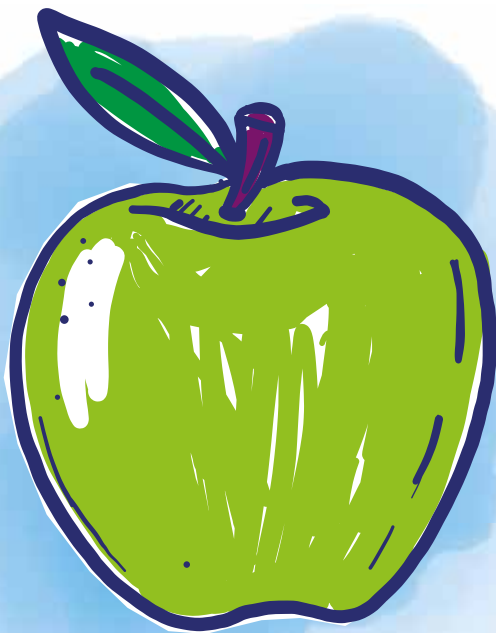


Healthy living



Looking after yourself
physically and mentally

Information written with you in mind.

This information guide has been produced with the help of expert peer reviewers as well as older people and carers.

Published: **August 2019**

Next review due: **July 2020**

We'd love to hear from you.

1) Join our Readers' Panel. Have your say and be involved in updating our guides by joining our Readers' Panel. You don't need any specialist knowledge at all.

Join our Readers' Panel at www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel.

2) Tell us your story. We want to include real voices of real people with real stories in our guides. If you have a story then we're here to listen.

Email us at stories@ageuk.org.uk.

This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and cannot be used as a substitute for professional advice.

Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use and it is the reader's sole responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Contents

What this guide is about	4
Keeping active	
Why being active is so important	6
Getting moving	8
Finding something that suits you	12
Diet and lifestyle	
Healthy eating and drinking	14
The Eatwell Guide	18
Drinking	20
Smoking	21
Mind and body	
Healthy teeth and bones	22
Caring for your feet	24
Hearing	25
Eyesight	26
Sleeping well	27
Mental wellbeing	28
Memory loss	31
Tests and checks	
Your keeping healthy checklist	34
Tests and checks to stay healthy	36
Useful organisations	39

This guide has been produced with the support of the Morrisons Foundation.



What this guide is about

We could all benefit from being healthier – and it’s never too late to start.

Our bodies were made to move, and it’s a myth that getting older means an end to being active. Looking after yourself doesn’t have to mean working up a sweat or joining a gym – just a few small changes can make a big difference to your physical and mental health.

If you want to be a little healthier but don’t know where to start, this guide is for you. It suggests some changes you might want to make to your daily routine and diet, and how they could help you live a longer, more fulfilling life.

“Being active not only helps me physically, but it’s been so important for my mental health too.”

Theresa, 70



A healthy lifestyle is all about balance. But finding that balance and what works and is achievable is different for everyone.

Whether you’re already fairly active or you want to make those first steps to a healthier lifestyle, this guide can help.



Throughout the guide, this symbol indicates where information differs for Wales and Northern Ireland.

Next steps



It’s a good idea to find out the number for your local council. They’ll be able to provide some of the support and information mentioned in this guide.

My local council number is:

Keeping active

Why being active is so important

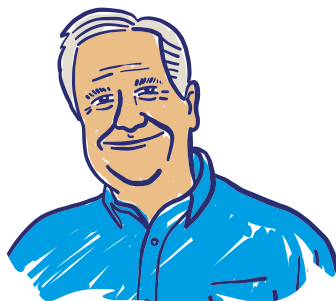
Moving more is always a good thing. Any activity – however small – will help you stay mobile, and able to do everyday tasks, for longer. It will also help you continue enjoying the things you love for as long as possible, like tending to your garden, or spending time with your family and friends.

Keeping active helps you:

- sleep well
- have a good appetite
- stay at a healthy weight
- stay social
- strengthen muscles and bones, reducing the risk of falls and fractures
- keep your bowel healthy
- manage high blood pressure and angina (severe chest pain)
- reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes and some cancers
- prevent some long-term conditions, like arthritis, from getting worse.

“My blood pressure’s gone down since joining the bowls club.”

Ron, 78





Doing physical activity to improve stamina, strength, flexibility and balance can help you stay independent for longer. In practical terms, this means being able to walk longer distances, climb stairs, and continue to get washed and dressed on your own. You'll also find yourself more able to continue doing the things you enjoy most such as hobbies, socialising or even going on holiday. It might even help you keep up with the grandkids!

And what's good for the body is good for the mind too. As well as helping to keep you sharp, staying active can also improve your mood and mental wellbeing, and help you deal with stress. Win, win!



Get moving

Changing habits and starting to live healthier can seem daunting, so start small. Lots of everyday activities count as exercise, so look for simple ways you can begin to move more.

Every step counts, so try and set yourself achievable goals every day, even if it's just a few extra steps here and there. It's always best to build up your activity levels gradually. It's about moving more each day, in whatever way works for you.

You could start by:

- getting up and stretching if you've been sat down a while, or walking about when you're on the phone
- walking to the shops instead of taking the car or bus
- using the stairs instead of lifts or escalators
- getting off the bus a stop earlier than usual
- choosing a parking space a bit further away from the shops
- doing more housework or gardening.

**“I make sure I do what I can,
even if it’s just stretching
my arms for 5 minutes.”**

Arthur, 82



If you find it hard to move about

As we get older it can get harder to move about and as our bodies change, we sometimes stop being able to do the things we used to do. That’s particularly true if you’ve been ill, are living with a long-term health condition, or have lost some mobility.

You might feel like you’re not as strong as you were, aren’t up to doing a lot or feel it’s not going to be safe for you to move around too much.

Just do what you feel you can manage. This may be walking to and from the front door or doing the ironing. The trick is to do what you can, as often as you can – and keeping at it.

There are also exercises you can do while sitting in a chair and they’re a great way to improve your flexibility and strength – and you can even watch the telly while you do them! Online videos will show you how to do them, or there may be seated exercise classes in your local area. Ask your local Age UK if they run these classes.

Good to know

Walking for Health (page 44) runs a network of health walk schemes across England. In Wales, contact Ramblers Cymru and in Scotland, contact Paths for All (pages 43 and 44).



If you'd like to do a bit more

There's no one single way to get more active. In fact, the best way to make it a habit is to keep it simple. It's not necessarily about making your heart race or getting out of breath – a little bit of movement every day is enough. If you're generally fit and have no existing health conditions that affect your mobility, try to do moderate intensity activity for around two and a half hours, spread throughout the week.

This is activity that warms you up, makes you breathe harder and increases your heart rate, but won't leave you too out of puff. This could be something like:

- walking (while being able to hold a conversation)
- a leisurely cycle or swim
- mowing the lawn
- a type of dancing you enjoy
- chair exercises
- sports like walking football or netball.

If you're already fairly active

Lots of us have spent our lives on the move – running around after children, holding down busy jobs and keeping up with friends and favourite hobbies. And while it can be nice to take the rush out of life as you get older, there's no reason your age should mean you stop altogether.

If you're lucky enough to still be able to do these things you should try to make the most of it for as long as you can.

There's no specific type of exercise you should be doing as you get older – anything you enjoy is great – but you'll want to choose activities that work your cardiovascular system. These could include:

- walking (too fast to hold a conversation)
- going for a jog or run
- cycling at a fast pace or on a hilly route
- climbing stairs
- swimming at a fast pace
- doing a spin or Zumba class
- playing sports like tennis or squash.

Next steps



Speak to your doctor if you want to increase your activity levels to make sure you can do it safely. Visit the NHS website (page 41) to read the Government's physical activity guidelines for older adults.

Finding something that suits you

Being active shouldn't feel like a chore, so find something that you enjoy and suits you – you're much more likely to stick with it.

How these activities will benefit you:

Activity	Flexibility	Strength	Stamina	Balance
Brisk walking			✓	✓
Climbing stairs		✓	✓	
Swimming	✓		✓	
Dancing	✓		✓	✓
Bowls or golf	✓		✓	✓
Yoga	✓			✓
Tai chi	✓			✓
Chair-based exercise	✓	✓		

These are only suggestions, so just try things out and see if there are any that work for you. Ask friends how they stay active and join them – staying active with someone can help you stick with it. Or head to your local gym or leisure centre and ask what they offer.

Good to know

Your local Age UK, Age Scotland or Age Cymru can help you find out about classes near you (page 39).

If you have a health condition

It's natural to feel anxious about some of these activities, particularly if you have an existing health condition. If you do, or you find moving about difficult or painful, talk to your doctor.

You could also get in touch with the relevant organisation for your health condition, such as Arthritis UK or the British Lung Foundation. They'll be able to suggest what activities might be best and how they could help you.

There are some great volunteer driver and community transport schemes that may be able to help you get to and from an activity. Contact your local council or Age UK to find out what's available in your area.

“I've had to adjust what I can do since my cancer diagnosis – but I keep going!”

Karen, 73



Next steps

The NHS has step-by-step exercise guides on its website. In Wales visit NHS Direct Wales website (pages 42).



Diet and lifestyle

Healthy eating and drinking

A healthy lifestyle is all about balance – and it starts with your diet. As part of your balanced diet, try to:

...eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day

Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables makes you less likely to develop heart disease and certain cancers, like bowel cancer. Frozen, canned or dried fruits and fruit juices all count. Don't be put off if you don't always reach your 'five a day' – two or three portions are better than none.

...base meals around starchy food

Starchy foods, like rice or pasta, are a good source of energy. Wholegrain and high-fibre versions help prevent constipation.

...eat fish at least twice a week

Having one portion of white fish, like cod or pollock, and another of oily fish, like salmon or mackerel, every week is ideal. Oily fish is rich in vitamin D and a type of fat that helps reduce the risk of heart disease. Grilling, poaching or baking fish is healthier than frying it.

...find different sources of protein

You could try alternatives to meat, such as soya-based meat substitutes, beans or lentils. Dairy products, such as milk and cheese, contain protein too. They're also a good source of calcium, which helps to keep bones strong. Try to go for lower fat versions. If you eat meat, limit portion sizes of red meat or poultry and choose lean cuts of meat or mince if you can.

...cut down on foods high in salt, fat and sugar

Eating too much salt can increase your risk of high blood pressure and stroke. Look for lower-salt versions of foods where you can. Foods that are high in saturated fat such as cakes, sausages and cheese increase cholesterol levels in the blood and raise your risk of heart disease and stroke. Try to see these as a treat rather than an everyday snack.

...drink about six to eight glasses of fluids each day

This doesn't have to be just water. Tea, coffee and low-sugar or sugar-free squash are fine too. When it's hot, drink a little more to stay hydrated.

Good to know



Eating well doesn't have to mean giving up the less healthy things you enjoy – it just means eating them in moderation and as part of a balanced diet. Eating regularly is also important, and anything is better than not eating at all – even if it's a little of your favourite sweet treat!

Keeping a healthy weight

There are health risks associated with being both overweight and underweight. If you're worried about your weight, you'd like advice about how to lose weight or you've recently lost weight but aren't sure why, you should make an appointment with your doctor.

Preventing constipation

If you're struggling with constipation, make sure that you have enough wholegrain cereals and fruit in your diet. Drinking plenty of liquids can help, too. If changing your diet doesn't help, see your doctor. Physical activity helps to keep the bowels moving, so try to keep active.

**“I have good and bad days,
I think everyone does though,
don't they? I just do what I can.”**

Sara, 79



How can I make sure I'm eating the right things?

Food labels

All major supermarkets have agreed to help make choosing healthy food easier with a standard label that lets you see how much fat, saturated fat (saturates), sugar and salt is inside. Red is high, amber medium and green low.



Visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well for more information on how to read food labels. In Wales, see the 'Live Well' section of the NHS Direct Wales website (page 42).

If you're struggling to shop or cook for yourself

It can be hard to eat well if you find it difficult to buy and cook your meals. The unhealthy option tends to be more convenient. But there's support available to help make sure you're eating the right things.

Talk to your local adult social services department (or social work department in Scotland) and explain the problems you're having. Your local Age UK will know if voluntary groups in your area can help.

Good to know

The NHS website has more information about eating well. In Wales, visit the NHS Direct Wales website. In Scotland see the NHS Inform website (pages 42 and 43).

The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide helps you follow a healthy, balanced diet. It shows how much of your diet should come from each food group. This includes everything you eat and drink during the day.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 3.0g	Saturates 1.3g	Sugars 34g	Salt 0.9g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/ 167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars



Eat less often and in small amounts

Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates



Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.
Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.



Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts

sustainably Eat less

Dairy and alternatives
Choose lower fat and lower sugar options

Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

© Crown copyright 2016

Drinking

Like eating well, healthy drinking doesn't mean you can't enjoy a glass of wine or a dram of whisky every now and then – just try to do it in moderation. Drinking too much can damage your liver, brain, blood vessels and increase the risk of some cancers, and doesn't help if you're trying to watch your weight, too.



You shouldn't regularly drink more than 14 units a week, which is roughly either:

- 6 pints of beer or cider (4% strength)
- 6 medium (175ml) glasses of wine (13% strength)
- 12 small (25ml) glasses of spirits such as gin, whisky or vodka (40% strength)

Having a few alcohol-free days a week and spreading your drinking over the other days (rather than drinking a lot on one day) can help make sure you're not overdoing it.

You should avoid drinking alcohol with certain medicines. Always read leaflets that come with medication and if in doubt, ask your pharmacist.

If you feel you need a drink to help you cope with a difficult situation, have a chat with your doctor or someone you trust.

Next steps



Visit the Drinkaware website for information about how to drink healthily or if you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking (page 41).

Smoking

Even if you've smoked for years, it's never too late to stop.

Whatever your age, and however long you've smoked for, you'll notice a lot of positive changes to your health if you stop smoking (not to mention on your bank balance!). You're likely to:



- be able to breathe easier
- reduce your risk of developing heart and lung problems, (or making them worse)
- reduce your risk of smoking-related cancers
- reduce your risk of having a stroke
- reduce your risk of problems with your eyesight
- recover more quickly after an operation
- feel better overall, and live longer.

Most people know how unhealthy smoking is, but find it difficult to give up. You could start by asking your doctor about local one-to-one or group support or medication that can help you stop.

Next steps



The NHS Smokefree website and helpline has tips on stopping and details of local services that can help. In Wales, contact Help me Quit, in Scotland contact Quit Your Way Scotland, and in Northern Ireland contact Want2stop (page 43).

Mind and body

Healthy teeth and bones

Looking after your teeth

Keep your teeth and gums healthy by brushing twice a day and visiting your dentist regularly for a check-up. Even if you have full dentures, a regular check-up is still important as the shape of your mouth changes over time so they may not fit as well. See our factsheet **Dental Care: NHS and private treatment** for information on dental services. In Wales, see Age Cymru's version of this factsheet.



Looking after your bones

As we get older our bones tend to get weaker and are more likely to break if we fall.

Your bones largely depend on your genes, but your lifestyle can help keep them healthier too. Regular physical activity helps, and so does eating calcium-rich foods like dairy products, canned fish, leafy greens and nuts.

“After a couple of falls I’ve joined an exercise class which is helping me build up my strength.”

John, 72



Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for strong bones and helps the body absorb calcium. Most people get the vitamin D they need from being in the sun so, if you can, spend time outside in spring and summer, but don't let your skin redden or burn. During autumn and winter you're unlikely to get enough vitamin D from your diet so it might be worth taking a daily supplement.

If you think you might not be getting enough vitamin D, particularly if you stay indoors a lot, speak to your doctor.

You're more at risk of osteoporosis if:

- you've been immobile for a long time
- you've been a smoker or regular drinker
- you have a parent who broke a hip
- you're underweight.

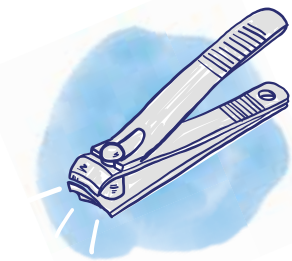
Next steps



The National Osteoporosis Society's website has a bone health checklist (page 42). Print out your answers to take to your doctor if you're concerned.

Caring for your feet

You may not think so, but looking after your feet can have a massive impact on your overall health. Your feet lose some of their natural cushioning and blood flow may decrease as you get older. Any blisters or sores can take much longer to heal, and could lead to infections.



You should always try to keep an eye on any changes to your feet, especially if you have a long-term condition, like arthritis or diabetes. To keep your feet happy:

Do:

- wear comfy, supportive shoes
- dry your feet carefully, particularly between the toes
- apply foot cream containing urea which hydrates the skin (but not between the toes since this area should ideally stay dry).

Don't:

- wear the same shoes every day
- soak your feet for too long – it causes dry skin.

If you find it difficult to cut your toenails, your local Age UK or Age Cymru may offer a local nail-cutting service, or be able to help you find one.

Next steps



Contact your practice nurse or doctor to report any foot problems, particularly if you have diabetes.

Hearing

As you get older, you may find yourself having to turn up the telly or radio, and struggling to hear what's being said. Hearing loss is a normal part of ageing, but speak to your doctor if you're having trouble with your hearing or being able to communicate.



Hearing aids and batteries are available free on the NHS, if you need them. If you think you have tinnitus (where you hear noises like ringing or humming in your ears), let your doctor know.

Contact Action on Hearing Loss for more information (page 40). You can try their free hearing check on their website or tinnitus helpline, which will let you know if you should see your doctor.

Combined sight and hearing difficulties

There are also things that can be done to help if you have difficulties with both sight and hearing.

Contact social services and explain how your day-to-day life is affected. They may have a specialist team who can help.

Good to know



Deafblind UK can offer support, practical advice, home visits and befriending to people who are deafblind or who have combined sight and hearing loss (page 41).

Eyesight

Have your eyes checked at least every two years so that any sign of problems like cataracts, glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration can be picked up early.



You can get a free NHS sight test every two years if you're over 60, or annually if you're over 70. You may be able to get help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses if you're on a low income. In Scotland, everyone is eligible for a free sight check.

If sight problems affect your ability to safely go about your daily life, ask your local social services department about equipment and services that can help.

There are other things you can do to look after your eyes:

- Protect your eyes from the sun by wearing sunglasses on a sunny day – look for those labelled CE or UV400.
- Eat a balanced diet and stop smoking if you're a smoker.
- Adjust the settings on any electronic devices to make the screen as easy to view as possible.
- Make sure there's a good level of light around the house.

Next steps



Have a look at our factsheet **Help with health costs** for more information. In Wales, see Age Cymru's version of this factsheet.

Contact the Macular Society or the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) for more information about eye health and the services they offer (page 44).

Sleeping well

Sleeping patterns change as you get older, so you may not get as much sleep as you used to. But with the right routines, environment and diet, we should still get enough sleep to keep us healthy and feel fully rested during the day.



Everyone's different – some people need less sleep than others. But what's important is that you get enough quality sleep to function during the day.

If you feel like you're not getting enough sleep, you can improve your sleeping patterns by:

- being more active throughout the day
- going to bed at the same time each night
- not eating or drinking alcohol too close to going to bed
- reducing the amount of caffeine you have during the day, perhaps by switching to decaf tea or coffee
- cutting down on daytime naps
- getting up and doing something for half an hour if you can't get to sleep, before going back to bed.

Next steps

If you have persistent problems with sleep, your doctor may be able to help. If you suffer from insomnia, the NHS website (NHS Direct Wales website in Wales or NHS Inform website in Scotland) has tips on treating it (pages 42 and 43).

Mental wellbeing

Feeling well is not just about looking after your body – your mental wellbeing is just as important. And though physical health plays a part in this, there are other simple things you can do to help look after yourself.



Make plans and enjoy yourself

When you retire it can be hard to adjust to the lack of routine. But retirement can be a great opportunity to do things you love. Whether you've always fancied doing a course but never had the time, or you want to get your garden in great shape – make the time for yourself.

It may be the perfect time to research an interest or learn something new. The University of the Third Age (page 44) has classes across the UK where members share their expertise with each other. And there are plenty of groups you could join for a range of activities and interests.

Good to know



Your local Age UK, community centre or library are great places to find out what's going on in your area. To find out about volunteering, contact your local Age UK, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, or the organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (page 43).

“I hadn’t been feeling myself for a while so I knew it was time to have a chat with the GP.”

Ruth, 76



Being sociable

Spending time with family and friends or meeting new people can help you feel less lonely or anxious, and gives you a chance to share experiences, thoughts and ideas.

You could enjoy a hobby with other people, get involved in the local community or volunteer. Think about the kind of things you like doing, or something you’ve always wanted to try. And if you can’t do some of the things you used to, why not try something totally new?

Stay in touch

Talk to the people you care about most whenever you can – invite them over or give them a call. You can go online and talk to people you know via video calls or those you don’t on forums. There’s a forum for pretty much anything you’re interested in – from fishing, to different TV shows, to your favourite sports – so you’ll definitely find like-minded people to chat to.

If you aren’t confident using the internet, your local Age UK or Online Centres Network can help (pages 39 and 43).

If you're feeling low

Speaking to friends or family about how you feel can be difficult if you haven't done it before. But it's important to share your feelings or ask for help. And the sooner you can address problems, the less likely they are to develop.

If you'd rather speak to someone you're not close to, you may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor or join a support group for people in a similar situation. You could also talk to your doctor. Samaritans has a helpline that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for anyone who needs to talk (page 44).

If you've been feeling down for a while

No one feels 100% all the time, but if you've been feeling out of sorts for two weeks or more you may be experiencing depression.

Depression is just as significant as any physical illness. Symptoms include loss of self-confidence, not being able to enjoy the things you usually do and having unexplained aches and pains. If you're experiencing any of these, speak to your doctor and explain how you're feeling, and they can tell you about the many ways you can get help.

For more information about looking after your mental health and where to turn if you're not feeling yourself, see our guide **Your mind matters**.

Good to know



If you need support or advice, contact Mind, Samaritans, CALL (in Wales), Aware Defeat Depression (in Northern Ireland), or Breathing Space (in Scotland). See pages 40-44 for contact details.

Memory loss

You may notice you've become more forgetful or confused, struggle to remember things or follow conversations, or get disorientated in familiar places. This can be worrying, but most of us experience these things from time to time. They can be symptoms of many common conditions, such as stress, depression or vitamin deficiencies. They don't necessarily mean you have dementia.



If you're worried about memory loss, talk to your doctor to find out what's causing it. This can either ease your worries or allow you to get the help and support you need.

“I booked a doctor’s appointment after I started to forget some little things and misplace bits around the house.”

Terry, 81



Next steps



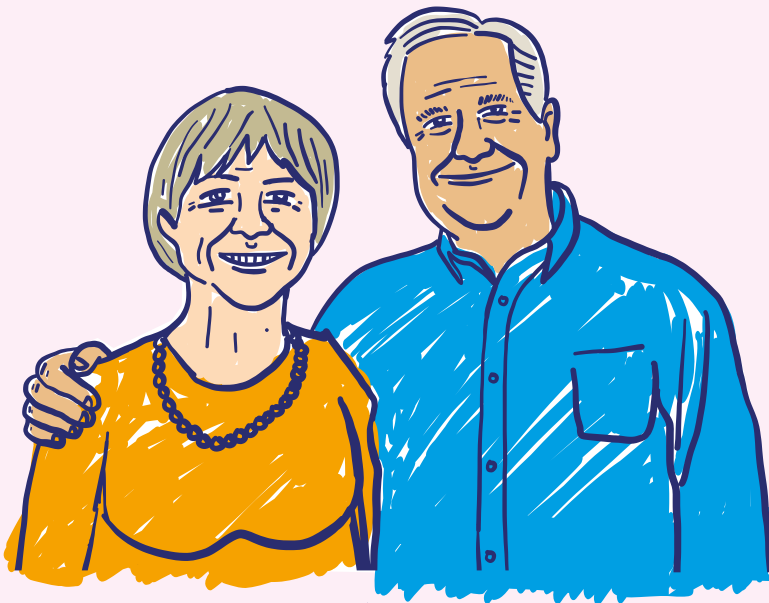
If you've been diagnosed with early-stage dementia, or if you care for someone with dementia, read our information guides **Living with early-stage dementia** and **Caring for someone with dementia**.

After Ron's wife died he found it hard to take an interest in anything.

After Joan died, Ron joined his local bowls club to meet new people – and improve his health.

'When my wife Joan was alive, we used to play golf every week. But since she died last year, I haven't wanted to go; it just wouldn't be the same. In fact, I don't seem to have the same interest in many things we used to do together – like gardening and going to car boot sales.

'When I went for my blood-pressure check, I was chatting with the practice nurse and I told her how I was feeling. We talked about Joan.



“I have more energy and life seems better every day.”



‘She said I wasn’t unusual in finding it difficult to go back to places and activities that we had always gone to together.

‘My blood pressure was still OK but I’d put a bit of weight on since last time. She suggested I was missing the exercise and perhaps the company too, so why not try something different?

‘I’d heard my neighbour, Ken, talking about the local bowls club so I thought I’d go along with him and give it a go. It was the best thing I could have done. They’re a really nice group, my technique has improved, I have more energy and life seems better every day.’

Your keeping healthy checklist

This handy checklist shows you, at a glance, the key things you can do to stay healthy, physically and mentally.

1 Stay active

Make sure you exercise regularly, whether it's a hobby such as gardening or playing bowls, or joining an exercise class.



2 Eat a variety of foods

Check food labels before you buy and try to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Aim to have fish twice a week, making sure that one portion is oily fish.



3 Keep a healthy weight

It's not good to be overweight or underweight. If you're concerned about your weight, make sure you talk to your doctor.



4 Drink in moderation

Keep a note of how much alcohol you're drinking and make sure you stick to the safe limit of no more than 14 units spread out over the week.



5 Give up smoking

It's never too late to get help quitting and enjoy the benefits.



6

Care for your feet

Look after your feet by cutting your toenails regularly, wearing supportive shoes and getting any problems checked by your doctor.



7

Get your eyes tested

Get your eyes tested for free every two years, or annually if you're over 70.



8

Get enough sleep

If you have persistent sleep problems, talk to your doctor to see if they can help.



9

Take care of your mental wellbeing too

Stay in touch with friends, do things that you enjoy and perhaps try some new things too. They can all help you feel good in body and mind.



10

Visit your doctor

Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly. Book your seasonal flu jab, follow up invitations for NHS cancer screenings. If you're aged 70 to 79, ask your doctor about the shingles vaccination.



Tests and checks

Tests and checks to stay healthy

One of the benefits of getting older is that you can have free health checks on the NHS – and you should definitely make the most of them! These can help to pick up on any problems early, meaning they're less likely to develop into a bigger problem down the line.

NHS health check

NHS health checks are free every five years for people aged between 40 and 74 who don't have a pre-existing condition. They usually take place at your doctor's surgery or local pharmacy.

At the check, you'll be asked about your family's medical history and lifestyle, and you'll have some routine tests. Afterwards you'll get a personal report on your risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and type 2 diabetes. It will tell you how to stay healthy and reduce your risk of developing certain conditions, and what to look out for.



In Wales there's a programme of checks for the over 50s. Speak to NHS Direct Wales or your doctor for further information. In Scotland talk to your doctor.

Screenings

Screening helps identify people who may be at risk of developing a particular condition, for instance certain cancers. Screening obviously has benefits, but also risks and limitations. Along with your invitation, you should receive a leaflet to help you make an informed choice about whether to go.



Breast screening is offered to women aged 50 to 70 to spot early signs of breast cancer. If you're registered with a doctor, you should automatically be invited for one every three years. After the age of 70 you'll usually stop receiving invitations for screening but you can still ask for one every three years.



Bowel cancer screening is available to men and women aged 60 to 74 (or 50 to 74 in Scotland), and a test is being rolled out in some areas at the age of 55 (you'll be automatically invited if this is available in your area). You should get a home testing kit sent to you every two years. If you're aged 75 or over, you can call **0800 707 60 60** to ask for a test. If you are aged 75 and over in Wales and are concerned about bowel cancer, you should contact your doctor for advice.

Abdominal aortic aneurysm screening is offered to men when they turn 65. It spots any swelling in the aorta (the main blood vessel that runs down from the heart), which causes no symptoms but could be fatal. You'll be told your results at the end of the test and if it's clear, you never need to have it again. If there's a problem, you'll be told and then sent a letter to let you know what happens next.

Vaccinations

If you're aged 65 or over, you're entitled to the free flu jab every year. Others with certain long-term conditions, or those caring for someone who is elderly or disabled, can also get the jab for free.

You should have a flu jab every year to protect you over winter – most surgeries and pharmacists start to offer it in September or October, so make sure you book yours in.

If you're over 65 you can also have the pneumococcal vaccination, which protects against bacterial infections that cause illnesses like pneumonia and meningitis. A single vaccination offers protection for life.

There is a shingles vaccine for certain people aged 70-78, but when you can get this vaccine depends on your date of birth. Ask at your doctor's surgery for more information.

Checks you can do yourself

It's important to check yourself regularly between screenings and let your doctor know of anything unusual. You should also go to your doctor if you notice any changes in the size, shape or colour of moles, or get a persistent cough (one that lasts longer than three weeks).

For other signs of cancer contact Cancer Research UK (page 41) or see www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer.

Good to know



Find out about screening and vaccinations on the NHS website or from your doctor. In Wales, see the NHS Direct Wales website. In Scotland, see the NHS website (page 42).

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and website.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

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

www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact Age Cymru: **0800 022 3444**

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: **0808 808 7575**

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland: **0800 124 4222**

www.agescotland.org.uk

Age UK runs a number of services in England that promote physical exercise and healthy eating to help improve your health and mental wellbeing.

Contact your local Age UK or call Age UK Advice for more information.

In Wales, **Age Cymru** runs a number of activity programmes to encourage older people to become more active – Nordic Walking, which is suitable for all ages and fitness levels, and Low Impact Functional Training (LIFT), where trained volunteers deliver low-level activities and games to older people and tai chi, which can improve physical health and general wellbeing. For more information, call 029 2043 1555 or visit the **Age Cymru** website. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, contact **Age NI** or **Age Scotland** to find out about physical activity sessions.

Action on Hearing Loss

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

Tel: **0808 808 0123**

Textphone: **0808 808 9000**

Hearing check phone line: **0844 800 3838**

Tinnitus helpline: **0808 808 6666**

Tinnitus textphone: **0808 808 9000**

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society

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

Helpline: **0300 222 1122**

www.alzheimers.org.uk

In Scotland, contact Alzheimer Scotland

Helpline: **0808 808 3000**

www.alzscot.org

AWARE

Support network for all those in Northern Ireland affected by depression or bipolar disorder.

Tel: **028 9035 7820** (Belfast) and

028 7126 0602 (Derry/Londonderry)

www.aware-ni.org

Breathing Space

A confidential telephone line for people experiencing low mood, anxiety or depression.

Tel: **0800 83 85 87**

www.breathingspace.scot

CALL (Community Advice and Listening Line)

Offers support to people in Wales concerned about their mental health or that of a relative or friend.

Tel: **0800 132 737** or text 'Help' to **81066**

www.callhelpline.org.uk

Cancer Research UK

Provide information about cancer and support for those affected by cancer. Call their helpline to speak to a nurse.

Helpline: **0808 800 4040**

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Deafblind UK

National charity for people who are deafblind or have a combined sight and hearing loss.

Tel: **0800 132 320**

Text: **07950 008870**

www.deafblind.org.uk

In Scotland, contact Deafblind Scotland

Tel: **0141 777 6111**

www.dbscotland.org.uk

Drinkaware

An organisation funded by alcohol firms that offers tips on responsible drinking.

Tel: **020 7766 9900**

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Macular Society

Provides advice and support to people with age-related macular degeneration.

Tel: **0300 303 0111**

www.macularsociety.org

Mind

Provides advice and support on mental health issues.

Tel: **0300 123 3393**

www.mind.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

Provides details of local volunteer centres and opportunities across England.

www.ncvo.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact Volunteer Now

www.volunteernow.co.uk

In Scotland, contact Volunteering Scotland

www.volunteerscotland.net

In Wales, contact Volunteering Wales

www.volunteering-wales.net

National Osteoporosis Society

Offers information and support on prevention and treatment of osteoporosis.

Tel: **0808 800 0035**

www.nos.org.uk

NHS

Offers information about health topics including healthy eating and drinking, physical activity and insomnia.

www.nhs.uk

For guidelines on physical activity visit:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults

For sitting exercises visit:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises

In Wales, visit NHS Direct Wales
Tel: **0845 4647** or **111**
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

In Scotland, visit NHS Inform
Tel: **0800 22 44 88**
www.nhsinform.scot

NHS Smokefree

Provides information on stopping smoking and details of support available.

Tel: **0300 123 1044**
www.nhs.uk/smokefree

In Wales, contact Help me quit
Tel: **0808 163 3031**
www.helpmequit.wales

In Northern Ireland, contact Want2stop
www.want2stop.info

In Scotland, contact Quit Your Way Scotland
Tel: **0800 84 84 84**

Online Centres Network

Helps people to master basic computer and internet skills.

Tel: **0114 349 1666**
www.onlinecentresnetwork.org

Paths for all

Promotes walking for health in Scotland.

Tel: **01259 218 888**
www.pathsforall.org.uk

Ramblers Cymru

Promotes and encourages outdoor walking in Wales through the Let's Walk Cymru programme.

Tel: **029 2064 4308**

www.ramblers.org.uk/wales

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

Provides information and support for blindness and visual impairment.

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

www.rnib.org.uk

Samaritans

Confidential support for people who are despairing or suicidal. Lines are open 24 hours a day.

Tel: **116 123**

www.samaritans.org

University of the Third Age

Local groups of older people who learn together informally.

Tel: **020 8466 6139**

www.u3a.org.uk

Walking for Health

Runs a network of health walk schemes across England.

Tel: **020 7339 8541**

Visit **www.walkingforhealth.org.uk** and enter your postcode to find your local group. You can then contact them directly.

Can you help Age UK?

If you would like to, please complete the donation form below with a gift and return to: **Freepost Age UK REPLY**. Alternatively, you can phone **0800 169 87 87** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/donate**. If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

Your details

AGUK0081 MXAQ-19CA05-C015

Title: Forename: Surname:

Home address:

Postcode:

We'd[†] like to let you know about the vital work we do for older people, our fundraising appeals and opportunities to support us, as well as the Age UK products and services you can buy. We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure.

I do not wish to receive communications by post.

You can change your mind at any time by phoning **0800 169 87 87** or writing to Supporter Services at the registered address below.

For further details on how your data is used and stored:

www.ageuk.org.uk/help/privacy-policy

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of £:

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

Card payment I wish to pay by (please tick):

MasterCard Visa CAF CharityCard Maestro

Card number Expiry date

Signature

Gift Aid declaration 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 am a UK tax payer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Today's date * Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI. **Please ensure you provide your full name and address**, and let us know if you wish to cancel your declaration, or if your tax status, name or address changes.

[†] We, includes the charity, its charitable and trading subsidiaries, and national charities (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. **Age UK provides a range of services and your gift will go wherever the need is the greatest.**

Help us be there for someone else

We hope you found this guide helpful. When times are tough, it's so important to get some support. Did you know you could help us reach someone else who needs a little help? Here's how:

1

Give your views on guides like this

Our Readers' Panel helps make sure the information we produce is right for older people and their families. We'd love you to join. Go to www.ageuk.org.uk/publications/readers-panel.

2

Donate to us

Every donation we receive helps us be there for someone when they need us. To make a donation, call us on **0800 169 8787** or go to www.ageuk.org.uk/donate.

3

Volunteer with us

Our volunteers make an incredible difference to people's lives. Get involved by contacting your local Age UK or at www.ageuk.org.uk/volunteer.

4

Campaign with us

We campaign to make life better for older people, and rely on the help of our strong network of campaigners. Add your voice to our latest campaigns at www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns.

5

Remember us in your will

A gift to Age UK in your will is a very special way of helping older people get expert support in the years to come. Find out more by calling **020 3033 1421** or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/legacy.

What should I do now?

You may want to read some of our other relevant guides, such as:

- **Your mind matters**
- **Staying steady**
- **Your hospital stay**

You can order any of our guides or factsheets by giving our Advice Line a ring for free on **0800 169 65 65** (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).

Our friendly advisers will also be able to help answer any questions you have about anything you've read.

All of our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

There's plenty of really useful information on our website, too. Visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeing** to get started.

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



0800 169 65 65
www.ageuk.org.uk

This guide has been produced with the support of the Morrisons Foundation.



Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). Registered address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to helping more people love later life. ID204283 08/19