'll be doing three moves: jabs (when you don't fully straighten your arms); punches (when your arms do straighten – forwards, to the sides); and up or down and hook punches (up and across, usually aiming at the chin - but your imaginary opponent will be in guard position!



1. Start with slow and steady forwards punches, when your arms fully straighten – left then right, 20 times, followed by fast jabs, when your arms remain partly bent at the elbows. Vary all these by doing not only alternate arms but also repeated punches or jabs with the same arm. Try at least 30 times to start with and increase as it gets easier.

2. Upper cuts – start with your hands at hip level and push each one up and across – alternate hands and speeds. Do at least 30

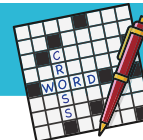


3. Keep punching whilst turning your upper body from one side to the other. Alternate slow and fast punches and jabs and upper cuts in an asymmetric rhythm both for speed and for which arm is punching.



4. Remember to keep your feet moving as you punch if you can but if you find that difficult, between each set of punches, give your arms a rest and march on the spot for a minute

5. Use some jaunty music if that will help you to keep going. Try to box regularly and see your fitness improve. ENJOY!!



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

HIDDEN OBJECTS

Find 10 hidden objects (shown on right) in the picture below.



The duck
said to the
bartender,
'put it on
my bill.'



Across

- 1 Deride (4)
- 3 In a tizzy (8)
- 9 Hermit (7)
- 10 Concise (5)
- 11 Boadicea's people (5)
- 12 Casual trousers (6)
- 14 Flock of geese (6)
- 16 Card game for four players (6)
- 19 Movement (6)
- 21 Out of condition (5)
- 24 Surpass (5)
- 25 Pistol case (7)
- 26 Incessant reader (8)
- 27 Sluggish (4)

Down

- 1 Matrimony (8)
- 2 Hidden store (5)
- 4 Lubricant (6)
- 5 Shin bone (5)
- 6 Deceived (7)
- 7 Bonkers (4)
- 8 Interment (6)
- 13 London airport (8)
- 15 One of the Marx Brothers (7)
- 17 Russian currency (6)
- 18 Pollen-producing part of a flower (6)
- 20 Relative by marriage (2-3)
- 22 Causing death (5)
- 23 Pavement edge (4)

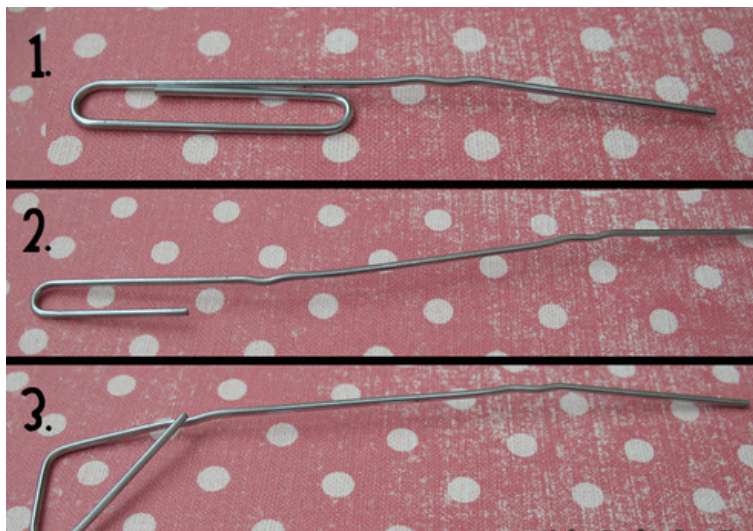
1		2			3	4		5		6		7
				8								
9								10				
11						12						
												13
14		15					16	17				
					18							
	19			20				21		22		
23												
24						25						
26								27				

What you will need

All you need is scraps of red/white/pink paper, two paper clips per bird, scissors and a hot glue gun. I prefer the big thick paper clips...they make stronger birds legs.

Instructions

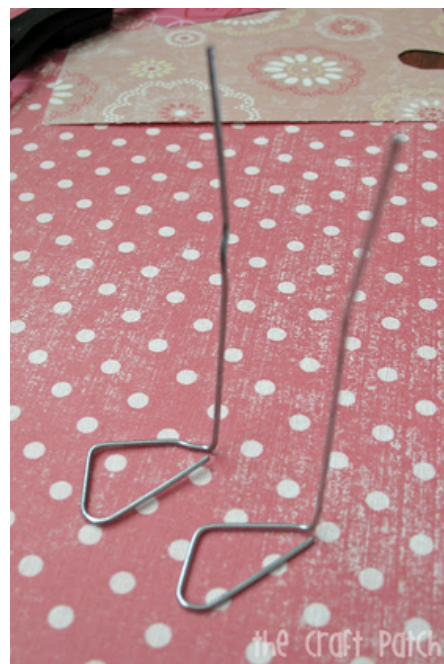
Step 1: Bend the paper clips into legs by following the picture shown below:

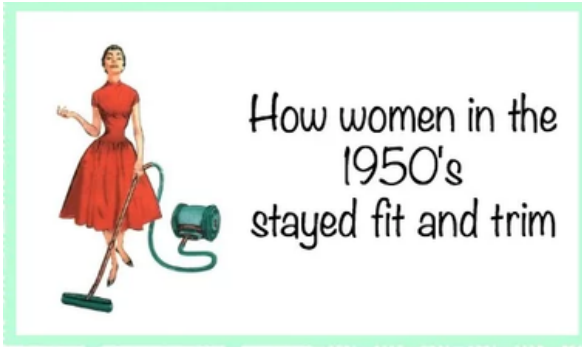


Step 3: Cut out a bird body (front and back), a wing, and a beak from coordinating paper. Tape or glue the tops of the paper clip legs to the back side of the paper body and glue the other paper over the paper clips, sandwiching them in so the pretty sides of the paper are showing. Add a beak, wings, and eyes and you are done! If you wanted to get fancy, you could even add a little feather sticking out of the tail. Now you just need to find a perch for your happy little love birds!



Step 2: The last bend you will have to make is so they stand up. I had to wiggle and bend and wiggle and bend until mine stood up on their own.





Have dinner ready – and make sure it's good!

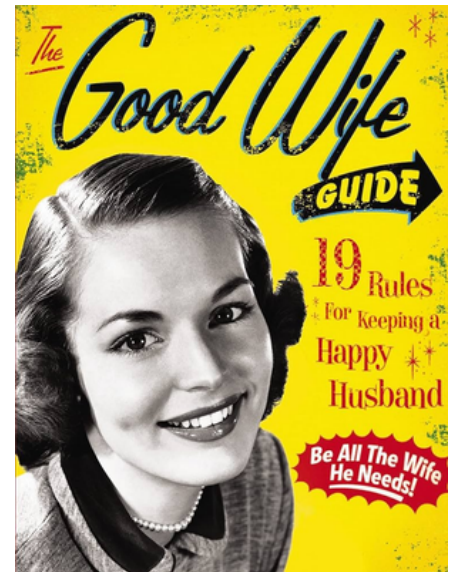


Minimize noise – and don't you dare talk right when he returns home!

After a long day of work, the last thing your husband wants to deal with is a loud home. That's why women in the 1950s were taught to keep their homes as quiet as possible in the evening. This meant finishing the washing and vacuuming during the day, and ensuring the children didn't throw any tantrums.

Be as feminine as possible if you want to find yourself a husband

In the 1950s, women were told the best way to find themselves a husband was to appear as feminine as possible! The less feminine they were, the more difficulty they'd have finding a man. Given it was seen as "abnormal" to be single, many took this advice to heart and dolled themselves up whenever they went out in public, in case they came across a potential partner.



To ensure their husbands were able to enjoy the evening, women were told to keep any complaints to themselves, including those about them hardly spending any time at home. Since all women did day in and day out was relax (we're rolling our eyes, too), the evening was the time for them to allow their husbands to experience the same luxury!



Versus reality!

HOW CAN WE HELP?

AGE UK BARNET SERVICES

- 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.
- Would you enjoy a regular chat over the phone with a friendly volunteer? Try our **Befriending Service** on 020 8432 1416
- 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.
- 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.
- **Household Support Fund** - grants for Barnet residents over the age of 55 struggling to make ends meet during this cost of living crisis. Phone 020 8203 5040 or email support@ageukbarnet.org.uk

*There may be a charge for this service

OUT & ABOUT

AGE UK BARNET EVENTS



AdvantAGEous ART EXHIBITION - 6 - 23 March 2024 Art, knitting and pottery made by our talented art class participants and our day club members will be on display in an exhibition at artsdepot in North Finchley. You can buy the work and suggested donations will be between £15 and £40. artsdepot is on 5 Nether Street, Tally Ho Corner, North Finchley and is right next to the North Finchley Bus Station. For more info please email agefriendly@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call Pippa on 07379 331807.



Disco for the young at heart - 20 March 2024 (5-8pm) To mark Action Against Ageism day we're holding a disco for over 55s - a chance to let go and release your inner Olivia Newton John or John Travolta. So, dust off your dancing shoes and come along and boogie. A dance instructor will be teaching us a few moves too. Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. Free entry but a cash bar. To register your place, contact Pippa on agefriendly@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call her on 07379 331807.

Living Well in Barnet event— Monday 25 March 2024 (10am-12.30pm) Join us for a morning of stimulating talks and activities for people interested in memory and living well with dementia. Some great speakers including Professor Catherine Loveday on spotting the early signs of memory issues and caring for people living with dementia. Information stalls and refreshments. Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. To book your place call Fiona on 020 8629 0269.



Talk: Fuel for thought – why what we eat affects how we think. Weds April 10 (7-8pm)

Professor Catherine Loveday on the gut brain connection, brain boosting foods and the impact of sugar on thinking skills. Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. To book your free place, contact Teresa on 2084321421

Eid celebratory lunch – Monday 15 April (2-4pm) Join us to mark the end of Ramadhan and celebrate Eid. Bringing together the community to enjoy an afternoon of entertainment, followed by a free light meal. We welcome people who celebrate and those from other faiths who want to find out more about the festival. Dressing up encouraged! Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, N2 8LT. To book your place, phone Salima on 020 8129 7619.

Talk: Has the pandemic affected our memories? Weds May 8 (7-8pm) Professor Catherine Loveday on how the pandemic and other big life events impact our memories over time. Takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. To book your free place, contact Teresa on 2084321421

Writer Lee Janogly – an 84 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 she talks cars and the perils of parking.

My friend, Gloria loves her car. No – she adores her car, lovingly taking it for a shampoo and blow-dry every week. I don't know what breed it is – it's a low-slung sporty thing with a fat bottom – but getting a lift with Gloria is a nerve-wracking experience before you even get in, as she snaps out instructions:

'Check there's no mud on your shoes,'

'Take your bag off the seat!'

'Don't slam the door, close it gently!'

It's worse in the summer when she slides the lid back. By the time we arrive at our destination, my painstakingly straightened hair has turned into a halo of matted frizz.

I have no interest in cars at all. As long as it has a wheel on each corner and hiccups when I turn on the engine, that's all I need to know. I have no idea what make it is – I think it's a VW Peppermint – and the only way I can remember the number plate is to assign a little phrase to it, for example DBC 'Don't buy chocolate'. When the red light comes on, I drive to the garage and put petrol in. The first time I did that I thought there was something wrong with the nozzle as it stopped

all the time, so I kept pressing it and only gave up when the petrol jumped out of the hole on to my shoes.

I consider myself a good driver though – as long as I keep going forward. Going backwards is a bit tricky, thereby making parking rather an ordeal. After ten minutes of shunting backwards and forwards, one of my kids would inevitably say, 'This is fine, Mum, leave it here - we'll walk to the kerb.' Rude!

I'm not as bad as my friend, Deely though. (Her real name is Delia but she's never called that because, as she says, people think she can cook). Deely practices 'touch parking'. She backs into a space until she 'touches' the car behind, then edges forward until she 'touches' the car in front. Well, it works for her. I am brilliant at spatial awareness though, and can whizz through those width-restricted posts without slowing down. Surely one wing mirror is quite enough, no?

The older I get, the more anxious I find driving, especially in London where there seems to be endless roadworks, diversions, cycle lanes, different apps for parking in each borough and ULEZ. I avoid busy motorways and find many of my contemporaries feel the same way. Thank goodness for my travel card enabling me to hop on the tube or bus rather than drive anywhere.

I remember a few years ago, Gloria rang my doorbell and said, 'I've come to show you my new car!' I said, 'Why?' She looked at me in disbelief and exclaimed excitedly, 'It's got Blue Tooth!' – being one of the first to get this connection. I didn't know what she was talking about. I still don't.

Lee is the author of 'Getting Old, Deal with It' (Mensch Publishing)



WHY IT'S GOOD TO GET OLDER



We are less prone to colds! The human immune system encounters millions of potential dangers every day and over the years our white blood cells recognise and respond quickly to invaders they've encountered before. Called immune memory, this does begin to drop off in your 70s or 80s, but there's a bit of a sweet spot for people – particularly from your 40s through to your late 60s and early 70s – where the immune system remembers the viruses experienced over the years.

This cumulative protection translates into fewer colds. While 20-year olds can expect to catch two or three in a year, over 60s average only one or two.

Whether we are fans of swearing or not, many of us are likely to resort to it now and again – and, according to neuroscientist Professor Catherine Loveday, there are good reasons for this. In fact, it might sometimes do us some good..

‘The latest research shows that swearing is not simply a sign of aggression or lazy language, it might even serve a useful purpose,’ says Catherine. ‘My colleagues and I carried out a review of more than 100 academic papers on the subject and found that swear words can have a powerful impact on how we think, act and behave.’



Are swear words special?

Experiments show that swear words are different to other words as they are better remembered and command more attention.

This is backed up by neuroscience. Brain scans suggest that swearing might be located in different parts of the brain from other speech regions – areas that are involved in aspects of memory and emotion that are instinctive and difficult to inhibit.

This might explain why swearing can remain intact in people who have suffered brain damage and struggle to speak as a result.

The unique power of swearing

Swearing affects our emotional state, which can lead to physical changes in the body, such as increased sweating and a raised heart rate. Some scientists have suggested that swearing triggers the “fight or flight” response, which might explain why it helps us deal with acute pain.

‘In our research, we have found that one of the most common reasons for people to swear is when they hurt themselves,’ says Catherine.

A series of experiments have shown that this is actually a very effective response to pain. When people are asked to submerge a hand in icy water for as long as possible, those who repeat a swear word over and over again have a higher pain threshold. Other studies have found increased physical strength in people after swearing.

Why we swear

As well as helping us cope with pain, or giving us a bit of extra strength when we need it, swearing (in a safe and appropriate setting) can also be a helpful way to vent if we are very frustrated about something.

But Catherine points out that we swear for a whole range of other reasons too: we might be expressing aggression and causing offence or using it to be funny. It can be a way of bonding, of showing trust in a particular group or individual. Or it could be a way of grabbing attention and dominance over other people.

Why does swearing affect us?

Catherine’s research team are interested in why swearing is so powerful. An important clue comes from the fact that this depends on our experience of the word. Bilingual people get better pain relief and are more distracted by swear words from the first language than their second language. And when we hear a swear word in an unfamiliar language it has no impact.

Memory and swearing

‘So, it is not the word itself, but something about our early experiences with hearing or saying those words,’ says Catherine. ‘Maybe we were given a strong telling off by a parent or teacher, and that leaves us with a powerful emotional response to the word, which persists into adulthood.

However it may relate to different ways in which we encounter swearing in our life.

‘My colleagues and I are working on a new large study which will explore people’s memories of swearing throughout their life. What were their significant swearing incidents? Did swearing always bring about unpleasant consequences, such as punishment, or were there benefits too?’

‘We are also intrigued by the idea that swearing might show a similar memory pattern to that for music. The songs we remember and like best are those that we listened to when we were teenagers, and our research suggests that maybe our most powerful swear words come from the same period. That’s because, like music, swearing possibly takes on new meaning in adolescence.

‘It becomes an important way to respond to the intense emotions we tend to have during this time, and an act that signals independence from parents and connection with friends. We think that swear words and songs used during this time may become forever linked with important and highly memorable experiences.’

Whatever you may think about swearing, it is fascinating to explore why these words take on such a different meaning to other words. Swear words may sometimes be offensive and can be used to upset people, but science shows us that they also play a valuable role in our social world and can be a great way to help us manage pain and emotion.



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.



Winter on the allotment can be a miserable place. Not much growing, the ground too wet or frozen and not many people around to chat to. Even the beautiful early snowdrops can look grumpy. But spring is on its way! Now we have the days getting longer, crocus and daffodils flowering and the ground starting to warm up.

At our allotment site we are aiming to have work-parties every month to help tidy-up and maintain the overall appearance of the site. A couple of hours' work for the volunteers, followed by homemade soup and sausages in rolls, tea or coffee and maybe cake as well. This is a great way to get big jobs completed, rubbish cleared and helps create a great sense of community spirit. I believe that a shared hobby like gardening or having an allotment can help provide great health benefits and much needed social contact. Spending a few hours a week could be more beneficial to your health than some of the more energetic activities taken on by some people.

At the moment I have been digging up my asparagus bed that has been overwhelmed by bindweed. The worst weed going in my opinion. I will try to salvage the plants and re-plant them in a new location, but trying to remove bindweed roots takes forever, so I must try to keep on top of it when it inevitably starts re-growing!

A few other jobs for March/April

- From the end of February it's time to start chitting potatoes. Place in a light, cool frost free place to get them off to a head start. You can grow some in a large pot or plastic sack.
- Try growing some chillies. They need a long growing season so have to be started early.
- Cut back ornamental grasses before the new growth starts to emerge.
- It is also a good time to spread your homemade compost around flower beds in the garden and veg beds on the allotment.

HAVE YOU GOT A WILL?

We have new legacy leaflet which you should have received in your Pigeon Post this month. If Age UK Barnet has helped you, or you want to make a lasting difference to future generations of older people in the borough, please think about us when leaving a gift in your will. And to ensure that the money will be spent in Barnet, please include our charity number: 1080458. We are an independent local charity and are responsible for raising our own funds.

If you have not yet made a will, you can try a new free support service for online probate applications. Run by the Ministry of Justice in partnership with We Are Group, you can book an appointment for a digital support session - either remotely, in a centre nearby or in your home. Just call 03300 160 051.

If you have not received our legacy leaflet and would like a copy, we have plenty in our reception at the Ann Owens Centre in East Finchley. There should also be copies in your local library. Alternatively, please give us a ring on 020 8203 5040 and we can send one to you.





Knitting and crocheting do wonders for our mental health, according to a study from the University of Wollongong.

Participants felt happier, calmer and more useful after crocheting. When we're engaged in repetitive motion tasks, our body and mind settle. Our heart rate and breathing even out and we have lower blood pressure.

What sets knitting and crocheting apart from other crafts is the rhythm of stitches and needles clicking.

This sense of rhythm can lead to a sensation known as flow state, the pleasurable feeling you get when you're so engaged by an activity that time disappears.

'I am living with cancer and knitting has helped me deal with all the stress,' says Luigi, a participant in our Knit 'n' Natter class. 'I just focus on the task and forget about everything else. It really gives me a boost.'

Knitting and crochet are useful for depression and anxiety because they can provide a sense of control that reduces feelings of uncertainty and ruminations. There's also evidence that crocheting and knitting are effective in maintaining dexterity and cognitive health as we age. 'Knitting keeps my hands moving,' says Luigi. 'And even though I make loads of mistakes – I drop stitches and add extra stitches, for instance – it still makes me happier.'

Sharing an activity with others can give people a much-needed sense of connection if joining a group. 'I look forward to coming to the class every week, not only to knit, but to meet people and chat,' says Luigi. 'Everyone is doing their own thing and supporting each other.'

Knit 'n' Natter group runs every Wednesday at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT. Phone Helen on 07384 466 840 to let us know you're coming.



HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

LAST GRANTS BEING HANDED OUT!



A final call-out to Barnet residents over 55 who are struggling financially and need help with bills or other essentials. Our Household Support Fund team are still busy giving out grants but time is running out and we cannot accept any applications made after 31 March 2024. This fund has helped hundreds of Barnet residents through difficult times and helped them get back on their feet. Please give us a ring on 020 8203 5040 if you think you might be eligible.

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

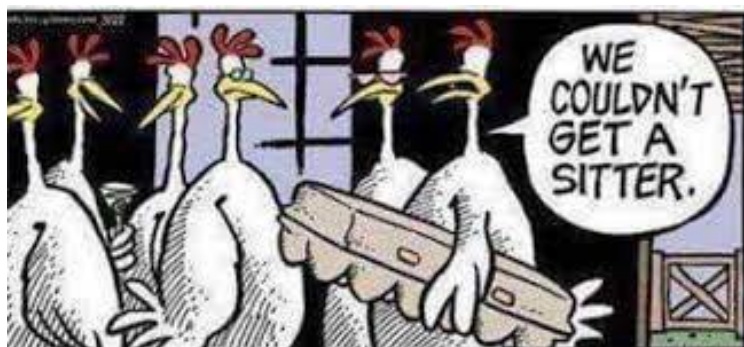
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"A cat killer? Is that the face of a cat killer? Cat chaser maybe. But hey—who isn't?"

Memorizing pothole locations is a survival skill where I'm from



....next month, a day in the life of Cat Moss aka Suki - "pawed" by Suki herself!

