

# Health and Wellbeing in Later Life



# Who we are

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 and promote their rights and interests.**

**Our vision** is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

**Our mission** is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people enjoy better later lives.

**We have three strategic aims:**



**We help older people to be as well as they can be**



**We promote a positive view of ageing and later life**



**We tackle loneliness and isolation**

# How we can help

**We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.**

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

Our **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.



**Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222**  
**(Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm)**



**Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://www.agescotland.org.uk)**  
**to find out more.**



# Contents

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Foreword</b>                                 | <b>p1</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                             | <b>p2</b>  |
| <b>Creating change through habits</b>           | <b>p4</b>  |
| <b>Habits for a healthy lifestyle:</b>          | <b>p12</b> |
| Improving social connection                     | p12        |
| Making healthier food choices                   | p14        |
| Staying hydrated                                | p18        |
| Keeping active                                  | p20        |
| Getting enough sleep                            | p23        |
| <b>Attending health checks and appointments</b> | <b>p25</b> |
| <b>Things to look after in later life:</b>      | <b>p27</b> |
| Brain health                                    | p27        |
| Bones   | p29        |
| Teeth   | p31        |
| Feet  | p33        |
| Hearing   | p35        |
| Eyesight  | p36        |

This information guide has been prepared by Age Scotland and contains general advice only. It should not be relied upon as a basis for any decision or action, nor used as a substitute for professional advice. Neither Age Scotland 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 Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.



# Foreword

Age Scotland's Health and Wellbeing in Later Life guide begins "We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual". That's true, but this guide is a pretty good place to start! It includes advice about maintaining or improving some of the most important aspects of your health.

Keeping healthy as we age, both physically and mentally, helps us live more independently, pursue our interests, support our families and friends, contribute to our communities and more. Although our health will sometimes be affected by things we can't control, there's growing evidence about the importance of things we are more able to influence. This includes many of the lifestyle choices we make.

Knowing that certain things are good (or bad) for us is important, but that's only step one. The steps most of us find a bit harder are making changes based on that information and sticking to those. There are reasons why some changes might not be possible for everyone. If that's the case, there's often another aspect of our health we can focus on.

It can also be helpful to remember that small changes add up. Making a change in one area, slowly and over time, can build towards a range of health benefits.

As we age, we all have different things we want to continue to do and knowing what we're aiming for can help motivate us. So, with your goal in mind and this guide in hand, you've taken the first steps towards enjoying a healthier future.

Professor Alan Gow  
Heriot-Watt University

# Introduction

Whatever our situation and age, there are things we can all do to improve our health and wellbeing.

This guide is for you if you want to be a little healthier and need some help getting started. It explains how our tendency to form habits can help us make small changes that will improve how we feel today and make a big difference to our health in the longer term.

You may like to invite a friend or community group to work through this guide with you. Making changes alongside others can be motivating and help you stay on track.

To order more copies of this guide, call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** or visit **[www.age.scot/publications](http://www.age.scot/publications)**.





## What health and wellbeing might we expect in later life?

Research has shown that the way in which you live can make your body and brain either younger or older than your age in years. While accidents, illness and genetics will affect your ageing, your day-to-day habits and routines also have a big influence.



### **Focus on what is within your control**

**For example, muscles can gradually weaken from around age 30, but physical activity and good nutrition can help to build muscle throughout life.**

**Similarly, while thinking skills and memory may become less sharp with age, we can boost our brain capabilities with healthy living and by keeping mentally active.**

**It is realistic to expect that, with small adjustments to our lifestyle, we can make a positive impact on how well we age and our ability to enjoy later life.**

# Creating change through habits

Modern life constantly presents us with unhealthy temptations. Psychologists have found that relying on willpower to resist these is unlikely to succeed, particularly when we are busy, tired or stressed. However, we can use our human tendency to do things by habit to help us achieve our health goals.

Habits are the things we do on cue, often without thought, such as brushing our teeth or washing our hands. By understanding more about habits, we can change existing ones and create new ones, so we don't have to use willpower to make healthy choices. They will simply become an effortless part of our routine.

## How to form healthy habits

First, be clear about your motivation for change. You may find it helpful to write this down and put it somewhere in view, or you can write it in the space below. This can remind you of why it is worth sticking with your new routines.

Everyone is different, but common motivations include wanting to:

- continue to do a sport or other hobby
- look after yourself in your own home
- feel better and have more energy
- recover from, or live well with, a health condition
- increase your chances of future good health
- enjoy active play with your grandchildren





**I want to start making healthier choices because:**

Having clear goals will also help you to choose the right changes for you. Start by identifying one healthier choice that will help you towards your goal. Decide when you will do it, where, and how. For changes that take time and effort, start small. For example, if you want to go on a daily walk, start with just a few minutes. You can build up to longer once it has become a habit.

Make it as easy as possible for yourself to make your healthier choice. For example, you could:

- set out a fruit bowl if you plan to eat more fruit
- put sweet treats out of view if you are trying to cut down, or stop buying them altogether
- leave your walking shoes at the front door before bed if you are aiming to take a morning walk



## **Make it enjoyable**

Habits form more easily when there is an immediate reward, such as feeling cleaner after brushing our teeth. If we remember feeling good after doing something, we are more likely to repeat it.

For healthier choices that take a bit of effort, find ways to make them more enjoyable so they are more likely to become habits.

For example, you could:

- exercise by walking to a place you like visiting or dancing to music you enjoy
- invite a friend over to prepare and eat a healthy meal with you
- find a favourite glass you can use if you want to start drinking more water



## Other ways to improve your chances of success:

**Start with an easy change.** Success motivates us, so begin with just one healthier choice that is easy and achievable. Focus on it until it becomes a normal part of your day or week.

**Add to existing habits.** For example, you could balance on one leg while you brush your teeth. You may need a sticky note on the bathroom mirror to remind you at first. Eventually, you will do it naturally each time you brush your teeth. You could make a list of all your habits to identify healthy habits you could add to, and unhealthy ones you might like to change.

**Congratulate yourself** each time you make a healthier choice. You could put a tick on a calendar or in your diary. This creates a positive association with making that choice to help encourage you to repeat it. You could also reward yourself for a run of successes with a healthy treat.

**Be kind to yourself** if you find it hard to stick to your new healthier choice. If you forget, or go back to an old habit, remind yourself of what you have already achieved. Then pick up from where you left off. Over time, your healthier choices will become second nature.

## The importance of mental wellbeing

Feeling good in ourselves makes us more likely to stick to healthier habits. Many of the changes in this guide can help with mental wellbeing, but sometimes this is not enough.

Ask for help if you are struggling with low mood, or any aspect of your mental or emotional wellbeing. Speaking to your GP is a good place to start. They may want to rule out any physical causes of your symptoms. They might also offer you medicines or counselling to help you manage how you are feeling.

Many organisations offer information and support for issues around mental health. Here are just a few of them:

**i** The **Mental Health Foundation** provides information on a wide range of topics: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health).

**Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH)** can provide you with information about support in your area.  
[www.samh.org.uk/find-help](http://www.samh.org.uk/find-help) / **0344 800 0550**.

**Breathing Space** provides free, confidential support from specialist advisers. It is open outwith usual business hours, via phone, textphone and webchat. An interpretation service for foreign languages and BSL is available.  
[www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot) / **0800 83 85 87**.

If you are feeling low and need to talk, **Samaritans** has a 24-hour helpline, open 365 days a year. Call **116 123** or visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) for more information.

The **Age Scotland** guide **Keeping well and who can help** provides more information about where to turn if you need help with your mental health. You can order a copy by calling the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.





## Emotions and unhealthy habits

When we feel an uncomfortable emotion, it can be tempting to make unhealthy choices to make ourselves feel better in the short term. This type of response can easily become a habit.

Working on our ability to accept our emotions can help us break these kinds of habits. Emotions usually only last for a short time in our body and brain, and their effects can pass quickly if we let them. Noticing and naming our emotions, without judgement, can help this process. Once identified, we can act on the emotion if needed, or let it go if not.

There are many things that, if done regularly, can improve our ability to accept our emotions and help us resist the temptation to turn to unhealthy choices.

**Getting enough sleep** is important to emotional and mental wellbeing. Our sleep routine can change as we get older so changes to sleep patterns are not necessarily a concern. However, speak to your GP if lack of sleep is affecting your everyday life. See page 23 for more information about sleep.

**Spending time in nature** can make us feel more connected to the world around us. This can help to change our thought patterns and give us a fresh perspective.

**Doing meaningful activity** can improve self-esteem and provide a sense of identity and purpose. You may find meaningful activity through work, helping a friend, volunteering, creative projects, caring for an animal or even tending a plant.

**Slowing down our thoughts** is important, but not always easy. The NHS recommends a range of practices that can help us to observe our thoughts and bring them under control. These include breathing and meditation practices and Tai Chi. You may like to try a guided meditation to help get you started.

**i NHS Inform** provides further ideas about ways to improve emotional and mental wellbeing. Visit [www.nhsinform.scot/mind-to-mind](http://www.nhsinform.scot/mind-to-mind) or call the NHS Inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88**.

## Beating addictions

Habits that provide particularly strong feelings of pleasure may become addictions. The NHS defines addiction as ‘not having control over doing, taking or using something to the point where it could be harmful to you’.

Addictions form when repeating a pleasurable behaviour creates changes in the brain. These changes wire the brain to give us feelings of withdrawal if we try to stop the behaviour.

Alcohol and nicotine can be highly addictive because they create a particularly strong chemical response in the brain. Other things that can be addictive include sugar, gambling, pornography and social media.

Addictions can have a big impact on many aspects of life. It is important to seek help for anything affecting your wellbeing and health, and many people benefit from support to break addictions.

**i WithYou** provides free, confidential support with alcohol or drugs via a local service or online, including webchat. Visit **[www.wearewithyou.org.uk/help-and-advice](http://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/help-and-advice)** or call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222** for help finding your local service.

**Alcoholics Anonymous** provides free self-help groups across Scotland. Its 12-step programme involves getting sober with the help of regular support groups. **0800 917 7650 / [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)**. Webchat is available.

**Quit Your Way** provides free personalised information and advice about how to stop smoking. **0800 84 84 84 / [www.nhsinform.scot/quit-your-way-scotland](http://www.nhsinform.scot/quit-your-way-scotland)**. Webchat is available.

**GambleAware** is the charity dedicated to keeping people safe from gambling harms. 24/7 helpline **0808 8020 133 / [www.gambleaware.org](http://www.gambleaware.org)**. Webchat is available.



## Choosing the right changes for you

Remember that success motivates us, so start with a change you know will be easy to achieve.

The **Habits for a healthy lifestyle** section (page 12) outlines habits we can change or create for better health and wellbeing.

Many of the suggestions in the **Things to look after in later life** section on page 27 are actions rather than habits, such as getting your hearing or eyesight checked. Some may have benefits you might not expect. You could start with these, or complete them alongside creating healthier habits.

You might like to list your chosen changes and actions in the space below. Once you feel a change has become a habit, you can tick it off and add the next one into your routine.

### My chosen changes and actions:

e.g. eating fruit instead of a biscuit as a morning snack, booking a hearing test



---




---




---




---




---




---

# Habits for a healthy lifestyle

Choose one change at a time to make into a habit. The ‘Why is it important’ sections below may be useful to help you choose the right changes for you.

## Improving social connection

### ? Why is it important?

Improving our social connection could be the single biggest thing we can do for our overall wellbeing. Good quality relationships can improve our mood, boost our ability to fight infection and recover from illness, and may even lengthen our lives.

### ? What does it look like?

Even small daily interactions are good for our wellbeing. Greeting neighbours, waving to a delivery person or making conversation with a shop assistant can all add to our sense of connection.

Being kind to others helps us form connections and can make us feel happier. This makes volunteering a great way to improve wellbeing.

Joining a group that meets regularly can lead to lasting connections and provide a sense of community and belonging. This could be a coffee morning, a Men’s Shed or an activity group, for example. Regular groups provide structure to your week and can be a valuable source of peer support, information and advice.

Many people benefit from the companionship of owning a pet. If you rent your property, make sure you check the rules about pets in your tenancy agreement. Dog ownership can be particularly social as it brings opportunities to meet others during dog walks. If you are not able to keep a dog of your own, you may like to offer to walk a friend’s dog or volunteer with a scheme such as **Borrow My Doggy**.





## ? How do I get started?

The **Age Scotland Community Connecting Service** can help you find opportunities to make new social connections. A volunteer will talk to you about your interests and suggest groups and activities you might enjoy. Call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222** to sign up.

You could also check the noticeboards at your local library or community centre for details of groups and events that might interest you.

**Men's Sheds** are community spaces where men can come together to enjoy practical hobbies. Visit [www.menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed](http://www.menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed) or call **0300 772 9626**.

If you are retired, **u3a** (formerly University of the Third Age) is a nationwide collection of charities offering special interest groups for people no longer in full-time work. Visit [www.u3asites.org.uk/scotland](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/scotland) or call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.

For more information about **Borrow My Doggy**, visit [www.borrowmydoggy.com](http://www.borrowmydoggy.com) or call **020 3826 8628**.



## Making healthier food choices

### ? Why is it important?

The foods we choose don't only affect our long-term health. You may have noticed that what we eat can affect mood and energy levels in the short term.

### ? What does it look like?

Eating fresh foods and cooking from scratch is usually healthier than eating pre-prepared foods. Cooking doesn't have to be complicated; one-pot recipes can be a good choice if you find cooking difficult or unenjoyable. You could also try cooking extra portions, so you have leftovers for another day.

Making healthier food choices does not have to mean cutting out everything you enjoy. A healthy diet needs variety, and should generally include:

- lots of vegetables and fruit
- starchy foods like wholewheat bread and pasta, and brown rice
- some protein-rich foods like fish and meat
- healthy fats and oils such as those in nuts, avocados and olives

Foods high in salt, sugar and saturated fats should be eaten in moderation.





Getting enough protein can be particularly important as we get older. It is the building block of our body tissues, including our muscles, which tend to get weaker with age. Eating more protein and keeping active can help them stay stronger for longer. Foods that are a good source of protein include eggs, fish, lean meat, beans, nuts and tofu.



**High amounts of protein can be harmful for people with certain medical conditions, including those affecting the kidneys. Get advice from your doctor if you think this could affect you.**

## Alcohol in older adults

It may be worth knowing that the body is less able to process alcohol as we get older. Some advice suggests that older adults should drink less than the limits recommended in the low-risk drinking guidelines. These recommend no more than 14 units of alcohol per week. As a guide, there are 2.2 units of alcohol in a pint of 4% beer or a medium glass of 12.5% wine, and 1 unit in a single measure of a 40% spirit.

For information visit [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/alcohol), or call the NHS Inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88**.



## **Is it really a healthy choice?**

Some foods that seem like healthier choices may be less healthy than you think. The 'Red, Amber, Green' system on product labels shows if the amount of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar in the food is considered low (green), medium or high (red). This is a quick way to check if a food contains more fat, salt or sugar than you might expect.

Some examples of foods to watch out for:

- flavoured sachets of porridge oats are often high in sugar
- some yoghurts are high in sugar, including plain as well as flavoured ones
- real fruit juices are very high in sugar and should only be drunk in moderation



## ? How do I get started?

You might like to start a food diary to note down how you feel after eating different foods. You may notice habits you would like to change. Page 4 provides information on creating healthy habits.

Eating meals with others can improve the variety and quality of the meals we eat. You could start a supper or lunch club with friends or join one that already exists. If you would like help learning to cook tasty healthy dishes, there may be community cooking groups in your area. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** for help finding groups local to you.

**Food Train** offers practical help and advice to support older people in Scotland to eat well. Their **Eat Well Age Well** project aims to tackle malnutrition in older adults. Visit **www.thefoodtrain.co.uk** and **www.eatwellagewell.org.uk** for more information.

Our **Eat Well** guide explains more about eating a healthy, balanced diet. You can order a copy by calling the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.



## Staying hydrated

### ? Why is it important?

Our bodies need water to function normally and to flush out things we don't need. As we get older, our thirst signals reduce so we may not realise we need to drink. It is important we find ways to get enough liquid. Not doing so can cause headaches, tiredness, confusion, dizziness and constipation. It can also increase the risk of bladder infections.

### ? What does it look like?

National guidelines recommend we have 6 to 8 glasses of liquid a day. If you notice your urine is dark or your lips are dry, this could be a sign you need to drink more. People with certain heart or kidney problems may need to limit the amount they drink. Make sure you check with your doctor if you think this affects you.

Water, tea, coffee and low-sugar squash are all good options for staying well hydrated. You may want to switch to decaffeinated tea and coffee in the afternoons as caffeine can affect sleep. It can also increase blood pressure and heart rate; check with your doctor for further guidance.

Try to avoid too many high-sugar drinks, including fruit juices, as these can cause dehydration. Alcohol will also dehydrate you.

Foods containing lots of water can count towards your daily liquid intake. Examples include soups, stews, custard, jelly, melon and tomatoes.

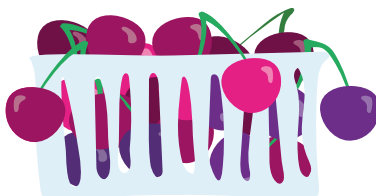
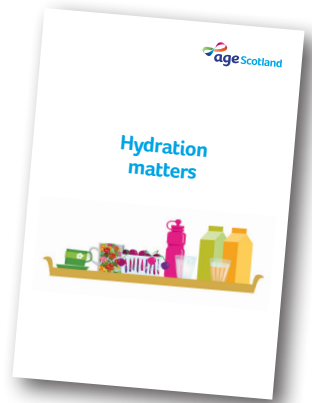


## ? How do I get started?

Having soup for lunch is an easy way to increase your liquid intake. If you tend to forget to drink, you could set an alarm for every couple of hours to remind you. Choosing a favourite water bottle, drinking glass or mug that you can leave around the house may also act as a reminder.

If you drink a lot of high-sugar drinks, you could start switching these gradually for other options. You may want to try adding water to fruit juices or switching to a low-sugar squash in place of a fizzy drink.

For more information see our **Hydration matters** guide. You can order a copy by calling the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.



## Keeping active

### ? Why is it important?

We know that keeping active is important throughout life, but it becomes increasingly important in later life. From around the age of 30, our muscles and bones begin to lose strength – and this can speed up as we get older. Staying physically active in later life helps us to maintain our strength, balance and flexibility so we can keep our independence for as long as possible. Maintaining strength and balance also reduces the risk of serious consequences from slips, trips and stumbles.

The many other benefits of keeping active include:

- improving mood and mental wellbeing
- improving sleep and appetite
- helping to manage high blood pressure
- reducing the risk of a range of long-term health conditions
- helping you live well if you have a long-term health condition or disability







## ? What does it look like?

There are many ways to keep active, and they don't all have to feel like 'exercise'. Every movement makes a difference and lots of everyday activities count. This includes gardening, vacuuming, and even walking around your home.

If you can get outdoors this can add to your wellbeing even further. Photography walks, nature spotting or playing golf all provide gentle outdoor activity. If you enjoy walking, **Paths for All** offers accessible volunteer-led health walks across Scotland.

Breaking up periods of sitting still is important, no matter what you do in between. If your mobility is limited, many activities can be done from a chair or while holding onto something for stability. Resistance training, such as lifting weights or using an exercise band, can also be done from a sitting position. Resistance training has been linked to better brain health and may also be good for the immune system.

Activities that improve strength, flexibility and balance can help reduce the risk of falls and fractures. Stretching, yoga and Tai Chi are all good for flexibility. Exercises for strength and balance include standing on one leg, toe walking and heel-to-toe walking.

If you prefer structured activities, you could join an activity group or sports team. Finding an activity that you enjoy and is right for you will help you stay motivated. Joining a group is also a great opportunity to meet new people.



## **How do I get started?**

Check with a health professional if you have had an illness, are worried about your health, or have been inactive for a long time. If you experience pain when you move, ask for advice on managing your pain so it doesn't stop you from keeping active. Specialist charities may offer advice on how best to keep active if you are living with a specific health condition.

If you are enjoying good health and feel well, it is usually safe to gradually build more activity into your day. Try and set yourself achievable goals every day, even if it is just a few extra steps here and there.

For example, you could start by:

- walking about when you are on the phone
- walking to the shops instead of taking the car or bus
- using stairs instead of lifts or escalators
- getting off the bus a stop early or parking further from the shops

You may prefer to start with exercises that can improve your mobility and confidence. This could be as simple as heel and toe raises while doing the washing up. Search strength and balance at **[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)** and **[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)** for more examples.

To find a **Paths for All health walk** near you, call **01786 641851** or visit **[www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)**.

If you'd like to join an activity group or sports team, the **Age Scotland Community Connecting Service** can help you find options in your area. Call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.

See our **Keeping Active in Later Life** guide for further ideas and information. You can order a copy by calling the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.



## Getting enough sleep

### ? Why is it important?

Getting the right amount of good sleep is essential for wellbeing and for long-term mental and physical health.

Poor sleep will also make it less likely we will make healthy choices in what we eat and drink, and in how physically and socially active we are.

### ? What does it look like?

The best amount of sleep is different for each of us. Sleeping patterns do change as you get older, so you may not get as much sleep as you used to. However, it is important you get enough quality sleep to keep you healthy and feeling fully rested.

Short naps at the right time of day can be helpful after a poor night's sleep. Try not to nap after mid afternoon, and only nap for about 20 minutes at a time. This allows you to rest without falling into a deep sleep that can leave you feeling groggy.

The most common cause of interrupted sleep is needing to use the toilet. Bladder problems, and problems with the Prostate Gland, can result in needing to get up to pee during the night. These are more common over the age of 50. Speak to your GP if you regularly need to go to the toilet more than once or twice in the night.

## How do I get started?

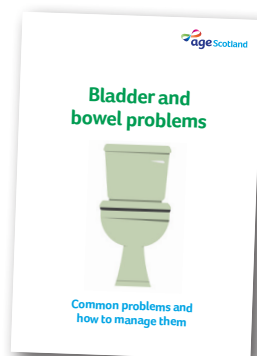
If you feel you are not getting enough sleep, you could try:

- going to bed at the same time each night
- spending time in daylight as early as possible in the morning
- being more active during the day, but not too close to bedtime
- having less caffeine after lunch, or avoiding it altogether
- avoiding smoking, drinking alcohol or eating too close to bedtime
- keeping technology with screens out of the bedroom
- investing in blackout curtains.

If you are not asleep within 20 minutes of settling in bed, you could try doing something relaxing for ten minutes, like listening to gentle music or reading. It may be best to go into another room if you can, so your bedroom is only associated with sleeping.

Speak to your GP if you have persistent problems with sleep, including issues with your bladder.

You can also order a copy of Age Scotland's information guide **Bladder and bowel problems** by calling the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.





# Attending health checks and appointments

## ? Why is it important?

We know that prevention is better than cure at any age. This becomes truer than ever in later life because our immune system becomes weaker. The body also becomes less able to repair itself from damage, so it is important to stay as well as we can.

## ? What does it look like?

Keeping up with vaccinations and screening programmes can help to prevent some illnesses. You should also follow the advice of your GP or specialists about check-ups.

If you have troublesome symptoms, don't just assume these are a normal part of ageing. This includes symptoms of the menopause. Speak to your GP if your daily life and relationships are being affected.

As well as seeing your GP, pharmacists can prescribe or recommend treatments for many common symptoms and conditions.

You can also call **NHS 24** on **111** if you need urgent care and your GP or dentist is closed, if you are in mental health crisis, or if you think you need urgent help but are not sure what to do.

**If you have chest pains or any other life- or limb-threatening emergency, call 999 immediately.**

If you are working and living with a long-term condition or disability, you may want to speak to your employer. They should make reasonable adjustments to support you to continue working while being mindful of your health.

Our **Older Worker's Guide** provides more information about your rights at work. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** to order a copy.



## ? How do I get started?

**NHS Inform** provides information about many health conditions. Visit [www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot) or call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

It also provides details of the vaccination and screening programmes offered to older people by the NHS. It has an online tool that will tell you which winter vaccines you are eligible for. Visit [www.nhsinform.scot/winter-vaccines](http://www.nhsinform.scot/winter-vaccines) or speak to your GP to find out which vaccines are right for you.

Screening for some health conditions is offered automatically if you meet the criteria. Other tests are only available on request, or need to be requested if you are over a certain age. For more information visit [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/screening](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/screening), or call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

More information about menopause, including your rights if you are still working, can be found at [www.nhsinform.scot/menopause](http://www.nhsinform.scot/menopause), or call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

Further details of NHS services can also be found in our guide **NHS Services for Older People**. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222** to order a copy.





# Things to look after in later life:

This section provides information on caring for specific aspects of your health. Many of these are simple actions that can have a big impact. Even if you do these already, you might find tips to improve existing routines.

## Brain health

### ? Why is it important?

Looking after your brain health can help maintain your ability to plan and problem solve. This may help you to remain independent for longer which can have a big impact on overall wellbeing.

### ? What does it look like?

Learning new skills is one way to improve and maintain memory and thinking ability. Good social connection has also been linked with better brain health and a reduced risk of dementia. It is thought that conversation and human connection helps to keep the brain stimulated. Treating hearing loss may also reduce dementia risk for the same reason – see page 35 for more information about hearing.

What is good for overall health is generally good for your brain too. Eating a balanced diet and doing regular physical activity are very important. Not smoking and drinking less alcohol can also help maintain good brain health.

Speak to your GP if you notice sudden or significant changes in your thinking or memory. Many people worry that these could be signs of dementia, but there are many other potential causes that can be treated. Whatever the cause, early diagnosis can help you get the support you need to continue living well.

## ? How do I get started?

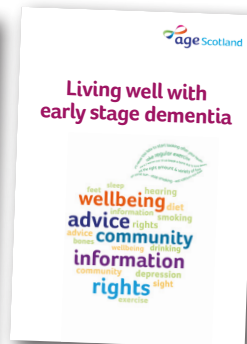
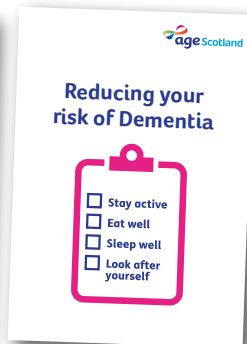
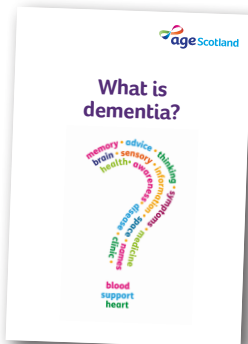
Easy ways to keep your brain active at home include reading widely, exploring a topic online or playing challenging games. Some research suggests that learning a language or a musical instrument, particularly as a beginner, has benefits for brain health. Or perhaps there's a subject you've always wanted to study.

Your local council, library or college may have details of adult education classes, or volunteering opportunities with the chance to learn new skills. The **Age Scotland Community Connecting service** can also help you find activities or classes in your area. Call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 22**.

If you are retired, **u3a** (formerly University of the Third Age) is a nationwide collection of charities offering special interest groups for people no longer in full-time work. Visit **www.u3asites.org.uk/scotland** or call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.

You can call **Alzheimer Scotland** on **0808 808 3000** for information and advice about dementia, including how to reduce your risk. To order copies of the **Age Scotland** guides on dementia, call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.

**Brain Health Scotland**, hosted and supported by Alzheimer Scotland, provides information on looking after your brain health and opportunities to get involved in research. Visit **www.brainhealth.scot** or call **Alzheimer Scotland** on **0808 808 3000**.







## Bones

### ? Why is it important?

As we get older, our bones tend to get weaker and are more likely to break if we fall. It also takes longer for us to heal. This can cause other problems, such as loss of muscle strength and depression.

People with **osteoporosis** need to take extra care of their bone health. Osteoporosis is a condition that weakens bones, making them more likely to break. The risk of osteoporosis increases after the menopause.

### ? What does it look like?

Regular physical activity helps to maintain bone health. The **Royal Osteoporosis Society** recommends short bursts of activity. This should include a mix of exercises to strengthen muscles, such as lifting weights, and exercises that involve supporting your own weight, such as walking, yoga or dancing. Doing exercises that improve strength and balance can also help reduce the risk of falls.

Nutrition is also important. Both calcium and vitamin D are needed for good bone health. We can generally get the calcium we need from our diet, but it is not possible to get enough vitamin D through diet alone.

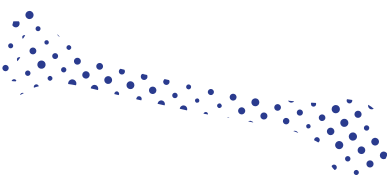
Spending time with our skin in sunlight helps our bodies to make vitamin D, but in Scotland the sunlight is only strong enough in spring and summer. It is recommended that everyone in Scotland takes a daily vitamin D supplement from October to March, and people from minority ethnic groups with dark skin are recommended to take one all year round.

## ? How do I get started?

The **Royal Osteoporosis Society** provides information for anyone wishing to improve their bone strength. [www.theros.org.uk/exercise](http://www.theros.org.uk/exercise) / **0808 800 0035**.

Make sure you are including calcium-rich foods in your diet, such as dairy products, canned fish, leafy greens and nuts. Some foods like milk substitutes, orange juice and breakfast cereals have extra calcium added to them. Look for labels that say ‘fortified with calcium’.

You can buy vitamin D supplements from pharmacies, most supermarkets and online. The recommended dose is 10 micrograms ( $\mu\text{g}$ ). From April to September, it is considered safe to spend around 10–15 minutes a day in Scottish sunshine with your skin exposed. This can generate enough vitamin D if you have fair skin, with the best chance between 11am and 3pm, but be careful not to let your skin redden or burn.



*As you get older your bones  
tend to get weaker and are  
more likely to break if you fall.*



## Teeth

### ? Why is it important?

As well as affecting our ability to chew, problems with our teeth in later life can impact our ability to speak and be understood.

Having good oral health has also been linked to having better health overall. People with poor oral health are more likely to have serious conditions such as heart disease, strokes, diabetes and cancer.

### ? What does it look like?

Most of us are familiar with the advice to brush twice a day for at least 2 minutes, floss daily and visit your dentist regularly. Brushing technique is also important. Pay attention to the gum line and any teeth that have had dental work or are hard to reach. Make sure you brush the front, back and chewing surfaces of each tooth, and brush the gums too. Use a toothpaste that contains fluoride and don't rinse your mouth after brushing.

It is generally best to have a toothbrush with medium bristles of varying lengths. Your dentist can give you advice specific to your oral health, so it is a good idea to ask them at your next check-up.

Even if you have full dentures, you should still have a regular check-up with a dentist because the shape of your mouth changes over time. You should also see your dentist if you notice any bleeding when you brush.

## How do I get started?

More information about caring for your teeth is available by searching ‘teeth cleaning guide’ at **[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)**, or call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

If you haven’t had a check-up in a while, make an appointment to see your dentist as soon as possible. When you register with a dentist in Scotland, you will stay registered for life unless you register somewhere else, or your dentist gives you written notice. Even if you haven’t seen your dentist for many years, you should still be able to make an appointment.

If you don’t currently have a dentist, information on finding and registering with one can be found at **[www.mygov.scot/register-with-dentist](http://www.mygov.scot/register-with-dentist)** or call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.



## Feet

### ? Why is it important?

Looking after your feet can have a wide impact on your overall health. As we age, our feet lose some of their natural cushioning and blood flow may decrease. This means that any blisters or sores can take much longer to heal and could lead to infections.

If your feet feel uncomfortable you are also likely to avoid walking around, which will reduce your physical activity and could affect your health over time.

### ? What does it look like?

Check your feet regularly for any cuts, scrapes, sores or blisters so you can treat them before they get worse. Contact a health care professional to report any foot problems. This is especially important if you have a long-term condition like arthritis or diabetes.

You should wash your feet every day, taking care to wash and dry between your toes. It is good to moisturise your feet, particularly on the backs of your heels, but NOT between your toes. A moisturiser that contains urea as the main ingredient is recommended.

Toenails should be filed once a week with a nail file or trimmed regularly with toenail clippers or nail scissors.

Footwear should be comfortable and supportive, with fastenings that are secure but not too tight. It is best to have a few pairs of footwear, so the fabric has a chance to air between use.

Socks and hosiery should be made mostly from natural fibres such as wool or cotton. This will allow your feet to breathe. You should change your socks or hosiery every day, and slippers should only be worn for short periods rather than all day long.

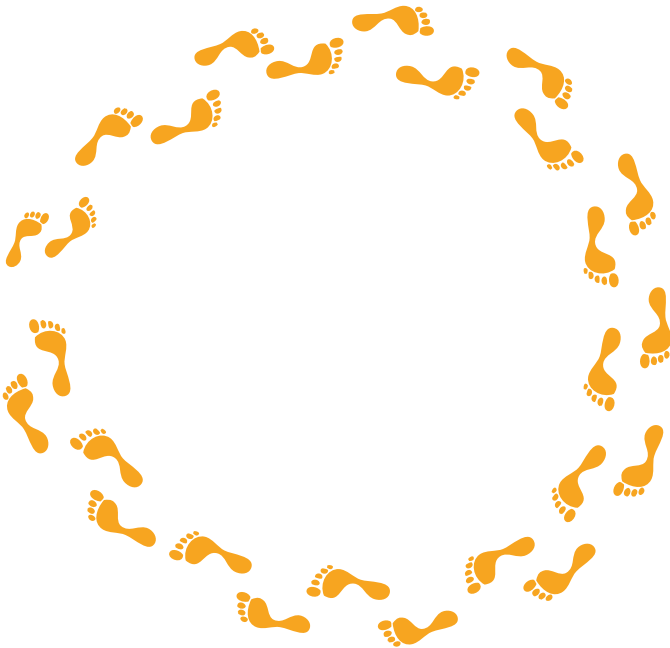
## How do I get started?

Start to develop a daily footcare routine if you don't have one already. Page 4 of this guide provides advice on how to create healthy habits.

If you are unable to cut your toenails yourself, your local podiatry (foot health or care) service may have information about toenail cutting services. Call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88** or contact your local council.

Your local pharmacy or NHS podiatry service can offer further advice about footcare. NHS Inform also has advice and guidance, including examples of suitable footwear. Search 'Looking after your feet' on **[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)**, or call the **NHS Inform helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

If you have diabetes, specific information about caring for your feet is available at **[www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-footcare.html](http://www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-footcare.html)**.





# Hearing

## ? Why is it important?

Hearing loss can affect our ability to connect with others socially, which can be harmful for our overall wellbeing. It is also thought that hearing loss could increase the risk of dementia and other difficulties with thinking, memory or concentration. This may be due to the stimulation we get from conversation.

## ? What does it look like?

You may need your hearing tested if you struggle to follow conversations, need to ask for things to be repeated multiple times or listen to the TV or radio at loud volumes.

The sooner you get a hearing aid if you need one, the better the results are likely to be. Digital hearing aids are available free from the NHS, or you may choose to purchase devices from private hearing aid companies. New batteries and other maintenance are free for NHS hearing aids.

## ? How do I get started?

Ask your GP for a referral to your local audiology department. Hearing tests (audiometry) last about 20 minutes and the results will be shown on a chart called an audiogram.

**RNID** provides information and advice about hearing loss.

**[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk) / 0808 808 0123.**

## Eyesight

### ? Why is it important?

Most people will find that their eyesight changes as they grow older. While most changes are nothing to worry about, age increases the risk of certain eye conditions that may need to be treated early, so it is important to take care of your eyes.

### ? What does it look like?

Have your eyes checked annually, or any time you feel there is a problem. As well as checking your sight, an eye examination will help to detect early signs of eye conditions including cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

Anyone living in Scotland who is 60 or over, has diabetes, or is sight impaired is entitled to a free annual eye examination; anyone else living in Scotland is entitled to one every two years.

Make sure you are not straining your eyes. This includes having an up-to-date prescription if you need glasses and wearing a pair of sunglasses in bright sunshine.

Health issues like a stroke or diabetes can affect your sight. Looking after your overall health by keeping active, eating a balanced diet and not smoking will all help to protect your eyesight.





## ? How do I get started?

If you have not had an eye test in a while, book one as soon as possible. If you need help finding your local optometrist, call the **Age Scotland helpline** on **0800 12 44 222**.

Invest in a good pair of sunglasses if you don't already have one. These should have CE or UV400 on the label to show they provide good protection against damage from ultraviolet (UV) light.

If you enjoy reading, make sure your favourite reading spot is well lit. You could also adjust display settings on electronic devices to make sure screens are as easy to read as possible.

The RNIB can provide more information about help for problems with eyesight. Visit **www.rnib.org.uk** or call **0303 123 9999**.

H  
50  
A V E  
40  
Y O U R  
E Y E S  
30  
T E S T E D  
18  
R E G U L A R L Y  
12

# How you can help

## Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information we provide is free and impartial. It helps older people access their rights and entitlements and can be life changing.

We are also a lifeline for older people who are feeling lonely and isolated. You can help us to support older people who need us most.

Together, we can make a difference.



### Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- Call **03330 15 14 60**
- Visit **age.scot/donate**
- Text **AGESCOTGIVE** to **70085** to donate £5\*
- Complete the **donation form** and return by Freepost



### Fundraise

Whether it's having a bake sale or running a marathon, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



### Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help us to continue being there for older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

\*Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

# Please donate today

Complete the form and return by Freepost to RSBS-KEHC-GBBC, Age Scotland, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

## Your details

Title:  Forename:  Surname:

Address:

City:

Postcode:  Date of birth:

By providing us with your telephone number and email address you are consenting to us contacting you via phone, text and email.

Email:

Home tel:  Mobile tel:

## I WOULD LIKE TO DONATE

£75  £50  £25  Other (£)

I wish to pay by (please tick):

MasterCard  Visa  CAF

CharityCard  Cheque  (payable to Age Scotland)

Signature

Name on Card

Card No.

Expiry date  Security code

Date

I prefer not to receive a thank you acknowledgement for this donation

I would like information about leaving a gift in my Will

## I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE MY DONATION WORTH 25% MORE

I want Age Scotland\*\* and its partner charities 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.

*giftaid it*

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.

Yes, I want Age Scotland\*\* to claim Gift Aid on my donations

I do not wish you to claim Gift Aid on my donations

Date

## Keeping in touch

We will stay in contact by post unless you ask us not to. We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure. You can change your mind at any time by emailing us on [contact@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:contact@agescotland.org.uk) or calling us on 0333 323 2400.

You can read Age Scotland's privacy policy at [age.scot/privacypolicy](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/age.scot/privacypolicy).

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

**Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.**

.....

## Let's keep in touch

### Contact us:

#### Head office

0333 323 2400

#### Age Scotland helpline

0800 12 44 222

#### Email

info@agescotland.org.uk

#### Visit our website

www.agescotland.org.uk



### Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today at [agescot/roundup](https://www.agescotland.org.uk/agescot/roundup)



### Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



We are grateful to the Scottish Government for part-funding this publication

