

# Your mind matters

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Ideas and tips for  
emotional wellbeing  
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# Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

**We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people to love later life.**

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

**Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 160 local partners.**

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# What this guide is about

We've all heard how important it is to look after our physical health – to keep to a healthy weight, take regular exercise and eat well. But what about our mental health? You may be confused about what mental health is or why it's relevant to you.

Some people call mental health 'mental wellbeing', 'emotional health' or 'emotional wellbeing'. Our mental health affects how we think and feel, and how we cope with life's ups and downs. It's just as important as good physical health but like physical health, our mental health doesn't stay the same. It can change with our circumstances, or as we move through different stages of life. And just as our bodies can become unwell, so can our minds.

Because there are often no outward signs, you may not realise anything is wrong but mental health problems are more common than many people think.

This guide looks at things you can do to look after your mental wellbeing, as well as steps you can take if you think you need some help.

As far as possible, the information in this guide is applicable across the UK.

## Key

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



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

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# How to stay well

Just as you can look after your physical health and reduce your risk of falling ill, you can take care of your mental health too. Try doing as many of the following things as possible and you may notice a boost in your mental wellbeing.

## **Take care of yourself**

Be kind to yourself and have a treat from time to time. It doesn't have to be expensive, for example, treating yourself to your favourite magazine or going out for lunch might raise your spirits. Or simply take some time by yourself to sit down with a good book. Think about what helps you relax and keep things in perspective.

## **Do the things that make you laugh and have fun**

Think about the things you enjoy and make some time for them. All of us are different. Perhaps you enjoy cooking or laughing at repeats of your favourite TV programmes. Whatever it is, think about what makes you feel good and try to set aside some time every week for it.

## **Get enough sleep**

It's recognised that sleep patterns change as we get older and lack of sleep can directly affect the way we feel. If you're having difficulty sleeping, try cutting back on daytime naps and reduce the amount of caffeine you drink. Try to make time to relax and unwind each evening, perhaps by reading a book or listening to the radio. You should also minimise the amount of time you spend in bed awake and try going to bed and getting up at the same time each day to get into a routine.

## **Eat well and drink sensibly**

What we eat and drink affects how we feel. Try not to fill up on the wrong things, such as sugary and fatty foods, and instead eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. While we all enjoy having chocolate and sweets every once in a while, it's important to remember that what we put in our bodies affects how we feel.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink and keep at least two days per week alcohol-free. Many of us enjoy going for a drink now and again and it's easy to try to convince ourselves that alcohol will make us feel better, but remember that alcohol is actually a depressant and can affect your mood. You should avoid alcohol when taking certain medicines too. If in doubt, ask your pharmacist for advice.

Our free guide *Healthy eating* has more information about having a healthy diet and drinking sensibly.

## **Create structure to your day and set yourself goals**

Most of us look forward to retirement and having time to ourselves, but when it comes it can be hard to adjust to the loss of structure to our day, and the purpose that working life gave us. But retirement doesn't have to mean an end to keeping active and busy and is often a time to discover new things.

Setting goals and making plans gives our lives meaning and purpose. Make sure they're realistic and start small. For example, rather than saying 'I plan to exercise for one hour every day', plan instead to go for a 20 minute walk, three times a week. For more suggestions on what you might like to do, see our information on staying in touch and meeting new people (see page 10–15).

## Keep active

As well as keeping you healthy, research has shown that regular physical exercise is a great way to improve your mood as it increases the production of brain chemicals that make you feel happy. It can also be a good way to clear your mind and relax.

It's never too late to get active. Try to limit the amount of time you spend sitting and look for simple ways you can become more active, such as using the stairs instead of lifts or escalators. Any physical activity that raises your breathing rate for ten minutes or more is beneficial to health. And being active doesn't have to involve going to the gym. Housework can count as physical activity if it raises your breathing rate, or try going out for a brisk walk. Build up gradually, aiming for at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week, along with muscle strengthening and balance activities twice a week. Strength and balance activities could include yoga or Pilates, and can also include every day activities such as lifting bags of shopping or heavy gardening.

Finding an activity you enjoy means you're more likely to do it regularly. Perhaps you enjoy taking some time out by yourself to exercise. Or you might prefer the social aspect that comes with exercise classes or groups.

If you have a health condition that makes moving about difficult or painful, consult your GP who should be able to suggest suitable activities and exercises. To find out more see our free information guide *Healthy living*.

## Get some fresh air

Simply getting outside for a few minutes every day can improve your mood. Why not join a walking group where you could explore the local area and meet people who share similar interests? Walking for Health (see page 37) has various groups that cater for individual needs and levels of mobility. In Scotland, contact Paths for all, in Wales contact Ramblers Cymru, and in Northern Ireland contact Walk NI (see page 37). Or why not get outside and enjoy some gardening? If you have mobility or physical difficulties with gardening, contact Thrive (see page 37).



## Talk about your feelings

Speaking to friends or family about how you feel can be difficult if you haven't done it before, but it can help you see things from a different perspective. The sooner you can address your problems, the less likely they are to develop further. If you would rather speak to someone you're not close to, you may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor or support groups for people in a similar situation. The Samaritans has a helpline that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for anyone who needs to talk (see page 36).

Men in particular tend to find it hard to discuss their thoughts and feelings, and prefer to keep their problems to themselves. Perhaps you think you'd be burdening others, but you may be surprised at the difference it can make or the sense of relief you get from sharing your feelings.

If you feel that formal ways of talking about your feelings, such as support groups and counselling services, are not for you, try getting out and about and meeting people who have been through a similar situation. Meeting new people who you can relate to may help you find a way to work through your feelings. See our suggestions for staying in touch and meeting new people (see pages 10–15) for some ideas.



Our **mental health** affects how we think and feel and **how we cope** with life's ups and downs.

# After Joe retired he found himself missing the routine and structure of work.

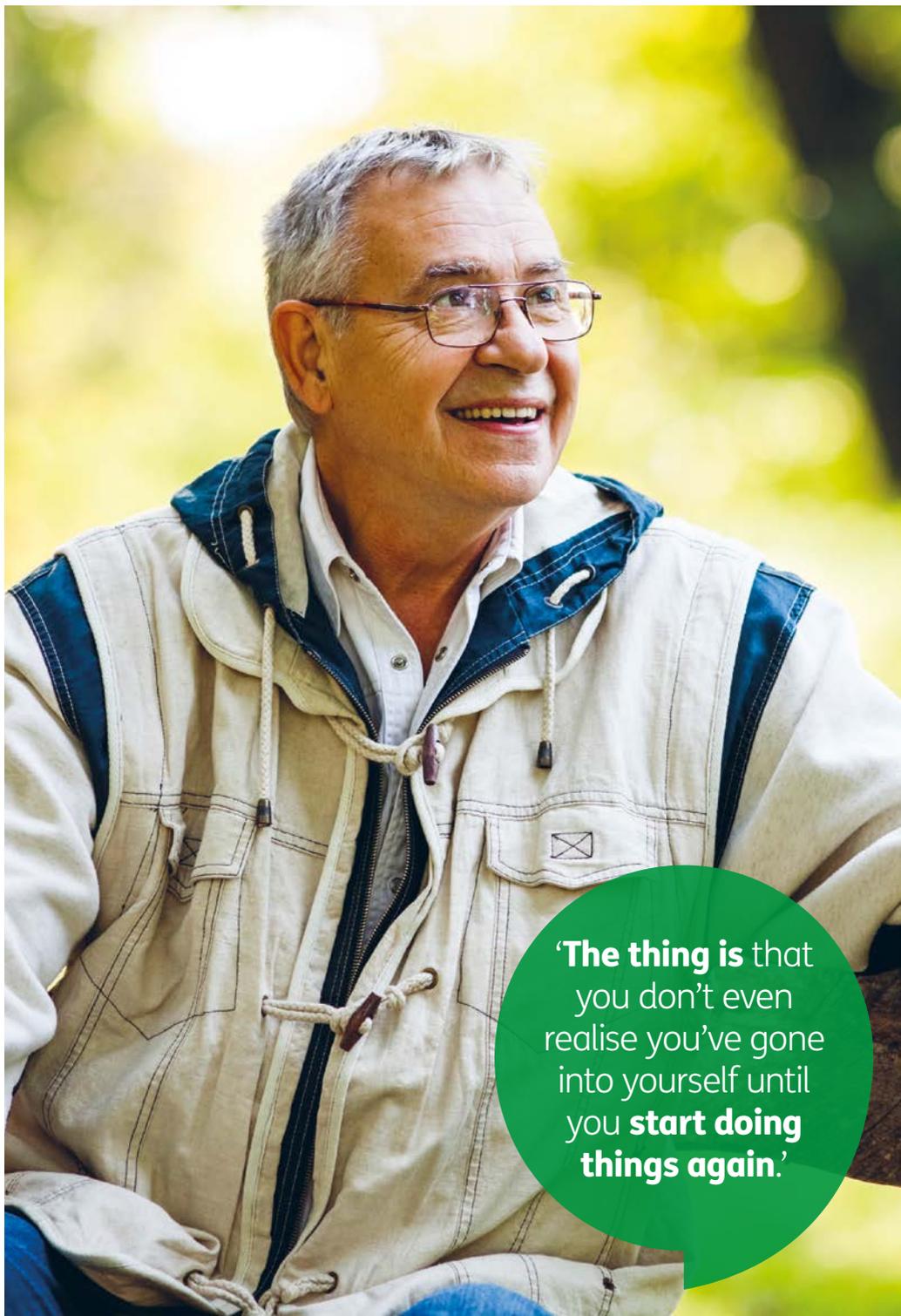
'I'd looked forward to retirement for a few years and at first it was a real novelty not having to set my alarm to go off in the morning.

'But people don't tell you that retirement isn't always so easy once you get there. After a couple of months I felt myself wondering what I had to get up for. I was spending a lot of time sitting on the couch watching TV. I knew I should get out and do something but it was hard to motivate myself.

'Then one day I was reading my local paper and I saw an advert for a walking group. I wasn't sure at first. I knew I wanted to start doing something so I thought about it for a few weeks before finally plucking up the courage to go along.

'It wasn't easy turning up by myself the first few times but one of the regulars, Ron, made a real effort to introduce me to everyone and make me feel welcome. I go on two walks a week now – every Wednesday and Saturday – and I really look forward to them. Getting out for some exercise and fresh air does me the world of good as it helps me clear my head and keep things in perspective.

'And the social aspect has been great. I hadn't realised how much I was missing the social interaction I got from work. I even meet up with a few people outside the group now. We go to the cinema together and out for lunch every couple of weeks. The thing is that you don't even realise you've gone into yourself until you start doing things again.'



**‘The thing is** that you don’t even realise you’ve gone into yourself until you **start doing things again.**’

# Staying in touch and meeting people

Regular social contact is vital for good mental health. It's part of what makes life fulfilling and helps us feel good about ourselves. But it can be difficult to meet new friends when you're retired. Many of us meet our friends at school, college, or work, or through friends of our children. As we get older, opportunities to make friends don't exist in quite the same way. You may find your circle of friends has got smaller or you may want to widen your social network. The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities to stay in touch with old friends and meet new people.

## Stay in touch with friends

Talking to friends is a great way to relive old memories and remind you of all the positive things in your life. Spending time with other people can prevent you from feeling lonely or anxious and give you a chance to share experiences, thoughts and ideas. If friends live nearby, arrange to meet them regularly. It can take confidence to reach out and arrange things with friends, but why not try organising lunches, afternoon tea and day trips. Visit Britain (see page 37) has plenty of suggestions. If your friends can't make it the first time you ask them don't take this as a rejection – they could be busy for a number of reasons. Agree a time and date that suits you all to rearrange. And if friends live far away, make regular phone calls to stay close.

If you don't have anyone nearby, Contact the Elderly (see page 33) hold monthly afternoon tea parties for people over 75 who live on their own with little or no chance to socialise. Once a month, a volunteer driver will pick you up and take you to afternoon tea where you can make new friends and catch up with old ones.

Remember to research any travel concessions you may be entitled to, such as a free bus pass or a senior rail card. You could also contact your local council to find out if there are any voluntary car schemes in your area.

### **Use your experience**

Retirement is the perfect opportunity to put your past experiences to good use and volunteering is a great way to use your skills to make a difference. Start by thinking about the kinds of things you like doing, what you're good at and what type of organisation you want to help. Perhaps you could get involved in community projects, or help at a local hospice. The National Trust are often looking for new volunteers for a variety of projects, from helping out in their shops and cafes, to being a guide showing people around venues and rooms. And remember that you have a lot of useful experience you can pass down to younger generations. You could try volunteering at your local youth group or school.

To find out about volunteering opportunities in your area contact your local Age UK or the National Council for  Voluntary Organisations (see page 35). There are separate volunteering organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (see page 35).

## Research an interest or learn something new

Meeting friends, enjoying hobbies and getting involved in the local community can improve our self-confidence and keep us active. If you find that you're not able to do the things that you used to, why not try something new?

Retirement can be the ideal time to undertake some research into a subject you've always wanted to find out more about. Start by checking what your local library has to offer. Many galleries and museums are free, and many venues such as churches, community centres and concert halls have foyer exhibitions, lunchtime music or readings you can attend. Or perhaps you want to trace your family history or leave a record of your family for your grandchildren to read. Visit [www.gov.uk/research-family-history](http://www.gov.uk/research-family-history) to find out more.

You could also try learning something new. The University of the Third Age (see page 37) has classes across the UK where members share their expertise with each other. Learning is for fun rather than for a qualification and subjects range from languages to music, photography to computing.

And there are plenty of groups you could attend. Groups can cover a range of activities from cooking, crafts, DIY, music, amateur dramatics, photography, cinema groups and many more. Your local community centre, leisure centre, church or library are excellent places to find out what is happening in your local area. You could also contact your council or local Age UK to find out what options there are in your area.

Remember that many cinemas, theatres and groups offer daytime performances and concessionary rates for older people. Check your local newspaper or noticeboard to find out what is happening in your area and make sure you always ask if there are any discounts available, as they might not always be offered automatically.

If you're lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender you may be interested to know that there are lots of LGBT groups out there, some of them specifically for older people. Contact Switchboard – the LGBT+ helpline if you want to find out details of local social groups and activities (see page 36). For more information, see our free guide *Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender*.

We all know that it can be difficult to walk into a group situation by yourself, but remember that everyone in the group was a new member at some point. If you're nervous or anxious about walking into a group situation by yourself perhaps you could see if a friend or family member could go with you on your first few visits, or you could try phoning the group organiser in advance so they know you're coming and can help you settle in. Some groups have open days where you can go and find out more about the group and the people that attend. Some groups even have a buddy system where new members are 'buddied' up with someone who has been attending the group for a while so that you can be shown around and introduced to different people. Although it can be difficult, once you have been to a new group for a couple of weeks, you'll often start to settle in and feel more comfortable.

### **Get online**

The internet has opened up even more ways to keep in touch with family and friends, such as exchanging emails and using Skype to make free video phone calls. Online social networks like Facebook and Twitter are a great way to stay in touch, make new friends, look at photos, find out about events and more. If you're not confident using the internet, ask your local Age UK for help – many offer training sessions on getting online. UK Online Centres can also help people who want to learn basic computer skills (see page 37).

## Men and women are different

We know that men and women are different and have different preferences and needs when staying in touch or making new connections. Women may be more likely than men to have experienced periods of working and not working, or working part-time throughout their lives – perhaps due to caring responsibilities. As a result, women may have built up more friendships with people outside work, and find it easier to adapt to the change of structure that retirement brings.

Many men have spent their whole lives in school and then at work, and it can be difficult to adjust to retirement when it comes. Perhaps you feel like you've lost purpose and you miss the male banter you experienced while working. It can be easy to retreat into yourself without realising it. Maybe you still go out for walks, go to the gym, or down to the pub for a few drinks, but you're missing the male camaraderie you had at work.

But it's never too late to build new friendships and there are some groups just for men. Try thinking about activities or hobbies where you could meet other men who share the same interests as you. You could contact your local Age UK to find out if there is a Men in Sheds group in your area. This is a place for men only where you can work on practical projects like woodwork and make some new friends along the way. And if you're a football fan but find it hard to play anymore, walking football groups are becoming more common. Contact your local Age UK to see what is available in your area, or check local newspapers and noticeboards.

## Find out about friendship services

If you like having a chat but find it hard to get out, you could join one of Independent Age's phone clubs (see page 34). They give you a chance to discuss books, films and more general topics over the telephone. Every few weeks a group of six people meet up over the phone – Independent Age will call you so there's no cost. If you have sight loss, you can join RNIB's telephone book club (see page 36) and talk to up to eight people on a monthly call for a small cost.

You can also contact your local Age UK to see if they offer friendship services. Alternatively, contact the national Call in Time Service at Age UK on 0844 225 0320 to find out about their weekly telephone friendship calls.



**Regular social contact** is vital for good mental health. It's part of **what makes life fulfilling** and helps us feel good about ourselves.

# Margaret missed her old friendships and wanted to meet new people.

‘When I was younger I felt I had plenty of friends. But as I’ve got older we’ve drifted apart. I was missing that social contact and feeling pretty down about it.

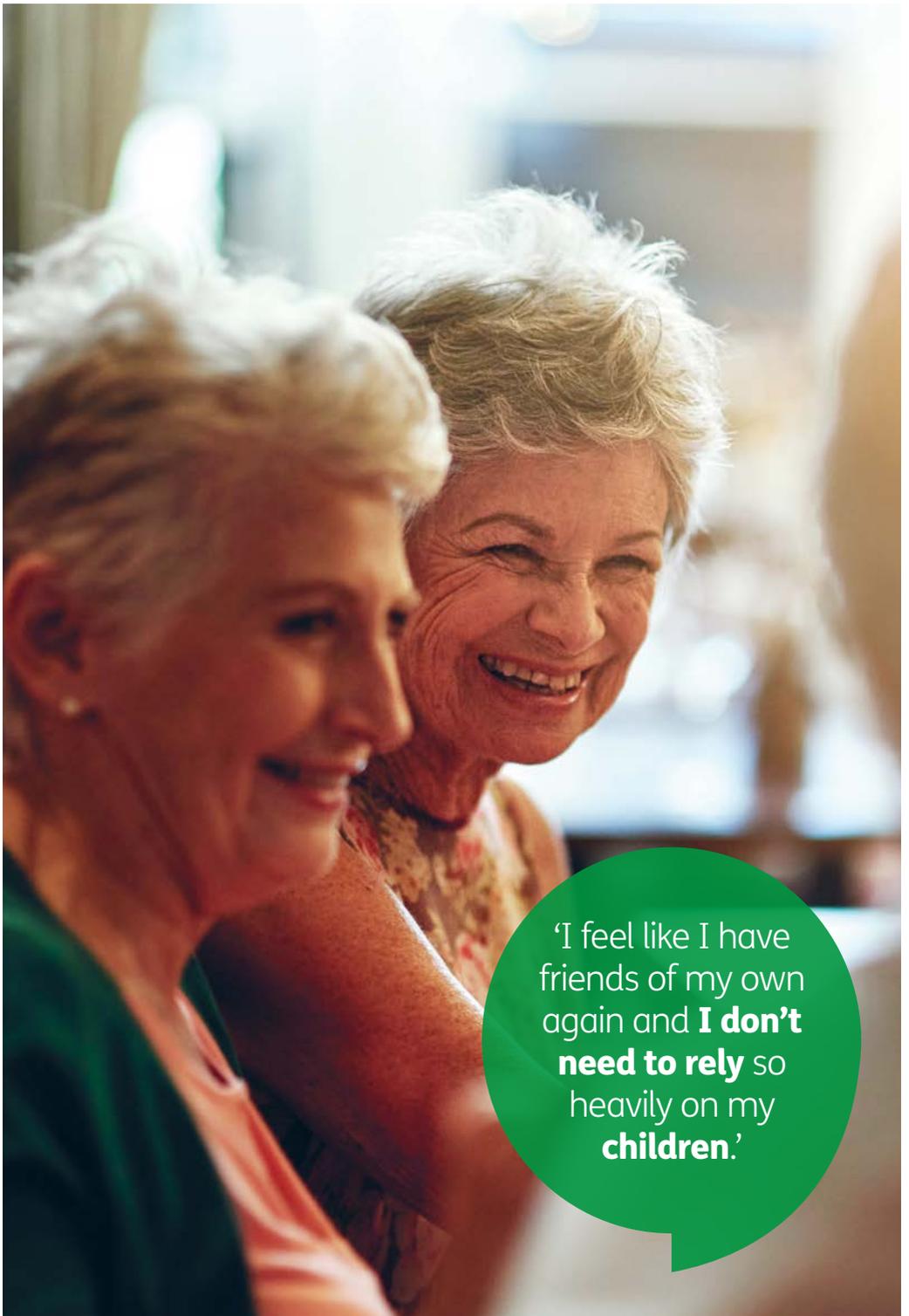
‘My children had been encouraging me to join a group but I’d never shown much interest. I’m naturally quite a shy person and I didn’t have the same confidence I used to. But slowly I realised that if I wanted to meet new people then I was going to have to do something about it myself as new friends weren’t just going to come to me.

‘I had a look on my local library noticeboard and saw a sign for ballroom dancing classes. Dancing was something I’d always wanted to do. I felt nervous about signing up but I pushed myself to do it.

‘I now go every week and I’ve noticed such a change in myself. It keeps me on my toes having to learn the routines. It’s a completely different lifestyle and I feel so much better for it. I’ve met lots of new people too and I’ve become close friends with a woman named Barbara.

‘Barbara’s even convinced me to go along to her weekly book club. Some weeks we do a lot more talking than we do discussing the books but it’s great fun. I feel like I have friends of my own again and I don’t need to rely so heavily on my children.

‘If anyone’s feeling a bit low then I’d encourage them to get out there and try something new. It’s not always easy but you’ve got nothing to lose.’



‘I feel like I have friends of my own again and **I don’t need to rely** so heavily on my **children.**’

# What can affect your mental wellbeing?

There are lots of reasons why your mental wellbeing can change. There may be a trigger point, such as a time of great change, a distressing event, or needing to find a new sense of purpose. Understanding what can affect your mental wellbeing might help you understand the feelings you're experiencing and help you think about the steps you can take to look after yourself.

Some common triggers include:

- retirement
- bereavement
- relationship and family problems
- money worries
- disability or poor health, including sight and hearing loss
- being a carer
- being on your own
- the time of year.

## Retirement

Many of us look forward to retirement. But often we're so busy thinking about what we're retiring from that we don't take the time to think about what we're retiring to. And while those first few months of not having to set the alarm can seem exciting, for many people the novelty soon wears off and the reality hits home. While retirement can be highly rewarding and relaxing, it's easy to fall into the routine of staying in bed late, or sitting on the couch all day watching TV. There are many ways you can make the most of your retirement though. See our information on staying in touch and meeting new people for some ideas (see pages 10–15).

## **Bereavement**

Bereavement can leave us feeling vulnerable. Grieving over losses is normal and healthy, even if the feelings last for a long time. Grief is often a rollercoaster of emotions with good days and bad days, which can be triggered by memories or reminders of your loss. If you're struggling to cope with your emotions or you feel you're not coping with life, then it may be time to seek help and support. Our guide *Bereavement* has more information and advice.

## **Relationship and family problems**

Relationship and family problems are sadly a common trigger affecting people's mental wellbeing. Perhaps you've found that your relationships with your loved ones have changed since you retired and you're now spending more time with them. Or maybe you're worried about other family members if they're experiencing poor health, money worries or relationship problems. If possible, try to talk about relationship and family problems before they have a chance to escalate. If you feel like you can't talk or relate to family and friends, consider speaking to a counsellor instead (see page 27).

## **Being a carer**

If you look after your partner, a relative or a friend who needs help because they are ill or disabled, then you are a carer. While caring can be rewarding and fulfilling, it's also a big undertaking that may affect your physical or mental health. Your GP can offer you support and help you stay well. Read our free guide *Advice for carers* for more information.

## Disability or poor health

As we get older, disability or poor health can make us less independent, lower our confidence, and make us feel more anxious about the future. Perhaps you find it hard to get out and do the things you once enjoyed. If so try contacting your local council to see if there are any community transport schemes or voluntary driver schemes in your area which could take you out to see friends or to take part in groups or activities.

Side effects of certain medications can also have an effect on your feelings. If you think this might be happening, talk to your doctor to see if there's anything they can do. Make sure you don't stop taking any medication before speaking to your GP as it can be dangerous to stop some medication suddenly.

If you've been diagnosed with a specific condition there may be specialist helplines that can offer you practical and emotional support. For example, Macmillan Cancer Support (see page 34) has a cancer support helpline, the British Lung Foundation (see page 33) has a specialist helpline for people suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and Alzheimer's Society and Dementia UK (see pages 33 and 34) have helplines for those affected by dementia. If you're feeling down and need someone to talk to, the Samaritans are always available to provide a listening ear (see page 36).

## Money worries

 If you're having money worries or are living on a low income, contact your local Age UK for a benefits check and see our free guide *More money in your pocket*. In Wales, see Age Cymru's version of this guide. And if you're worried about debt, remember that you're not alone and there is help available. It's never too early or too late to seek help for money worries. Our free guide *Dealing with debt* has more information.

## Feeling alone

You may be lonely for a number of reasons – perhaps you’ve lost a loved one, moved away from friends and family, lost the social contact and enjoyment you used to get from work, or have health problems that make it difficult for you to go out and do the things you enjoy. Loneliness can have a significant impact on our mental wellbeing. And feeling lonely doesn’t necessarily mean you have no-one nearby. You may be surrounded by friends and family but still feel lonely. While not everyone enjoys joining social groups, they can be a good way to build new and meaningful relationships and friendships, and many people soon start to rebuild their confidence. Look at our information on staying in touch and meeting new people (see pages 10–15) for some suggestions.

## The time of year

It’s not uncommon for our mood to change at different times of the year. Many of us feel more energetic and happier in the summer than we do in the winter. You may commonly hear this referred to as the ‘winter blues’. But for some people, the different seasons can have a significant impact on their mental wellbeing and leave them feeling tired, withdrawn and depressed or anxious. If the time of year has a significant impact on your mood, it’s important to visit your GP and ask for information and support.

# When should you seek help?

If you've been struggling with your mental wellbeing and it's affecting your life, meaning you can't face being with other people, or is making you feel like life isn't worth living, then it's time to make an appointment to see your GP.

Two of the most common mental health problems are depression and anxiety. Feeling down, anxious or depressed isn't a normal part of ageing, but it is common in later life. Fortunately it's never too early or too late to ask for help.

## Anxiety

It's common for us all to feel worried or fearful from time to time, for example, if we're trying something new, if we're worried about a worsening health condition, or if we're adjusting to life after a bereavement. But for some people, these feelings can be more frequent and stop them enjoying everyday activities. If you're struggling with anxiety you might find yourself worrying all or most of the time, feeling a loss of self-confidence, and this may also be accompanied by physical symptoms such as a fast heartbeat, shaking or sweating.

## Depression

Being depressed is more than simply feeling low or fed up for a few days. Depression is where these feelings are persistent for weeks or months. You may feel sad or hopeless, or have lost interest in the things you used to enjoy. It may also be accompanied by physical symptoms such as sleeping too much or too little, a change in appetite and experiencing various aches and pains. Depression is more common than some people realise. It affects one in five people living in their own homes, and two in five people living in care homes.

You may experience anxiety and depression separately, or have both together.

There's no need to feel embarrassed about struggling with your feelings. Mental illness is just as significant as a physical illness and is not an inevitable part of getting older. If you've been experiencing symptoms on most days for two to four weeks, you should speak to a medical professional.

Medical professionals are used to seeing people who feel depressed or anxious and know ways to help. If you feel too low or anxious to visit a GP you could try to ask for a telephone consultation to discuss your thoughts. Thinking about answers to the following questions might help you prepare for this conversation.

- What type of feelings have you been having?
- How long have you been having these feelings?
- How are your feelings affecting your everyday life?
- Do you have trouble concentrating?
- Do you have problems sleeping – either not getting enough or sleeping too much?
- What are your energy levels like?
- What is your appetite like?
- How do you feel about yourself?
- Do you feel like you're moving more slowly or quickly than usual?
- Do you feel uptight or fidgety?
- Have you had any problems with your mental health before? If so, were any treatments helpful?

Depending on your symptoms, your doctor may use a questionnaire to look at how you're feeling too. Sometimes they might ask about whether you're feeling like ending your life, so don't be surprised by this question. You may even feel relieved that you're being asked about your darkest feelings.

Some people find it difficult to discuss their feelings but the GP will respect your privacy and dignity at all times. Remember that everything you tell them is confidential.



Feeling **down, anxious or depressed** isn't a normal part of ageing, but it **is common in later life**. Fortunately it's never too early or too late to **ask for help**.

# Different types of help

Once medical professionals have identified what could be causing your feelings, they will talk to you about different treatment options. These will depend on how severe your feelings are, how long they've been going on, whether you've had treatment before, and if so how helpful it was. Think about what you might find most helpful and discuss the pros and cons of your treatment options with your doctor.

## **'Wait and see' or 'watchful waiting'**

If your symptoms are mild, they may improve by themselves. In this case, you should be given information about the nature of your symptoms and advice on coping. Your GP may then monitor your symptoms over a period of time to see if they improve by themselves.

## **Exercise**

There is evidence that exercise can help with depression and anxiety. Any type of exercise is useful as long as it suits you and you do enough of it. Our guide *Healthy living* has ideas about what exercise could work for you.

Your GP may refer you to an 'exercise on prescription' programme where you will see a qualified fitness trainer for a number of sessions.

## Self-help

Self-help groups can be a way to get support, share ideas on what helps, boost your mood and gain self-confidence. Meeting other people who understand what you're going through can be helpful, especially if you're feeling isolated or lonely. Ask your GP about local groups or contact Mind to find out what's available (see page 35). Anxiety UK (see page 33) and Rethink Mental Illness (see page 36) can also help you find support groups in your local area, or advise how to set one up if there isn't a local group. In Scotland, contact the Scottish Association for Mental Health (see page 36). If you're lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, you could also contact the Gender Trust or Switchboard – the LGBT+ helpline, to find support groups near you (see pages 34 and 36).



If you're more comfortable talking to people online, Depression UK and SANE have online forums (see pages 34 and 36 for their contact details). Depression UK also has a penpal scheme if you prefer writing letters or aren't online.

Along with other treatment options, your GP may suggest you work through a self-help book, or they may tell you about computerised therapy programmes that you can work through to learn new skills to prevent and cope with your symptoms. Some types of self-help involve very little contact with a healthcare professional, while others will involve talking to a healthcare professional every few weeks to review your progress.

## Talking treatments

There are different kinds of talking treatments. The most common are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and counselling. They may be offered in one-to-one sessions or in a group. Talking treatments allow you to talk to someone who is trained to help you manage your thoughts and feelings and the effect they have on your mood and behaviour. They are available for free on the NHS.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** helps you manage your problems by changing how you think and behave. It's based on the idea that the way we feel is affected by our thoughts, beliefs and behaviour. People who are struggling with their mental health often have negative thoughts such as 'I'm no good at anything', which can lead to negative behaviour such as stopping activities they once enjoyed. This could result in someone staying at home feeling more negative about themselves. CBT aims to stop these cycles. It can't take your problems away but gives you ways to deal with them. Visit the Age UK website and search for 'talking treatments' to watch a video of older people sharing their experiences of talking treatments.

**Counselling** lets you talk about your problems and feelings in a safe environment. Counsellors are trained in how to listen and empathise. They won't give you advice but will support and guide you to understand your problems and deal with negative thoughts and feelings.

If there is a long waiting list for talking treatments on the NHS, you may wish to find help privately and pay for it yourself. Your GP may be able to recommend someone. Or you could visit the website [www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk](http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk) or call 01455 88 33 00 to search for therapists in your area and find out more about different types of therapy, the likely costs and what to look for in a therapist. The website is run by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

## **Applied relaxation**

If you are experiencing anxiety, you may be offered applied relaxation. This will be delivered by trained practitioners who can teach you muscle relaxation techniques to help you cope in situations where you feel anxious. It will usually consist of 12–15 weekly sessions, with each session lasting one hour.

## **Medication**

If your symptoms are severe, you may be prescribed medication. A common form of medication is antidepressant drugs. These drugs work by boosting the level of brain chemicals that lift your mood. There are different types available and your GP should explain which they think is best for you. Antidepressants don't cure depression or anxiety but can make you feel better so that you're able to deal with the problems. It often takes around two weeks before you feel any benefits. You may experience mild side effects in the beginning such as feeling sick or dizzy, but these should quickly improve. It's important to take the antidepressants for as long as your GP recommends and follow their advice when coming off them as stopping them suddenly can cause side effects.

Antidepressants are often combined with talking therapies. You'll usually see your doctor every two to four weeks when you first start taking antidepressants.

### St John's Wort

St John's Wort is a herbal remedy for depression that is available from health shops and pharmacies. There is some evidence that it can be an effective remedy but it is not recommended by doctors or the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). This is because there is a variation in the amount of active ingredients within different brands and batches, making the effects of the remedy unpredictable. St John's Wort can also cause serious health problems by interacting with medications such as drugs used to treat epilepsy, and conditions where a patient is at risk of developing life threatening blood clots. It can also interact with prescribed antidepressants.

#### what next?

Visit Mind's website to find out more about different types of therapy, antidepressants and other kinds of help (see page 35).



**Meeting other people** who understand what you're going through can be helpful, **especially if you're feeling isolated** or lonely.

# If you're worried about someone

If you're worried that a friend, partner or relative may need support with their mental wellbeing, there are various ways you can help. The best thing you can do is support them, listen to them, remind them they're not to blame for the way they're feeling and reassure them that things will get better with time and help.

You may spot symptoms before your friend or relative does, or before they feel able to talk about it. Clues could be:

- turning down social invitations or avoiding phone calls or visits
- finding little joy in your visit
- a significant change in routine, such as getting up a lot later
- neglecting their appearance or personal hygiene
- complaining of feeling worthless
- not eating properly
- not keeping up with household chores
- moving more slowly than usual
- missing medication
- forgetting birthdays and anniversaries.

On the next page are some ways you can support someone.

**Be there.** Simply being there for the person can let them know that someone cares. Don't be afraid to ask them how they are feeling and if there's anything you can do to help. Having someone who is willing to listen could be a great comfort.

**Encourage them to get help.** Reassure your friend or relative that it's possible to feel better with the right help. If they're reluctant to see the GP about their feelings, suggest they go for a physical check-up instead. The GP should spot underlying problems. You could offer to go along for moral support.

**Support their treatment.** It can take weeks to feel the benefits of treatment, so encourage them to take any medication and attend any appointments.

**Encourage them to be healthy and active.** Eating well and exercising can help improve mental wellbeing. Suggest things you've always liked to do together, like going for a walk or a trip to a museum. Or perhaps you could arrange to have dinner with them, or go out for lunch occasionally.

**Offer practical help.** Your loved one may be low on energy and motivation, so practical assistance like helping with household chores, picking up prescriptions and organising appointments could be a big help. Try to do things together where possible – being included will be good for their self-esteem.

**Be patient.** When people are suffering from poor mental wellbeing they may get irritable or feel misunderstood by others. You may need to offer gentle reassurance.

# Useful organisations

## Age UK

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

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

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

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

**Age Cymru:** 0800 022 3444

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

In Northern Ireland, contact

**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575

[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

In Scotland, contact **Age Scotland** by calling Silver Line Scotland: 0800 470 8090 (This is a partnership between the Silver Line and Age Scotland)

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

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact [resources@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:resources@ageuk.org.uk)

### **Alzheimer's Society**

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

Helpline: 0300 222 1122

[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)  
[www.alzheimers.org.uk/wales](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/wales)

In Northern Ireland, contact **Alzheimer's NI**

Helpline: 028 9066 4100

[www.alzheimers.org.uk/northernireland](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/northernireland)

In Scotland, contact **Alzheimer Scotland**

Helpline: 0808 808 3000

[www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org)

### **Anxiety UK**

Provides information and support and help if you've been diagnosed with, or suspect you may have an anxiety condition.

Tel: 08444 775 774

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

### **British Lung Foundation**

Offers advice, information and support to people affected by lung disease, their families and carers.

Tel: 03000 030 555

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

### **Contact the Elderly**

Organises monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for people aged 75 or over who live alone with little or no social contact.

Tel: 0800 716 543

[www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk](http://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk)

### **Dementia UK**

Provides information for those affected by dementia, their family, friends and carers. They have a helpline staffed by Admiral Nurses who can offer advice and support.

Tel: 020 7697 4160

Tel: 0800 888 6678 (Admiral Nurse helpline)

[www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)

### **Depression UK**

National self-help organisation that helps people cope with their depression.

[www.depressionuk.org](http://www.depressionuk.org)

### **The Gender Trust**

Offers information and support for anyone with questions concerning gender identity.

Tel: 01527 894 838

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

### **Independent Age**

Provides advice and support for older people, their families and carers.

Tel: 0800 319 6789

[www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

Provides practical, medical and financial support for people facing cancer, their carers and loved ones.

Tel: 0808 808 0000

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

### **Mental Health Foundation**

Provides information and support on mental health.

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

## **Mind**

Provides advice and support on mental health issues.

Tel: 0300 123 3393

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

## **The National Council for Voluntary Organisations**

Provides details of local volunteer centres and opportunities across England.

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

In Wales, contact **Volunteering Wales**

[www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net)

In Northern Ireland, contact **Volunteer Now**

[www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)

In Scotland, contact **Volunteer Scotland**

[www.volunteerscotland.net](http://www.volunteerscotland.net)

## **NHS Choices**

Find out about local NHS services in England and get information on mental wellbeing.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

In Wales, contact **NHS Direct Wales**

Tel: 0845 4647

[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact **NI Direct**

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

In Scotland, contact **NHS Inform**

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)

### **Rethink Mental Illness**

Provides information and support to anyone affected by mental health problems.

Tel: 0300 5000 927

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

### **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

Information and support for blindness and visual impairment.

Tel: 0303 123 9999

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

### **SANE**

UK-wide charity to raise awareness and combat stigma about mental illness.

Tel: 0300 304 7000

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

### **Samaritans**

Confidential helpline offering support to talk about your feelings. Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Tel: 116 123

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)**

Offers information and support for people affected by mental health problems in Scotland.

Tel: 0141 530 1000

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

### **Switchboard – the LGBT+ helpline**

Gives information and support for anyone in the UK dealing with issues relating to their sexuality.

Tel: 0300 330 0630

[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)

## **Thrive**

Helps people with disabilities enjoy gardening.

Tel: 0118 988 5688

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

## **UK Online Centres**

UK Online Centres help people make the most of computers and the internet.

Tel: 0114 349 1666

[www.ukonlinecentres.com](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com)

## **University of the Third Age**

Local groups of older people who learn together informally.

Tel: 020 8466 6139

[www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

## **Visit Britain**

Provides ideas and suggestion of things to do across Britain.

[www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com)

## **Walking for Health**

Runs a network of health walk schemes across England.

Tel: 020 7339 8541

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

In Wales, contact **Ramblers Cymru**

Tel: 029 2064 4308

[www.ramblers.org.uk/wales](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/wales)

In Scotland, contact **Paths for all**

Tel: 01259 218 888

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

In Northern Ireland, contact **Walk NI**

Tel: 028 9030 3930

[www.walkni.com](http://www.walkni.com)



# Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, LONDON WC1H 9NA. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate). If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

## Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address:		
Postcode:		
Tel:	Email:	

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



The Age UK Group may use the information you have supplied to tell you about our other charitable services or to ask you to support our work. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland & Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from us do let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977 or by writing to us at our registered address. The registered address is Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA.



# Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

**1 Make a donation**  
To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved)**

**2 Donate items to our shops**  
By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)** and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

**3 Leave a gift in your will**  
Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email **[legacies@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:legacies@ageuk.org.uk)**

**Thank  
you!**

# 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](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)

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



The Age UK Group 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 are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

