
Healthy and active ageing

Summary

- Some of the benefits of staying active and healthy as you get older include increasing wellbeing and participation, recovering from illness more quickly, reducing the risk of getting chronic disease, and preventing falls.
 - Many local councils provide free or low-cost exercise classes and fitness programs for older people.
 - Visit your doctor for a check-up before starting a new physical exercise routine.
 - Always stop and get medical advice if you get chest pain, are out of breath or feel dizzy when exercising.
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In Australia, more and more people are living full and productive lives well into their 80s and 90s. Research shows that if you start living a healthy lifestyle earlier in life, you have better chances of staying healthy as you get older. Staying physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older.

Staying involved and socialising with others

Learning a new skill keeps your brain working and may protect you against dementia. Being able to adapt to change is important at any age, but can be particularly important as you get older. Seeing friends and joining in with others can energise your life and create opportunities for new experiences.

You might want to try something you have always wanted to do but never had the time earlier in your life. This might be volunteering, playing a musical instrument, learning a new language, developing your computer skills or doing a creative activity like painting.

If you are in a caring role, it is especially important to maintain social connections and continue activities that you enjoy.

Read more information on: [support available to help you look after yourself as a carer](#) or [healthy ageing – staying involved](#).

Being physically active

Regular physical activity has lots of benefits. It can help you sleep better, stimulate your appetite and may reduce your risk of heart disease, dementia and falls. It also helps improve and maintain your fitness, strength and balance.

It is important to remember that everyone's fitness levels and physical abilities are different.

If you have not been active for a while or if you have health problems or have been unwell, you may find you are not as fit as you used to be. So start slowly and build up gradually.

Doing some activity is better than doing none.

How much physical activity is enough

Australian Physical Activity Guidelines encourage older people to do 30 minutes of medium intensity exercise each day. This means increasing your heart rate to a level where you can talk but not sing. You don't have to do 30 minutes all at once, it can be done as three lots of ten minutes each day if you prefer.

Each week, try to do a range of activities to improve:

- **fitness** - water exercises, swimming, dancing, fast walking and cycling keep your heart and lungs fit and healthy

- **strength** - lifting and carrying weights, climbing stairs, doing squats and raising your legs to the side all help maintain your muscle tone and bone density
- **balance** - reaching to the front and to the side, balancing on one foot or your toes with a chair nearby for support, or tai chi all help you stay stable
- **flexibility** - yoga and stretching exercises can keep you flexible.

For some people, exercising alone can be challenging. It might be more fun for you to get involved in community, team or group activities. You could try lawn bowls, golf, walking groups or exercise classes.

Finding **the right activity for you** means you are more likely to keep it up.

Your day-to-day activities all count as physical activity. Things like hanging the washing out, carrying the shopping, sweeping floors and doing jobs in the garden are all ways you can be active.

Other things that will help you stay physically active are to:

- drink enough fluids when doing physical activity and listen to what your body tells you
- rest in hot weather or the day after a very strenuous physical activity session
- try chair-based exercise, assisted walking and standing, or water exercise if your mobility is limited or impaired due to arthritis or other health conditions
- make your home safe so you don't fall. If you're unsure how to do this, see a physiotherapist occupational therapist for advice and help
- not smoke.

For more information on how you can stay physically active as you get older, see our [Healthy ageing – physical activity](#) fact sheet.

Eating healthy food

It is important to eat a balanced diet for health and wellbeing. Good nutrition and regular meals combined with physical activity can improve your strength and help fight infection.

Eating a variety of healthy foods can improve your energy levels and help you maintain a healthy weight.

Some healthy eating tips to remember as you get older:

- Drink six to eight cups of fluid – preferably water – every day in both hot and cold weather. Tea, coffee, mineral water and soda water are also ok, but water is best.
- Eat three meals (and snacks) from the five main food groups each day. The five main food groups are: vegetables, fruit, lean meats and fish, dairy, grains and cereals.
- Avoid foods that have a lot of saturated fat (like biscuits, pastries, fast foods), salty foods and drinks, and foods high in sugar.
- You can drink up to two standard drinks of alcohol each day but aim to have one alcohol-free day every week.
- Always prepare and store food safely.
- Eat protein (meat and fish) and dairy (yoghurt) instead of carbohydrates (bread and pasta) if you are having trouble eating.
- Consider how your food is presented, how it tastes and what you like. Great smells encourage an appetite, and food is more appealing if it looks good!

If you are having trouble with your weight, ask your GP or dietitian for advice.

For more information on healthy eating as you get older see our [Healthy eating tips](#) fact sheet.

How your environment affects your health and wellbeing

Your environment has a big impact on your quality of life. Having good access to transport and services can help you stay healthy as you get older as it helps you to be active and connected to other people. Feeling safe and 'at home' in your community and joining in with others is important for your wellbeing.

You will feel better about yourself if you find things to do that are important to you, that make you happy and give

purpose and meaning to your life.

To find out more about healthy ageing take the [healthy ageing quiz](#) from the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI).

Information in languages other than English

The Department of Health and Human Services - **Well for life - A healthy approach to ageing** booklet is available in [Chinese](#), [Greek](#), [Italian](#) and [Vietnamese](#), as well as [English](#).

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Your [occupational therapist](#)
- Your allied health professional - [occupational therapist](#), [physiotherapist](#), dietitian
- Your local council

- [Seniors Online Victoria](#) 1300 797 210

- [Alzheimer's Australia Vic](#) 1800 100 500 (dementia helpline)

- [Beyond Blue](#) 1300 224 636

- [Life Activity Clubs Victoria](#) 9662 2930

- [Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres](#) 9654 1104

- [Quit](#) 137 848

- [U3A Network Victoria](#) 9670 3695

- [Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)

- [Volunteering Victoria](#) 8327 8500

- [Carers Victoria](#), call 1800 242 636

- [Council on the Ageing Victoria](#), call (03) 9654 4443

- [Personal Alert Victoria](#)

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