

Keeping active 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 so that they can love later life.

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 can make the most of later life.

Our three strategic aims are to:



Help older people to be as well as they can be



Promote a positive view of ageing and later life



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.

The Age Scotland **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.

For information, advice and friendship



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:

Introduction	p1
What is physical activity?	p1
Why is physical activity so important?	p2
Staying independent for as long as you can	
Sitting less	
Fun, company and learning	
Helping others	
Looking after your mental health	
Reducing your risk of dementia	
Physical health	
Do I need to check with a health professional before I start?	p6
How much physical activity should I do?	p7
What are moderate and vigorous activity?	
Getting started	p9
Keeping going	p9
Useful contacts	p10

Introduction

This guide is for you if you are thinking about being more physically active. Doing more physical activity is a great way to change your life for the better. It can help you to have fun, meet people, improve your strength and balance, maintain a healthy weight, and look after your health.

This guide explains why physical activity is important and provides ideas for getting started.

What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any way of moving the body that burns energy. It includes structured exercise such as fitness classes or going to the gym, walking, cycling, household chores, playing with grandchildren, gardening, hobbies or leisure activities.





Why is physical activity so important?

Staying independent for as long as you can

Keeping physically active throughout your life can help to manage the symptoms of many long-term health conditions and reduce the risk of falling and getting a fracture. Our muscles and bones naturally lose some of their strength from around the age of 30 and this can speed up as we get older. Using your bones and muscles will help to keep them strong. Activities that improve strength, balance and flexibility can boost your confidence and help you to be independent for as long as you can.

Activities that are good for strength, balance and flexibility include Tai Chi, bowls, yoga and dancing.

Sitting less

Even if you exercise regularly, sitting still for long periods of time without breaking it up can be bad for your health. If you safely can you should take every opportunity to stand up or move about. Even gentle activity such as slow walking, dusting or light gardening can improve your overall health. If you cannot move around easily, aim to stand up from sitting at least once every hour. If you use a wheelchair some light seated exercises are a great way to break up long periods of sitting still.

Fun, company and learning

Choose an activity that you think you'll enjoy. If you're having fun while being active you will be much more likely to stick to it.

You don't have to exercise alone. Physical activity can be a great way to stay connected to your community, spend time with friends or family or meet new people. Friendships made at clubs and activities can often feel more important than the exercise.

If you enjoyed active team games when you were younger, playing football, netball, rugby or other sports, you might want to try a "walking" version of what you used to do – or learn how to play a new sport or try out an active hobby you've always wondered about.

Perhaps you want to be more active, but you just don't like exercise or aren't sure what activities there are to try.

If you have lost confidence in your ability to be active, maybe because of surgery, or a health condition, you might think you won't be able to join in or keep up. People of every age can benefit from physical activity and there are options for everyone.

The contacts at the back of this guide may help you find the physical activity that is right for you.



Helping others

You could brush up on skills you haven't used in a while and share your knowledge with others through volunteering. You could help run an activity, or to support someone else to take part.

Volunteer Scotland has online information about volunteering opportunities on their website here www.volunteerscotland.net or you can call the Age Scotland helpline and ask for the phone number of your local volunteer centre.

Looking after your mental health

Physical activity can improve your mental health by:

- releasing 'happy hormones' that make you feel good
- improving sleep
- helping to manage stress in the body, and
- providing a way to distract from and cope with anxious, intrusive or negative thoughts.

Keeping moderately active for about 30 minutes a day reduces the risk of depression by almost half.

The **Scottish Association for Mental Health** (SAMH) information service provides information and support on mental health, whether you are seeking support, information or just want to have a chat about mental health.

You can call SAMH on **0344 800 0550** (local rate charges apply) or see their website www.samh.org.uk.

Reducing your risk of dementia

A healthy mind and healthy body come as a package. Keeping an active body as well as an active mind reduces the risk, and delays the onset, of developing problems with thinking and memory or dementia.

There is evidence that even gentle physical activity once a week can reduce the risk of dementia. The more you do the greater the benefit.

Physical health

Any amount of physical activity has benefits. Together with a healthy balanced diet, physical activity can help you stick to a healthy weight. Someone who is regularly physically active will have a much lower risk of developing long-term health conditions like Type 2 Diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers.





Do I need to check with a health professional before I start?

If you are enjoying good health and do not suffer from any heart problems, pains in the chest, joint or bone problems, then it is usually safe to gradually build more activity into your life. However, always check with a health professional if you have an illness, a long term condition, have any worries about your health, or if you have been inactive for a long time.

If you have had problems with your eating or know that you might push yourself to do more exercise than is healthy, it's a good idea to speak to your GP before being more active.

Your GP practice may know about a local exercise referral scheme. If you qualify for the scheme, and are interested in the activities they offer, you can be referred for a personal exercise programme at your local leisure centre which often includes free or discounted access to their facilities.





How much physical activity should I do?

Any amount of physical activity helps, so if you've not been active for a while be kind to yourself and set yourself realistic goals.

You can gradually build up the amount of physical activity and its intensity. If you safely can, you should aim for at least:

150 minutes
of **moderate**
intensity physical
activity a week

OR

75 minutes
of **vigorous**
intensity physical
activity a week

(or a combination of both)

PLUS

Activities to **build strength**
and **improve balance** such as
Tai Chi, bowls or dancing on
at least 2 days per week.





What are moderate and vigorous activity?

If you are doing moderate or vigorous activity you should feel slightly 'out of puff' like you are breathing faster and your muscles are working harder.

Do the 'talk test': If you are breathing faster than usual but still able to continue a conversation while doing the activity this is moderate intensity activity. If you are breathing faster but have difficulty talking without pausing this is vigorous intensity activity. This will be different for every person.



Getting started

There are lots of ways to find out what's happening locally:

Your local library or community centre: visit and ask the staff about local clubs, activities and events. There are often notice boards with posters and advertisements for groups and activities.

Your GP practice: speak to your GP practice and ask if they know about local opportunities to be physically active.

Your local leisure centre: check their website or visit and find out what's on. Many leisure centres have activities for older people and offer discounts.

You could be a pioneer and start something yourself. If you attend a social group that spends a lot of time sitting, Age Scotland can help you to introduce a fun burst of physical activity into your regular meetings, getting you moving and laughing together. See the health and wellbeing pages on our website www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/what-we-do/promoting-health-and-wellbeing-in-later-life/ to find out about **Body Boosting Bingo**, **Around the House in 80 days** and **Power Quiz!**

Keeping going

Making plans can help you to stay motivated and make physical activity a healthy habit for life.

The ideal activity for you will become part of your daily or weekly routine and be at a convenient time and place. It will also suit your personality – do you want regular physical activity that frees your mind, a different challenge every week or to join a group where you can make new friends and catch up every week? Do you want to set goals to increase and track your physical activity, or are a change of scene and fresh air more important to you?



Useful Contacts

Paths for All co-ordinates the Scottish Health Walk Network.

Health walks are friendly walks of less than an hour led by trained volunteers. Walking routes are checked to make sure they are safe, and groups walk at a pace suitable for all. The walks are ideal for people who haven't been active for a while, and for people who are recovering from ill health or managing a long-term health condition. The walks are free and you don't need any special equipment.

Tel: **01786 641851**

www.pathsforall.org.uk

Table Tennis Scotland

Table tennis can be played by people of all ages and abilities. It can even be played sitting down. There can be opportunities to play locally, from shopping centres to churches, so you don't necessarily need to go to a sports centre to enjoy it.

Tel: **0131 317 8077**

www.tabletennisscotland.co.uk

Walking Football Scotland

Walking football is a game of football where players walk instead of run. It helps people to get fit or be more active no matter what their age and fitness.

www.walkingfootballscotland.org

Netball Scotland

Walking netball is played at a walking pace. The sessions are suitable for people of all ages and abilities and are all about having fun.

Contact Netball Scotland to find out what's on locally.

Tel: **0141 428 3460**

www.netballscotland.com

Boccia Bowls

Boccia (pronounced “Botcha”) Bowls is played indoors. It is similar to boules or lawn and carpet bowls and is ideal for wheelchair users.

Contact Scottish Disability Sport for more information and to find out where you can play:

Tel: **0131 317 1130**

www.boccia.scottishdisabilitysport.com

Badminton

Badminton Scotland have information about local opportunities.

Tel: **0141 445 1218**

www.badmintonscotland.org.uk

Rugby

The Midlothian Walking Rugby team was the first walking rugby team established in Scotland in 2016. Since then several teams have been formed and older players took place in the first Walking Rugby International between Scotland and England in January 2020.

Find out more at the Scottish Rugby Union

www.scottishrugby.org



The Sporting Memories Foundation

The sporting memories foundation is dedicated to the development and use of sports reminiscence, inclusive physical activities and intergenerational activities to support isolated older people across the country.

www.sportingmemoriesnetwork.com

Men's sheds

Men's sheds provide a social space for all men with time on their hands to come together and be involved in activities chosen by the shedders including projects for the local community. Men's sheds improve men's health and well-being, but shedders use their flexibility, creativity and problem solving skills to involve the wider community.

To find a shed near you contact the Scottish Men's Shed Association

Tel: **07397 382533**

www.scottishmsa.org.uk

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

How you can help

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

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



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 **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.*



Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, 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 Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable 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

Let's keep in touch



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 by visiting [**age.scot/roundup**](https://age.scot/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.



[**/agescotland**](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)



[**@AgeScotland**](https://twitter.com/AgeScotland)



[**@age_scotland**](https://www.instagram.com/age_scotland)



[**/AgeScotland**](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AgeScotland)

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.

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

Follow us on social media:



/agescotland



@AgeScotland



@age_scotland



/AgeScotland



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

