

# Healthy living

Maintaining a healthy  
body and mind



# 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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# Introduction

It's never too late to think about adopting a healthier lifestyle. That doesn't mean you suddenly have to change your diet and start spending every day at the gym. Just a few small changes can make a big difference – helping you to feel better, have more energy and sleep more soundly.

Research shows that having a positive attitude to life in general, and to getting older, can help you enjoy better health. Choosing activities that give you an opportunity to meet people or play an active role in your local community can help too.

It's also important to remember to look after your body, especially your feet, eyes and ears.

This guide highlights changes you may like to consider and the benefits they can bring.

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

## Key



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.

# Staying active

There's no doubt that keeping active makes us feel more energetic. But it can also help to:

- manage high blood pressure and angina
- keep you at a healthy weight
- maintain regular bowel movements
- stimulate a poor appetite
- strengthen muscles and bones, which reduces the risk of falls and fractures
- prevent some long-term conditions, such as arthritis, from getting worse.

Regular exercise increases the production of chemicals in the brain that lift your mood – so it can be a good way to deal with stress and anxiety. And it can give you more energy to do things you enjoy, such as seeing friends or grandchildren.

Stamina, strength, flexibility and balance are particularly important as you get older and can help you to do everyday tasks more easily as well as enjoy activities more.

**Stamina** helps you to walk longer distances, swim and mow the lawn.

**Strength** helps you to climb stairs, carry shopping, rise from a chair and open a container.

**Flexibility** helps you to bend, get in and out of a car, wash your hair and get dressed.

**Balance** helps you to walk and climb steps confidently, stand from a sitting position and respond quickly if you trip.

Everyone can benefit from moving about more. Any amount of extra activity that's appropriate for your age group and health makes a difference.

## If you want to get started

Even if you haven't been very active before it's never too late to start.

Try to limit the amount of time you spend sitting watching the TV, reading or listening to music. Everyday activities count as exercise, so look out for simple ways you can become more active. They could include:


- 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 the housework.

Every step counts, so try and set yourself achievable goals every day. Always build up gradually and speak to your GP before increasing your activity levels significantly.

## If you'd like to do a bit more

If you're generally fit and have no health conditions that limit your ability to move around, the Government recommends that you build up to doing two-and-a-half hours of moderate activity throughout the week.

Moderate activity may leave you feeling warm and a little breathless. It can include:

-  • walking fast – visit the Walking for Health website (see page 38). (In Scotland, visit the Paths for All website and in Wales visit the Ramblers Cymru website – see pages 36–37)
- cycling on level ground
- playing a motion-sensor game on a computer console such as a Wii or an Xbox
- washing the car by hand.

### **If you're already fairly active**

If you're already active, you can improve your fitness and health by doing 75 minutes of vigorous activity throughout the week. This can include:

- running
- cycling fast or up hills
- climbing stairs
- playing tennis or football.

### **Muscle-strengthening activities**

Staying active isn't just about raising your heart rate. It's important to keep your strength up too. The Government recommends that you build up to two sessions of muscle-strengthening activity a week.

Exercises that help strengthen your muscles can include dancing, heavy gardening, yoga and Pilates. Lifting bags of shopping or weights can help to strengthen the muscles in your arms and wrists. For more information on improving your strength and balance, see our free guide *Staying steady*.

#### **what next?**


Visit the NHS Choices website (see page 36) to read the Government's physical activity guidelines – there are separate guidelines for older adults (those aged 65 and over) and for adults aged 19–64. They also have step-by-step guides to different types of exercise. In Wales visit the 'Live Well' section of the NHS Direct Wales website and in Scotland visit NHS Inform (see page 36).



# What kind of exercise might suit you?

Different activities bring a different range of benefits, so try a variety of things. Finding something you enjoy means you're more likely to do it regularly. The benefits of some activities and exercise classes are outlined below.

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

You don't have to be moving around to benefit from exercise. Chair-based exercises, which you can do while sitting or holding on to the back of a chair, are ideal for improving muscle strength and flexibility. You can watch videos online that demonstrate chair-based exercises or there may be chair exercise classes in your local area. Contact your local  Age UK, Age Scotland or Age Cymru to find out about classes near to you (see page 32). NHS Choices has step-by-step guides to exercises on their website (see page 36).



If you're physically able but find yourself sitting in front of the computer or television for hours at a time, try to break it up and build activity into your day. You can do this by going for a short, brisk walk around the garden or in the street – for example, during the advert breaks or after writing an email.

However, if you have a health condition that makes moving about difficult or painful, such as Parkinson's, arthritis or osteoporosis, always consult your GP for help in choosing the right exercise for you. They may be able to suggest suitable activities and be aware of special exercises or classes for people with your health condition. In some areas, your GP may be able to refer you to a structured exercise scheme, where trained instructors introduce you to exercise over a period of 12–20 weeks.

Alternatively, you can contact the relevant organisation for your health condition to find out how taking part in an exercise programme could help you.

Volunteer-driver or community transport schemes may be able to help if you need transport. Contact your local council or Age UK to find out what services are available in your area.

### what next?

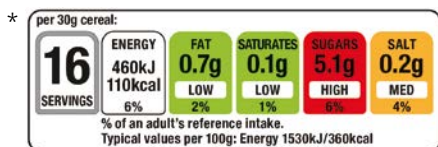
Decide what activities you would like to try and find out more about them. Your local Age UK may organise a range of activities and will know what else is available. Try your library or leisure centre too.


- ① In Wales, ask Age Cymru about the activity programmes it runs to encourage older people to become more active (see page 33). Your local Age Cymru may also organise activities.

# Healthy eating

No single food contains everything that you need to stay healthy, so the golden rule is to eat a variety of foods each day. Eating healthily doesn't mean cutting out foods that you enjoy, it just means eating some foods less often and/or in smaller portions, and eating more of other foods.

All major supermarkets have agreed a standard label that you'll find on the front of food packaging to help you make healthy choices.



Red means high, amber means medium and green means low so you can see at a glance whether the food has high, medium or low amounts of fat, saturated fat (saturates), sugar and salt. For more information on how to read food labels, visit [www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood](http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood) and click on the  'Food labels' link. In Wales, see the 'Live Well' section of the NHS Direct Wales website (see page 36). You can find out more about food labels and maintaining a healthy weight in our free guide *Healthy eating*.

## Keep a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important. It's not good for us to be either overweight or underweight. If you would like advice about how to lose weight, or if you've recently lost weight but aren't sure why, make an appointment to speak to your GP. They can give you advice if you have any concerns about your weight.

\* The Co-operative Food's front-of-pack nutrition label

### **Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day**

Research suggests that people who eat plenty of fruit and vegetables are less likely to develop heart disease or certain cancers, such as bowel cancer. To help you reach the target of five a day, think of all the fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruits, fruit juices and vegetables that you like. Try to choose five different-coloured ones to have with or between meals.

### **Eat fish at least twice a week**

You should aim to have one portion of white fish, such as haddock or cod, and another of oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel or sardines every week. Oily fish are rich in vitamin D and a type of fat that helps prevent heart disease. But grill, poach or bake fish rather than frying it.

### **Cut down on foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar**

Many of us eat too much salt, which can increase our risk of high blood pressure and stroke. Always think before you sprinkle salt on your meal. Compare food labels and look for lower-salt versions of foods such as processed meats, savoury snacks, biscuits, cheese, bacon, soups and ready meals. Foods that are high in fat include cakes, biscuits, sausages, meat pies, fatty meat and cheese. They contain saturated fats, which raise the level of cholesterol in the blood and increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. Eat foods like these less often and in smaller amounts.

### **Drink plenty of fluid: about six to eight glasses each day**

This does not have to be water. Tea, coffee and low-sugar or sugar-free squash are fine. Fruit juice contains a lot of sugar so it's advised not to drink more than 150ml (5 fl oz) a day. It's particularly important to drink plenty in hot weather. See our free guide *Staying cool in a heatwave* to find out more about staying well in hot weather.

## Preventing constipation

If you're struggling with constipation, first of all make sure that you have enough wholegrain cereals and fruit in your diet. Drinking plenty of liquids can help, too. Physical activity helps to keep the bowels moving, so try to think of ways to stay active. If changing your diet doesn't help, then see your GP for further advice.

## Look after your teeth

In order to enjoy your food, it's important that you keep your teeth and gums in good condition and if you wear dentures make sure they fit comfortably. You can keep your teeth and gums healthy by brushing them twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and by visiting your dentist regularly for a checkup. Even if you have full dentures, a regular check-up is still important. The shape of your mouth changes over time, so you are likely to need new dentures every five years. See our free factsheet *Dental Care: NHS and private treatment* for information on dental services. In Wales, see Age Cymru's version of this factsheet.



## Use the NHS Choices website

The NHS Choices website has information on nutrition, healthy cooking, exercise, weight loss and more (see page 36). It also explains the Government's Eat Well scheme, which offers recommendations on how to have a balanced diet. If you have a smartphone or tablet, look at the NHS Choices health apps and tools library to download useful apps at [www.nhs.uk/tools](http://www.nhs.uk/tools). In Wales, visit the 'Live Well' section of the NHS Direct Wales website. In Scotland see the Scottish government website on healthy eating [www.eatbetterfeelbetter.co.uk](http://www.eatbetterfeelbetter.co.uk)



**what  
next?**

Our free guide *Healthy eating* has more information about eating a balanced diet and what to do if you're worried about your weight or have a poor appetite. Your GP practice may also have information about healthy eating.

# Sensible drinking

Many of us enjoy an alcoholic drink now and then, perhaps, to help us relax or to mark a family occasion. Drinking alcohol in the evenings – maybe with your meal or while watching TV – has not received the same media attention as binge drinking. But regular drinking like this can damage your liver, brain, blood vessels and organs.

Government guidance says that we should drink in moderation, which means:

- Men and women shouldn't regularly drink more than 14 units a week.
- You should spread your drinking over three days or more if you do drink as much as 14 units a week.
- Having a few alcohol-free days a week is a good way of cutting down how much you drink.

If you're not sure what a unit is, a pint of beer (4 per cent alcohol) and a (175ml) standard glass of wine (13 per cent alcohol) both contain 2.3 units. A 750ml bottle of wine (13.5 per cent alcohol) has 10 units.

You should avoid alcohol with certain medicines so always read leaflets that come with any medicine and if in doubt, ask your pharmacist.

Sometimes we may feel that a drink can help us to deal with a difficult situation. However, it isn't advisable to use alcohol to lift your mood because, in the long term, it can actually make you feel lower. If you regularly have a drink to help you cope, speak to someone you trust about how you're feeling.

If you are worried about your own or another person's drinking, speak to your GP. For more information about drinking sensibly, visit the Drinkaware website (see page 35).

# Smoking

Even after many years of smoking, it's still worth giving up. The encouraging news is that older smokers who decide to give up have been shown to be more successful at staying away from smoking than younger people.

Whatever your age you can expect a range of benefits if you stop smoking, many of which you may notice quite quickly. You're likely to:

- be able to breathe easier
- feel better overall
- find that any existing heart and lung problems you have are less likely to become serious
- be less likely to have a stroke, or heart and lung problems
- recover more quickly after an operation
- live longer.

Most people know how unhealthy smoking is but, because they enjoy it, they find it difficult to give up. The first step is to convince yourself that you would like to be a non-smoker. Why would being a non-smoker be right for you? Ask your GP practice about local one-to-one or group support to help you. Medication to help you stop smoking is available on prescription.

## what next?



Call the NHS Smokefree Helpline (see page 36). The NHS Smokefree website also has tips on stopping smoking and details of local Stop Smoking services. In Wales, you can contact Stop Smoking Wales or visit the website. In Scotland call Smokeline, and in Northern Ireland call the Smokers' Helpline. See page 36 for contact details.

# Foot care

It's vital to look after your feet and basic daily foot care should include:

- washing in warm soapy water (but don't soak your feet too long – it destroys their natural oils, causing dry skin)
- drying carefully, particularly between the toes
- applying foot cream containing urea which hydrates the skin (don't apply between the toes)
- lightly applying foot powder.

Wear clean socks each day. Don't wear the same shoes every day and always choose ones that support your feet but aren't too tight. Wearing natural materials such as leather, wool and cotton will allow your feet to breathe.

It's important to pay attention to any changes to your feet. Contact your GP if they become painful, feel noticeably hot or cold or if there is a change in their colour. If you have corns, bunions, an ingrown toenail or other common foot problems, report these to your practice nurse too.

Cutting toenails regularly and straight across prevents ingrown toenails. You could file them daily instead if you find that easier. If you have health problems such as diabetes you may be able to get NHS help with cutting your toenails. Talk to your GP to find out more.

- ① Your local Age UK may offer nail cutting for a fee or know where help is available. In Wales contact Age Cymru. In Scotland, if you've had a care assessment that shows you need help with nail cutting, you shouldn't be charged for this. For more information contact Age Scotland.

**what  
next?**

**Report any foot problems to your practice nurse or GP, particularly if you have diabetes.**

## Ron joined his local bowls club and met new people while improving his health.

### **After Ron's wife died he found it hard to take an interest in anything on his own.**

'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.

'She said I wasn't unusual in finding it difficult to go back to places and activities that Joan and I 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.'





‘I have **more energy** and life seems **better every day.**’

# Healthy bones

Your bone health is largely influenced by your genes but it is affected by your lifestyle too.

You can keep your bones strong by doing regular weight-bearing activity (this means exercise where your legs and feet support your weight, such as walking, jogging and tennis) and by eating a healthy diet with plenty of calcium-rich foods. Good sources of calcium include dairy foods, fortified soya products and canned fish (with bones). It is also found in fortified breakfast cereals, white bread, pulses and nuts such as almonds.

Vitamin D is also important for strong bones and helps us to absorb calcium. Most of us get the vitamin D we need from regular exposure to summer sunshine rather than from food. Try to go outside every day from March to October without sunscreen for short periods (around 10 minutes), although it's important not to let your skin redden or burn. Try to do this once or twice a day, depending on how dark your skin colour is. You need to be outside – your body can't make vitamin D from sunshine coming through windows.

The Government recommends that certain groups of people take a vitamin D supplement of 10 µg daily, including people aged 65 and over. If you think you could be at risk of not getting enough vitamin D, particularly if you stay indoors a lot or cover your skin for cultural reasons, raise this with your GP. Always speak to your GP before starting to take a vitamin D supplement or over-the-counter medicine on a daily basis.

Everyone has some degree of bone loss as they get older, especially women after the menopause. Osteoporosis is the term used when bone loss makes bones significantly more fragile. It commonly affects bones in the spine, wrists and hips. It means that you're more likely to break a bone if you fall, or experience chronic pain if bones in your spine collapse.

You are more at risk of osteoporosis if you:

- are a woman who had an early menopause or hysterectomy with removal of the ovaries
- are a man who has low levels of testosterone following surgery for some types of cancer
- have a parent who broke a hip, particularly after only a minor fall
- use or have used certain medications, such as anti-epileptic drugs, some cancer treatments or long-term use of corticosteroids
- are underweight or have suffered from an eating disorder
- have been a smoker or heavy drinker
- have a condition such as Crohn's or coeliac disease
- have a medical condition that means you're immobile for a long time.

Complete the bone health quiz on the National Osteoporosis Society's website (see page 35) to find out which factors could affect your bone health. You can print out a factsheet based on your answers that you can take to your GP if you're concerned about osteoporosis.

**what  
next?**


**Speak to your GP if you think you may be at risk or contact the National Osteoporosis Society for more information (see page 35).**

# Tests and checks to stay healthy

There are free checks offered to older people on the NHS to help you stay healthy. These can help to pick up on any problems early on, reassure you if you have any concerns about your health and give you advice on how to stay well in later life.

## NHS health check

In England these are offered free every five years to people aged between 40 and 74 who don't have a pre-existing condition. It'll usually take place at your GP surgery or local pharmacy. At the check, you'll be asked about your family history and your lifestyle and you'll have some routine tests, including a test of your cholesterol and blood pressure. This will give you a personalised report on your risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and type 2 diabetes. You'll also get personalised advice on how to stay healthy and how to reduce your risk of certain conditions.

-  In Wales there is a programme of health and wellbeing checks for the over 50s. Speak to NHS Direct Wales or your GP for further information. In Scotland, talk to your GP.

## Screenings

For women aged 50 to 70, breast screening is offered to detect early signs of breast cancer, although in some areas this may be offered from age 47 to age 73. If you are registered with a GP you should be automatically invited for screening every three years. After the age of 70 you'll usually stop receiving invitations for screening but you can still request an appointment with your local screening unit.



Bowel cancer screening is available to men and women aged 60 to 74 (or 50 to 74 in Scotland). You should get a home testing kit sent to you every two years. In England, if you're aged 75 or over, you can request the test by phoning 0800 707 60 60. An additional test is also being rolled out to men and women at the age of 55 in England. If you are aged 75 and over in Wales and are concerned about bowel cancer, you should contact your GP for further advice.

Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening is offered to men when they turn 65. It detects if there is any swelling in the aorta, the main blood vessel that runs down from the heart. Swelling in the aorta causes no symptoms but could be fatal if it bursts. The test is a 10–15 minute ultrasound of the stomach. If no swelling is found you never need to have the screening again. If any swelling is detected, you will get to see a specialist within two weeks who can advise if you need any treatment.

### **Vaccinations**

If you are aged 65 or over, you're entitled to the free flu jab every year. This can help to protect you against catching flu. Other people are also entitled to the flu jab, including those with certain long-term conditions, or those who care for someone who is elderly or disabled. It's best to get the flu jab as early as possible to protect you over the winter – most surgeries and pharmacists start to offer it in September or October. You need to get the flu jab every year as the flu virus can change.

People over 65 are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccination, which protects against bacterial infections that cause illnesses such as pneumonia and meningitis. You only need a single vaccination which offers protection for life.

There is a shingles vaccine for certain people aged between 70 and 79 but when you can get this vaccine will depend on your date of birth. Ask your GP surgery for more information about eligibility. You can have the vaccine if you've had shingles before, as it will boost your immunity against shingles in the future. You can have the vaccination at any time of the year and you only need to have it once.

### Checks you can do yourself

It's important to check yourself regularly for any symptoms of cancers, including between screenings. That includes, for example, keeping an eye on any moles you have to see if they change, or getting a persistent cough checked out. For all the signs you should look out for, see [www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer](http://www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer) or contact Cancer Research UK (see page 34).

#### what next?



You can find out about screening and vaccinations through NHS Choices (see page 36) or from your local GP. In Wales, see the NHS Direct Wales website for further information (see page 36). In Scotland, see the NHS website [www.healthscotland.com/screening.aspx](http://www.healthscotland.com/screening.aspx)



‘There are **free checks** offered to older people on the NHS to help you stay healthy. These can help to **pick up on any problems early on**, and reassure you if you have any concerns about your health.’

# Sight

As we get older we need to take extra care of our eyes. Doing the following can help you to keep your eyes healthy.

- Have your eyes checked every two years, or every year if you're over 70. This means that changes in your vision can be corrected and problems such as cataracts, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) can be picked up early before they significantly affect your sight. NHS sight checks are free if you are 60 or over (except in Scotland where everyone is eligible for a free sight check regardless of age). You may be able to get help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses if you are on a low income.
- i** NHS sight checks are free if you are 60 or over (except in Scotland where everyone is eligible for a free sight check regardless of age). You may be able to get help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses if you are on a low income.
- Protect your eyes from the sun, particularly if you are near water or snow – they can be damaged by UV rays. Always wear sunglasses on a sunny day. Remember that not all sunglasses fully protect your eyes from UV rays, so choose sunglasses labelled with the CE mark or the European Standard EN 1836:2005. For even higher protection choose sunglasses labelled UV400, which means that they protect you from 99 to 100 per cent of UV light.
  - Stop smoking. Smoking increases your risk of developing AMD and cataracts.
  - Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.
  - If you use a computer, adjust the settings to make the screen as easy to view as possible. For example, increase the size of the text and change the brightness or colour settings.



Even with the right glasses or contact lenses, you may still find it hard to see things clearly. Day-to-day tasks can be made easier by good lighting and using low-vision aids or other equipment. If sight problems affect your ability to carry out everyday tasks safely, ask your local social services department what equipment and services they can offer.

If you care for someone who is unable to recognise or communicate sight problems, for example someone with dementia, remember to arrange regular eye tests for them. You can ask the optician about using special non-verbal tests. Encourage the person to wear glasses if they need them.

Contact the Macular Disease Society or the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) for more information about eye health and the services they offer for partially-sighted and blind people (see pages 35 and 37).

### what next?

See our free factsheet *Help with health costs* for more information. In Wales, see Age Cymru's free factsheet *Help with health costs in Wales*.



‘Have your eyes checked **every two years**, or every year if you’re over 70.’

# Hearing

Hearing loss is common as people get older. You may find you need the TV volume to be louder or that you cannot always hear conversations, particularly in a crowd. If you're worried about your hearing, try the free telephone or online hearing check run by Action on Hearing Loss (see page 34). It will tell you whether it's advisable to see your GP.

Your GP will check your ears and may refer you for a hearing test. If you need them, hearing aids and batteries are free on the NHS.

Tinnitus, often described as a ringing sound in your ear or head, is another hearing-related problem. It can be distressing but there are many ways to manage it.

## what next?

Contact [Action on Hearing Loss](#) for more information or to speak to their tinnitus helpline (see page 34).

# Combined sight and hearing difficulties

You may have difficulties to varying degrees with both sight and hearing but there are things that can be done to help you enjoy a better quality of life.

If you have a sight or hearing difficulty, or both, contact social services and explain how your day-to-day life is affected. They may have a specialist team who can help.

## what next?


[Deafblind UK](#) can offer support, practical advice, home visits and befriending to those who are deafblind or who have combined sight and hearing loss (see page 35). [Support group Sense](#) (see page 37) can help people with both sight and hearing difficulties, and their families.

# Mental wellbeing

Feeling well is not just about being physically fit and healthy: it's equally important to your overall health that you feel good mentally. Mental health is sometimes called 'mental wellbeing', 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing'. It means how you think and feel, and how you cope with life's ups and downs. Your mental health is just as important as good physical health and there are several things that you can do to help support your own mental wellbeing.

## Social contact

Meeting friends, enjoying hobbies and getting involved in the local community is fulfilling and helps us to feel good about ourselves and life in general. If you find that you're not able to do the things you used to, why not try something new? Spending time with other people can prevent you from feeling lonely or anxious and gives you a chance to share experiences, thoughts and ideas. Volunteering is a good way to meet people. 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. To find out about volunteering opportunities in your area contact your local

 Age UK or Volunteering England (see page 38). There are separate organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (see page 38).

## Do the things that you enjoy

Think about the things you enjoy and make time for them. All of us are different. Perhaps you enjoy cooking or laughing at re-runs of your favourite TV programmes. Or why not treat yourself to your favourite magazine or a good book? Whatever it is, think about what makes you feel good and try to set aside some time for it every week.

## **Stay in touch**

If you have family and friends nearby, try to meet up with them regularly or ask them to call round. Otherwise, regular phone calls can help you to stay close. The internet has opened up more ways to stay in contact and meet new people, such as exchanging emails, using online forums and using Skype to make video phone calls. Feeling that people care about you can make a big difference to your outlook. If you aren't confident using the internet, ask your local Age UK for help – many offer training sessions and advice on getting online for older people. UK Online Centres also help people who want to learn basic computer skills (see page 38).

## **Make plans and stay active**

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 your day and the purpose that working life gave you. Retirement doesn't have to mean an end to keeping active and discovering new things. Setting yourself goals, however small, can give you a sense of achievement and motivation. Your goal could be anything from finishing a crossword puzzle or making a phone call to a friend, to doing some gardening or going swimming or for a walk. Planning days out or arranging activities for the week or month ahead will give you something to look forward to and keep you feeling positive.

## If you're feeling down for a while

Although no one feels 100 per cent happy all of the time, if you are feeling out of sorts and have any of the symptoms below for two weeks or more you may be suffering from depression.

Symptoms include:

- loss of self-confidence and feeling down
- feeling anxious
- not being able to enjoy the things you usually enjoy
- unexplained aches and pains
- avoiding people, even those you are close to.

Depression is just as significant as any physical illness and is not an inevitable part of getting older. If you have any of the symptoms above, speak to your GP and explain how you're feeling. Together you can then agree on what may be best for you. They may suggest talking treatments, which involve talking to someone who is specially trained to help you manage your thoughts and feelings and the effect they have on you.

### what next?



See our free guide *Your mind matters* for more information about looking after your mental wellbeing. Age Scotland also has a free guide *Mental health and wellbeing in later life: keeping well and who can help*. If you need support or advice, contact Depression Alliance, Samaritans, CALL (in Wales), Aware Defeat Depression (in Northern Ireland), or Action on Depression (in Scotland). See pages 34–37 for details.

# Memory loss

You may be worried that you've become noticeably more forgetful or confused. Perhaps you're struggling to remember things that happened recently even though you can easily remember things from long ago, or you've been getting confused in a familiar place, or having trouble remembering names and following conversations.

You may be worried that these are early signs of dementia but most of us experience these things from time to time. They can be symptoms of many common conditions, such as stress, depression, vitamin deficiencies, thyroid problems, constipation, dehydration or urinary-tract infections.

If you're worried about memory loss you should talk to your doctor to find out what's causing it. This can either set your mind at rest or allow you to get the help and support you need. A diagnosis of dementia won't make things worse but it can help you plan for your future.

## what next?

If you have been diagnosed with early-stage dementia, or if you care for someone with dementia, you may find it useful to read our free information guides *Living with early-stage dementia* and *Caring for someone with dementia*.

# Sleep

Your sleeping patterns will change naturally as you get older and you may not get as much sleep as you used to. Everyone is different – some people need less sleep than others. What's important is that you get enough good-quality sleep to enable you to function during the day.

Many older people suffer from insomnia – ongoing difficulties with getting to sleep and staying asleep long enough to feel refreshed the next morning – which can make you feel tired, low on energy and depressed.

You can improve your sleeping patterns by:

- cutting down on daytime naps
- going to bed at the same time each night
- reducing the amount of caffeine you have during the day, perhaps by trying decaffeinated (decaf) tea and coffee
- getting up and walking around if you can't get to sleep or doing something for half an hour before going back to bed.

If you are caring for someone, you may find getting a full night's sleep difficult because of your caring responsibilities. If you're struggling to get a full night's sleep, consider getting a carer's assessment from your local council to see if there is some support you could get to make life easier.

## what next?



If you have persistent problems with sleep your GP may be able to help you find a solution. If you suffer from insomnia the NHS Choices website (NHS Direct Wales website in Wales or NHS Inform website in Scotland) has tips on treating it (see page 36). If you're a carer, read our *Advice for carers* guide for more information on getting a carer's assessment and the support that could be available to you.

# Checklist for staying healthy

Use this handy checklist to see the key things you can do to stay healthy.

## 1 EAT A VARIETY OF FOODS



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

## 2 GIVE UP SMOKING

It's never too late to get help to stop and enjoy the benefits of being a non-smoker.

## 3 GET ENOUGH SLEEP



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

## 4 DRINK SENSIBLY

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 STAY ACTIVE



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



## 6 MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

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

## 7 GET YOUR EYES TESTED

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



## 8 VISIT YOUR GP

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

## 9 TAKE CARE OF YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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Stay in touch with friends, try something new and do things that you enjoy. All of these things can help you to feel good and support your mental wellbeing.

## 10 CARE FOR YOUR FEET

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



# 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)

**Age UK runs a number of services in England that promote physical exercises and healthy eating to older people in order to improve their health and mental wellbeing.**

Contact your local Age UK or call Age UK Advice for more information and to find out whether there is a project near you.

In Wales, Age Cymru runs two physical 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. For more information, call 029 2043 1555 or visit the Age Cymru website.

In Northern Ireland and Scotland, contact Age Northern Ireland or Age Scotland to find out whether they know of any special physical activity sessions.

### **Action on Depression**

Support organisation for people in Scotland affected by depression.

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

### **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](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

### **Aware Defeat Depression**

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

Tel: 0845 120 2961

[www.aware-ni.org](http://www.aware-ni.org)

### **CALL (Community Advice and Listening Line)**

Offers confidential support and information to people in Wales who are 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](http://www.callhelpline.org.uk)

### **Cancer Research UK**

They 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](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

### **Deafblind UK**

National charity for people who are deafblind or have a combined sight and hearing loss. They offer information, practical advice, support, home visits and befriending.

Tel/Textphone: 0800 132 320

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

In Scotland, contact:

### **Deafblind Scotland**

Tel: 0141 777 6111

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

### **Depression Alliance**

Provides information and a network of local support groups for people affected by depression.

Tel: 0207 407 7584

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

### **Drinkaware**

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

Tel: 020 7766 9900

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

### **Macular Disease Society**

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

Tel: 0300 303 0111

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

### **National Osteoporosis Society**

Offers information and support on prevention and treatment of osteoporosis.

Tel: 0808 800 0035

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

### **NHS Choices**

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

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

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

In Wales, visit **NHS Direct Wales**

Tel: 0845 4647

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

In Scotland, visit **NHS Inform**

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

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

### **NHS Smokefree**

For information on stopping smoking and details of support.

Tel: 0300 123 1044

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

In Wales, contact **Stop Smoking Wales** to find your local group and for general advice on quitting.

Tel: 0800 085 2219

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

In Northern Ireland, call the **Smokers' Helpline** on 0808 812 8008

In Scotland, call **Smokeline** on 0800 84 84 84.

### **Paths for all**

Promotes walking for health in Scotland.

Tel: 01259 218 888

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

### **Ramblers Cymru**

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

Tel: 029 2064 4308

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

### **Sense**

Provides information and support to those with dual sensory impairment (deafblindness).

Tel/Textphone: 0300 330 9256

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

In Scotland, contact **Sense Scotland**

Tel: 0300 330 9292

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

### **Volunteering England**

Provides details of local volunteer centres and opportunities across England.

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

In Northern Ireland, contact:

### **Volunteer Now**

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

In Scotland, contact:

### **Volunteering Scotland**

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

In Wales, contact:

### **Volunteering Wales**

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

### **UK Online Centres**

Helps people to master basic computer and internet skills.

Tel: 0800 77 1234

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



# 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"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<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**.

