

Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing

A toolkit to support ageing well
in midlife and beyond

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Contents

Introduction: Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing	3
Sticky habits: how to make good habits stick	7
Eat smarter!	11
Introduction Nourishing your body for midlife and beyond	11
Activity One Crunch time: when snacks go rogue!	13
Activity Two Food for thought: fuel for a healthier, happier brain	15
Activity Three Strong to the core: building bone strength	17
Activity Four Pause for menopause: food for powering through change	20
Feel great, hydrate!	23
Introduction The vital role of hydration in healthy ageing	23
Activity One When sip happens: the power of water!	25
Activity Two Hydration myths and truths: understanding hydration	26
Activity Three Hydration happy hour: making water more interesting	29
Activity Four Water you waiting for? Building your own hydration habits	32
Let's keep moving!	35
Introduction Building movement, strength and balance to age well	35
Activity One CTRL + ALT + RESET: reboot your energy	37
Activity Two Flex appeal: building muscle strength to age well	38
Activity Three Wiggle room: finding the fun in moving more	40
Activity Four Stay in motion: building habits that increase movement, strength and balance	42
Healthy brains!	45
Introduction Boosting memory, mood and brain function to age well	45
Activity One Mind, mood, connection: how brain health shapes how you feel	47
Activity Two Use your noodle: everyday ways to support brain health	50
Activity Three Focus pocus: simple ways to sharpen concentration	52
Activity Four Brain gain: building habits that boost your brain	55
Let's connect!	57
Introduction The essential role of social connection for wellbeing in midlife and beyond	57
Activity One Hidden talent exchange	59
Activity Two Plug in! How connection recharges you	60
Activity Three Ice, ice... maybe? Why connection can feel tricky	62
Activity Four Stick with it! Building habits that keep you connected	65
Want to know more? Links to further information and resources	68
Acknowledgements	71



Introduction

This toolkit has been designed in consultation with HR, Learning and Development and health professionals to help organisations support colleagues' health and wellbeing in practical, engaging, and flexible ways through workplace learning. It provides accessible learning content, interactive activities, and take-home resources that encourage people to build small, sustainable habits that can make a meaningful difference over time.

Whether delivered through learning lunches, wellbeing breakfasts, awareness campaigns, employee networks, team meetings, or informal conversations, the toolkit is designed to spark discussion, increase awareness, and encourage positive action around ageing well.

Research consistently shows that habits and lifestyle factors have significant influence on how well we age. Nutritious food, good hydration, movement, sleep, stress management, social connection, and lifelong learning are all strongly associated with healthier ageing and wellbeing. However, although people often know what they *should* do, making changes can be challenging. The aim of the toolkit is not perfection or dramatic lifestyle overhauls.

Participants do not need to make huge changes to benefit. Often, the smallest actions repeated consistently create the biggest long-term impact. **The aim is to help colleagues feel informed, empowered, and supported to make realistic changes and build small, healthier habits into their everyday lives.**

The underpinning principles of the approach are **Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.** These are set out in a resource called **Sticky habits: how to make good habits stick**, which can be used by facilitators and shared with participants to support learning.





Why focus on ageing well in midlife?

We start ageing from the moment we are born, but midlife is a particularly important window of opportunity for supporting long-term health and wellbeing. Many people are balancing work, changes in family responsibilities and caring roles, health changes, and shifting priorities, often all at once. At the same time, it can also be a powerful opportunity to pause, reflect, and make positive changes that support healthier, happier ageing.

Our brains, bodies, and behaviours remain adaptable throughout life. Small, consistent actions at any age can improve physical health, emotional wellbeing, resilience, energy levels, and cognitive function over time. When small changes are made during midlife, they can help reduce the risk of future health problems such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, frailty, depression, and dementia, while improving quality of life in the present.

Ageing well is not simply about living longer. It's about *living well* for longer by maintaining independence, purpose, confidence, connection, and quality of life as we age.

The evidence base

The toolkit was developed in partnership with The Open University and informed by research and their evidence-based framework, the **Five Pillars of Ageing Well**, developed by Dr Jitka Vseteckova. The model is designed to support small, self-managed changes that we can all make to be healthier, live longer and prevent cognitive decline.

The Five Pillars of Ageing Well are nutrition, hydration, physical activity, cognitive stimulation, and social stimulation. These are embedded within the five sections of the toolkit:

- Nutrition – Eat smarter!
- Hydration – Feel great, hydrate!
- Physical activity – Let's keep moving!
- Cognitive stimulation – Healthy brains!
- Social stimulation – Let's connect!

The pillars are closely connected, and improvements in one area often support improvements in others.





Designed for today's workplaces

The toolkit was also developed in consultation with Learning and Development leads and HR professionals to support flexible and engaging wellbeing learning that fits around different organisational needs, working patterns, and delivery styles. In response to this consultation, the toolkit is designed to be:

- **Flexible:** activities can be integrated into existing workplace initiatives such as learning lunches, wellbeing breakfasts, awareness days, employee networks, team meetings, or informal wellbeing conversations.
- **Built around microlearning:** short 15-minute activities support engagement, improve knowledge retention, and fit more easily around busy schedules and different working patterns.
- **Modular:** sessions can be delivered individually or combined over time to create cumulative learning and behaviour change.
- **Interactive and engaging:** activities encourage discussion, participation, reflection, and shared learning to increase engagement and retention.
- **Social and practical:** many activities involve group interaction and conversation, and are supported by take-home resources to encourage continued reflection and action.
- **Suitable for different delivery formats:** resources and activities can be delivered face-to-face or adapted for online delivery.
- **Focused on 'sticky habits':** many people already know what to do to support their wellbeing, but turning knowledge into action can be difficult. The toolkit focuses on helping people build small, realistic habits that are easier to maintain consistently over time.





How to use this toolkit

The toolkit provides practical resources and interactive learning activities to support wellbeing in the workplace. The activities are designed to be easy to deliver, adaptable to different workplace settings, and suitable for varying levels of wellbeing knowledge and confidence. The toolkit resources are structured around the Five Pillars of Ageing Well.

Each pillar includes:

- **An introductory guide** providing key information about the topic area. This can be used by facilitators to prepare for delivery, support discussion during sessions, and be shared as a participant handout or take-home resource.
- **Four 15-minute learning activities** designed to support wellbeing through short, engaging, and interactive learning experiences. Each activity has specific learning outcomes and can be delivered as a stand-alone activity or stacked together.
- **Take-home prompts and practical ideas** to help participants reflect on their own habits and identify small, manageable actions to try in everyday life.
- **Additional resources and useful links** for participants and facilitators who wish to explore topics in more depth, access further support, or continue their learning beyond the sessions.

We hope that you enjoy delivering the learning and supporting colleagues to age well!



Sticky habits: how to make good habits stick

Most of us *know* what we need to do to help us feel well and we blame ourselves for lacking willpower or time to do them. But the problem isn't willpower and it isn't time. We can all build healthier habits.

Neuroscience shows that lasting habits form when we create a 'habit loop', making behaviours automatic rather than something we have to think about.

The habit loop

Habits are structured as a three-step loop:

- **Cue:** the trigger (time, emotion, or location) that starts the behaviour.
- **Routine:** the action or behaviour itself.
- **Reward:** the positive feeling or benefit that tells your brain to repeat this behaviour.

To make habits stick, we need to intentionally design this loop. In other words: build a simple system, focus on small actions, and repeat them until they become part of everyday life.

The key is to start small, keep it simple, and repeat it often.



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Facilitator Guide



The basics – 4 simple rules

To make a habit stick, follow these four rules:

1 **Make it obvious** with a clear visual reminder

Set up something that reminds you to do it. Examples:

- Leave your water bottle on your desk so you remember to drink more.
 - Put your stretch band next to you to remind you to use it.
-

2 **Make it enjoyable**

Link it with something you like. Examples:

- Only listen to your favourite podcast or music while walking or stretching.
 - Dance with your children, family or friends, so you can enjoy movement and connection at the same time!
-

3 **Make it easy**

Start small – so small you can't fail. Examples:

- Stretch for 2 minutes.
 - Drink one glass of water while the kettle boils when you're making a coffee or tea.
-

4 **Make it feel good**

Give yourself a quick 'micro-win' celebration. Examples:

- Say 'well done' to yourself out loud (it works as your brain remembers it!)
- Create a chart or use an app to record and recognise every small success.





Simple ways to build habits

Habit stacking (add it to something you already do)

Attach a new habit to something you already do every day. Examples:

- 'When I make a brew, I'll drink a glass of water.'
- 'After I get home, I'll stretch for 2 minutes.'

Think of the kind of person you want to be

Shift from *what* you want to achieve to *who* you want to become.

- Instead of *saying* 'I want to get fitter,' *think* 'I'm someone who looks after my health.'
Small actions reinforce this identity.

Don't miss two days in a row

- Miss one day? No problem.
- Miss two? That's when habits start slipping. Just get back on it the next day.

Prepare for obstacles and have a backup plan

Think ahead:

- 'If I don't have time after work, I'll do 2 minutes before bed.'
- 'If it's raining, I'll do something indoors instead.' Don't make yourself miserable either - there are always other options

3. Set up your environment

Make it visible. If you can see it, you're more likely to do it.

- Glass by the kettle = drink more water.
- Resistance band by your chair = quick stretch reminder.

Remove temptation

Make bad habits harder.

- If biscuits are in the cupboard, they'll get eaten. This is a fact!
- Keep healthier options easier to grab.

Track it. Tick it off each day on a calendar or app. Visible progress keeps motivation high.



4. What the research says works

Small and often beats big and occasional

If you can see it, you're more likely to do it.

Celebrate small wins

Even tiny steps forward help reinforce the habit loop.

Be patient

Habits don't form in 21 days. Research suggests **2 to 5 months** before a behaviour becomes automatic.

Use a buddy

Doing it with someone else helps massively. A workmate, friend, or family member can keep you on track.

Bottom line

Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Build habits that are **too easy to fail**, and over time they'll become part of your daily routine without you even thinking about it.





Why do we need to eat smarter?

You may have heard the quote 'You are what you eat'. In many ways, this is true. The food you eat fuels your body and brain. Eating well and having good nutrition supports our mental, emotional and physical wellbeing in many ways as we age.

As we move through midlife and into later life, what we eat becomes even more important. Our bodies naturally begin to change. We may lose muscle more easily, our bones can become weaker, and our risk of long-term health conditions increases. Eating well can help us stay active, independent, and feeling good for longer.

Forget guilt and 'diet failure'

It's not about following a diet. Let's avoid anything that starts with the word 'die'! Most people know that diets don't work because if they did, we would only need to do it once for it to be successful. The average adult will have engaged in at least 8 diets in their lifetime. This is proof that they don't work in the long term.

There are no good and bad foods. There are only foods that nourish and make you feel better, and foods that aren't as nourishing or don't make you feel as good. The aim of this resource is to really connect to how your body responds to certain foods and help you make small and sustainable changes to help you age well as you get older. When you choose to eat something that isn't as nourishing, do it thoughtfully, forget guilt, and enjoy every mouthful.

Appreciate your wonderful body for all the things it allows you to do. Think of it as a vehicle and not an ornament. Make a promise to your body that you are going to really love it by giving it the nourishment it needs to do all the things you want to do for as long as possible.

Be kind to yourself, connect with your body and become friends with it again.





Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Eating smarter is about understanding a few key basics and making small, realistic changes that work for you. The aim is not perfection, but balance, variety, and consistency over time. Small changes and increasing the variety of foods you eat will help improve how you feel and how you age. You don't need to be an expert in nutrition to benefit. Here is a simple guide to how different foods help nourish your body.

- **Energy:** Foods, especially carbohydrates such as potatoes, rice, bread, cereals and pasta, give us the energy we need to stay active, think clearly, and support our bodies as they repair and renew. Energy needs may change in midlife, but staying well-fuelled is still essential.
- **Eyes, skin and oral health:** Vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, C and D, calcium and zinc help maintain healthy eyes, skin, gums and teeth. These become increasingly important as natural ageing processes affect vision, skin elasticity and oral health.
- **Brain health:** Healthy fats (such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids) support brain function, memory and mood. These can be found in foods like oily fish, nuts, seeds, vegetable oils and some meats, all important for maintaining cognitive health as we age.
- **Muscle health:** We naturally lose muscle mass from midlife onwards. Protein from foods like meat, fish, eggs, beans and legumes helps maintain and repair muscles, supporting strength, mobility and reducing the risk of falls.
- **Bone strength:** Bone density decreases with age, particularly after midlife. Calcium and vitamin D are essential to keep bones strong and reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures. Sources include dairy foods, fortified alternatives, leafy greens, and sunlight exposure and supplements for vitamin D, particularly in the winter.
- **Blood system:** Iron helps make red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body. Low iron levels can lead to tiredness and anaemia. Good sources include red meat, beans, nuts, dried fruit and eggs.
- **Immune system:** A well-nourished body is better able to fight illness and infection. Food rich in vitamins C, E, D, zinc, and probiotics strengthens the immune system by reducing inflammation and supporting gut health. Eating a variety of nutrients helps keep the immune system working effectively, which becomes increasingly important with age. Foods include citrus fruits, garlic, berries, leafy greens, nuts, seeds and live yoghurt.
- **Digestive system:** Fibre supports healthy digestion and helps prevent constipation, which can become more common with age. A varied diet including wholegrains, plant foods and fermented foods (like yoghurt and kefir) supports a healthy gut.
- **Sleep:** What we eat and drink can affect how well we sleep. Limiting caffeine and including foods that support the sleep hormone melatonin, such as cherries, bananas, nuts and certain foods like tomatoes and mushrooms can help improve sleep quality, which is vital for overall health.

Eat Smarter! Activity One

Crunch time: when snacks go rogue!



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of the importance of what they eat on their health and wellbeing.
- Participants will have increased motivation to develop food habits that nourish their body and brain.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participant to understand why good is essential to improving their health and wellbeing and enabling them to age well.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

You may have heard 'You are what you eat'. This is a fact! The food you eat fuels your body and brain. But there are no good and bad foods, there are only foods that can nourish you and make you feel better and foods that aren't as nourishing or don't make you feel as good.

This activity is called **Crunch time: when snacks go rogue!** Did you know that snacking is something almost all of us do? Over 95% of adults snack daily, and while it often gets a bad reputation, it can be a real win when done intentionally, using nutrient-rich foods to boost energy and keep us going between meals.

If we only ate crisps, we probably wouldn't get scurvy because they do contain vitamin C, but the high salt and fat intake can cause high blood pressure and heart disease, so we're going to look at how we can build mindful and nourishing snacking habits that make us feel good.





2. Ask the group what **types of foods** they snack on and the **reasons they choose them**. (E.g. availability, convenience, filling, treats, taste, craving for salt or sugar.)
3. Divide the group into small group (2-4 people) for a five-minute activity. Give each group a sheet of paper and pens.
4. Ask each group to think about how they could 'glow up' their favourite snacks to make them more nutritious and delicious and create their own 'glow up' snack menu. This might include swapping to something that has a higher nutritional content (e.g. crisps for unsalted nuts) or adding something (e.g. crudité, hummus.)
5. Bring participants back together to share their nutritious and delicious menus.
6. Ask the group to think about **when** they are most likely to snack (e.g. mid-afternoon 'slump', watching TV) and **why** they snack (e.g. boost energy, boredom, hunger, force of habit), and share their thoughts with the group.
7. Ask the group how often they snack without thinking and what are their triggers? (e.g. boredom, stress, meeting). Ask them to think about ways they might build a sticky habit to make snacking mindful, rather than mindless! For example: have a glass of water before you snack as you might just be thirsty, or put your snack into a small container, rather than sitting with a family size bag of something in front of the TV.
8. Crunch time! Ask each person to commit to one small change to their snack habits.

"UK residents consume around 6 billion packets of crisps annually, averaging roughly 140 packs per person. This high consumption drives excessive salt intake—linked to 135,000 potential cases of heart disease—with, on average, the daily salt equivalent of 22 packets of crisps consumed per person."

Action on Salt

Eat Smarter! Activity Two

Food for thought: fuel for a healthier, happier brain



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of specific ways that nutrition supports brain health, including cognitive function and mood.
- Participants will have increased motivation to make positive dietary choices to support a healthier, happier brain.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participants to understand the critical importance of nutrition in supporting brain health to increase their physical and emotional wellbeing and motivate people to make positive dietary choices to support healthier, happier brains.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that **your brain uses around 20% of the energy you consume each day?** That means that the food you eat plays a huge role in your **concentration, memory,** and even your **mood.** But it's not just about how you think and feel today. What you eat can also influence your brain health in the future.

As people live longer, **dementia, including Alzheimer's, is rising, with nearly 1 million affected in the UK.** Up to **40% of dementia risk is linked to lifestyle,** including diet, so making small changes today can protect brain cells, reduce inflammation, support cognition, and lower the risk of decline.

Our brains are incredible and we need to look after them! Scientists have found around **45 nutrients that are linked to brain health, including vitamin D, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, and omega-3 fatty acids.**

This activity is called **Food for thought: fuel for a healthier, happier brain** and it's designed to help our brain function now through the food choices we make and protect our brain health as we get older.

2. Ask participants the question 'What does our brain help us do?'

Prompts: concentrate, store and recall memories and information, solve problems, move and control movements, manage emotions, make decisions, learn, understand the world around us, and process our senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch).

3. Explain to participants that you are going to run a quick-fire **brain fuel challenge.**

Tell participants: 'I'm going to read out different foods. For each one, give a **thumbs up** 👍 if you think it's a **brain booster** that supports brain health, or a **thumbs down** 👎 if you think it's a **brain drainer** that doesn't support brain health.'

Eat Smarter! Activity Two

Food for thought: fuel for a healthier, happier brain



4. Read each food out quickly and let them vote.

After each vote, give the answer with a short explanation:

- **Blueberries** 👍 Packed with antioxidants that help protect brain cells and improve memory.
- **Sugary cereal** 👎 Causes quick energy spikes and crashes, which can reduce focus and concentration.
- **Salmon** 👍 Rich in omega-3 fatty acids that support brain function and long-term brain health.
- **Energy drink** 👎 High in caffeine and sugar, leading to poor focus and energy crashes.
- **Nuts** 👍 Contain healthy fats and vitamin E, which support brain function and memory over time.
- **White bread** 👎 Refined carbs can cause blood sugar spikes that negatively affect concentration.
- **Dark chocolate** 👍 Contains flavonoids, which can boost focus and mood.
- **Fizzy drinks** 👎 High sugar content can impair memory and lead to energy crashes.
- **Eggs** 👍 A good source of choline (an essential nutrient, often grouped with B-vitamins) which helps with memory and is crucial for brain development.

5. Divide the group into pairs and ask them to **imagine that their brain is placing an order for the perfect meal. What would it ask for?** Explain that they have **two minutes in their pairs to design the ultimate brain power meal** using foods they know and like. Challenge them to design a meal to include:

- One food for focus
- One food for mood
- One food for long-term brain health.

6. After two minutes, bring the pairs back together to share some of their brain power meal ideas with the group.

7. Ask each participant to say which brain power meal they'd like to try this week.



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of the critical importance of nutrition in supporting bone health as we age.
- Participants will have increased motivation to develop positive habits to support their bone health.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participants to understand the critical importance of nutrition in supporting bone health and reducing risk of bone disease.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that **in the UK, someone breaks a bone due to osteoporosis every minute, amounting to over 500,000 fragility fractures every year?** It's often called the 'silent killer' because most people have no idea that they have bone disease until the moment they have a life-altering fracture. Yet it's one of the highest causes of disability and premature death.

The good news is that, although people often think of bones as hard and lifeless things, they are made of living, growing tissue. What we eat through midlife can make a big difference to our bone health and our chances of living independently and longer in later life.

This activity is called **Strong to the core: building bone strength**. By acting now, we can reduce our chance of becoming just another statistic in the UK's annual 500,000 fragility fractures data as we get older.

2. Divide the group into a small group (2-4 people) for a 5-minute activity.

Give each group sticky notes and pens.

3. Provide a clear space (e.g. wall, flipchart, or tabletop) for participants to arrange sticky notes under two different headers: **BONE BOOSTERS** and **BONE BREAKERS**.

4. Ask the small groups to discuss and write down on sticky notes:

- **Bone boosters:** Foods that are high in calcium and vitamin D, and habits that help build bone and protect bones.
- **Bone breakers:** Foods and habits that can accelerate bone loss (e.g. foods that are high in salt, fizzy drinks containing phosphoric acid, and high alcohol consumption which can reduce the body's ability to absorb calcium).

5. Ask participants to place each idea under the correct heading.

6. Review their answers and extend the learning using the prompts below.



Bone booster foods

Calcium is the building block of bone health. It provides the rigidity and strength needed to keep bones and teeth healthy and dense, helping to prevent osteoporosis and reduce the risk of fractures.

Bone booster foods that contain calcium are:

- **Dairy products:** Milk, cheese, and yogurt are the most concentrated and readily available sources.
- **Leafy green vegetables:** Curly kale, pak choi, and watercress.
- **Fish with soft bones:** Sardines and other canned fish.
- **Fortified foods:** Calcium-fortified drinks and cereals.

Vitamin D is also essential for bone health because the body can only absorb calcium if it has enough vitamin D. The body creates vitamin D from direct sunlight on the skin when outdoors. However, in the UK between October and early March, we can't make enough vitamin D from sunlight alone, so need to get it from food or supplements.

Bone booster foods that contain vitamin D include **egg yolks, mushrooms, and oily fish like salmon, sardines, or mackerel.**

Bone booster habits

- Safe sunlight exposure to help the body make vitamin D.
- Eating protein regularly throughout the day to support bone and muscle health.
- Doing weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, dancing, or climbing stairs.

Bone breaker foods and drinks

Avoid consuming **high-salt, processed foods**, which can increase calcium loss through the urine, and frequent **fizzy drinks** like cola that contain phosphoric acid, which may reduce bone density. Excess **caffeine** and **alcohol** can also interfere with calcium absorption and the body's bone rebuilding process.



Eat Smarter! Activity Three

Strong to the core: building bone strength



Bone breaker habits

- **Smoking**, which can damage our bone-building cells.
 - **Long periods of inactivity** or sitting.
 - **Crash dieting or eating too little**, especially in midlife and later life.
7. Ask each participant to commit to **one Bone Booster habit** they will start this week. Encourage them to think about how they can make it stick by linking it to something they already do.
 8. Ask each participant to share their commitment with the group.





Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of specific ways that nutrition can support health and wellbeing through menopause.
- Participants will have increased motivation to build food habits that support people to age well through menopause.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participants to develop increased understanding of the role of nutrition in ageing well through the menopause.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that over 75% of women going through menopause experience symptoms that affect them at work? 10% leave their job as a direct result of these symptoms. It is not just a 'women's issue', because it has an impact on everyone: friends, families, partners, and colleagues. Yet workplaces often still underestimate its impact.

Perimenopause and menopause are natural life stages where reproductive hormones decline. People often use the terms perimenopause and menopause interchangeably, but perimenopause is the transition phase leading up to menopause, while menopause refers to the specific point when a woman has gone 12 consecutive months without a period.

Everyone's experience is different, but women often describe the process as an emotional and physical rollercoaster which affects their mood, energy levels, sleep and focus, as well as the significant physical symptoms that impact their longer term health and wellbeing.

This activity is called **Pause for menopause: food for powering through change**. It's designed to help everyone understand how small changes to food habits can support healthy ageing through menopause.

2. Read out three statements and ask the group to vote on if they are true or false:

- Menopause only affects women (Answer: **FALSE**. It affects partners, friends and families, as well as colleagues, workplace wellbeing and productivity).
- Nutrition can influence symptoms like energy, sleep and mood. (Answer: **TRUE**. Research evidence consistently demonstrates that small changes to the food we eat helps people reduce and manage symptoms).
- Menopause only happens in your 50s. (Answer: **FALSE**. Perimenopause can start in the 40s or earlier and some symptoms often continue into the 60s and 70s).



3. Ask the group to use their current knowledge, understanding and experiences to highlight and discuss common effects and symptoms of perimenopause and menopause. (Take up to 5 minutes for discussions, using prompts if required e.g. mood swings, hot flushes, night sweats, poor sleep, brain 'fog', weight gain, vaginal dryness, decreased bone density and joint pain).
4. Explain that just as everyone's experiences are unique, different solutions work better for different people. However, the research evidence consistently identifies food habits that help to reduce and manage symptoms.
5. We are going to have a quick challenge to make this practical. We'll share some different food types. Your job is to decide for people without allergies or dietary restrictions, could this help? **If you think it could help, vote 'Eat MORE', or if it could worsen symptoms, vote 'Eat LESS'.**
6. Read out a list of food types below. Ask them to move to different sides of the room or call out the answers. When they have decided the answer for each food, explain what that food type specifically does to help manage the symptoms of perimenopause and support ageing well.





Food types and examples

- **Omega-3-rich foods (e.g. salmon, mackerel, chia seeds, walnuts, flaxseeds)**
ANSWER: Eat MORE
WHY: may help with inflammation, mood, heart health, hot flushes, brain function.
 - **Calcium and Vit D rich foods (e.g. yogurt, milk, sesame seeds, leafy greens)**
ANSWER: Eat MORE
WHY: important for bone health as oestrogen declines.
 - **Ultra processed foods (e.g. processed meats like sausages and bacon, sugary drinks or cereals, refined carbohydrates like white bread, pastries or pasta).**
ANSWER: Eat LESS
WHY: declining oestrogen levels can increase inflammation, slow metabolism, and reduce insulin sensitivity, making the body more sensitive to sugar, salt and other additives. These foods can aggravate symptoms and may also lead to weight gain.
 - **Phytoestrogen foods (e.g. ground flaxseeds, chickpeas, lentils, sesame seeds)**
ANSWER: Eat MORE
WHY: contains compounds that act like mild oestrogen in the body and may help with hot flushes and other hormonal symptoms.
 - **Magnesium-rich foods (e.g. almonds, pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate, spinach)**
ANSWER: Eat MORE
WHY: may help with sleep, mood, muscle tension, and constipation.
7. Ask the group to commit to making at least one small, simple change this week to eat smarter. Pair it with a trigger to stack the habit (e.g. when I make breakfast I will add chia seeds to my cereal. When I make pasta, I will add frozen chopped spinach to the sauce and use wholemeal pasta).



Why does hydration matter as we age?

Water is essential for life. Every cell, tissue, and organ in the body depends on fluid to function properly. Hydration helps regulate body temperature, transport nutrients, support digestion, protect joints, maintain energy levels, and keep the brain functioning well.

Even mild dehydration can affect how we feel day to day. It can leave us feeling tired, sluggish, dizzy, irritable, foggy-headed, or struggling to concentrate. Headaches, poor sleep, constipation, and low mood can sometimes be linked to not drinking enough fluids.

As we move through midlife and into later life, staying hydrated becomes even more important. Our bodies naturally hold less water as we age, and our sense of thirst can become weaker. This means we may not always notice when we need fluids. Some people may also drink less because they are busy, forget, dislike plain water, or worry about needing the toilet more often.

Hydration is one of the simplest ways to support how we feel physically, mentally, and emotionally every day. Small habits can make a big difference. Forget perfection and 'hydration guilt', looking after your hydration does not mean forcing yourself to drink litres of plain water or constantly tracking every sip. There is no such thing as a 'perfect hydration routine'. Some days you may drink more than others. Some days you may be more active, the weather may be warmer, or you may simply forget. The aim is not perfection, but awareness, balance, and consistency over time.

Hydration should feel realistic and manageable. Many drinks contribute to fluid intake, including water, milk, tea, coffee, and sugar-free drinks. Foods with high water content, such as fruit, vegetables, soup, and yoghurt can help too.

Rather than focusing on strict rules, try to notice how hydration affects your body and mind. When you are well hydrated, you may feel more alert, energised, focused, and physically comfortable. Be curious about what helps you drink enough fluids consistently and what makes hydration easier and more enjoyable for you.



Feel Great, Hydrate! Introduction

The vital role of hydration in healthy ageing



Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Good hydration habits are built through small, realistic actions that fit naturally into everyday life. Tiny habits repeated regularly are much more effective than relying on motivation alone. You do not need to completely change your routine to improve your hydration.

Here are some of the key ways hydration supports healthy ageing and wellbeing.

- **Brain function and concentration:** The brain depends on good hydration to function well. Even mild dehydration can affect concentration, memory, attention, and mood. Drinking enough fluids helps support mental clarity, focus, and emotional wellbeing.
- **Energy levels:** Dehydration can make us feel tired and sluggish because the body has to work harder to function properly. Staying hydrated helps maintain energy levels throughout the day and can reduce feelings of fatigue.
- **Temperature regulation:** Water helps the body regulate temperature through sweating and circulation. This becomes especially important during hot weather, illness, or physical activity. Older adults can be more vulnerable to overheating and dehydration.
- **Joint and muscle health:** Water helps lubricate joints and supports muscles to work properly. Good hydration may help reduce stiffness, cramps, and discomfort, particularly when combined with regular movement and physical activity.
- **Digestion and gut health:** Fluids help keep the digestive system working smoothly and support healthy bowel movements. Drinking enough fluids alongside fibre-rich foods can help prevent constipation, which can become more common as we age.
- **Kidney and urinary health:** Hydration helps the kidneys remove waste products from the body and supports urinary tract health. Drinking enough fluids may help reduce the risk of dehydration-related urinary infections and kidney problems. It also significantly reduces the unwanted side effects of any medication we're taking.
- **Skin and overall wellbeing:** Hydration helps maintain healthy skin and supports many of the body's everyday functions. While water is not a miracle cure, being well hydrated can help us feel fresher, more comfortable, and physically well.

Looking after your hydration is not about getting everything right all the time. It's about building simple habits that help your body and brain function at their best.

Small actions really do matter. The little things we do every day, like keeping a drink nearby, drinking regularly, and making hydration enjoyable, can help support healthier ageing and overall wellbeing over time.

Feel Great, Hydrate! Activity One

When sip happens: the power of water!



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of specific ways that good hydration habits improve their health and wellbeing.
- Participants will have increased motivation to develop good hydration habits

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participants to understand why good hydration is essential to improving their health and wellbeing and enabling them to age well.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

'Did you know that your brain is around 80% water and even mild dehydration (around 2%) can have a negative impact on your brains' performance, including your attention span, memory, and reasoning?

We all know that we can't survive long without water, but what does water do and why is it so essential? It's not limited to how your brain functions; good hydration is essential to every function in your body.

This activity is called *When sip happens: the power of water!* and it's designed to help us think about why good hydration is such a game changer, when it comes to ageing well.

We're going to split into two groups, and we'll have a competition to see how many specific ways you can think of that water supports your body functions and helps you feel well.'

2. Divide the group in half and deliver the activity as a competition to see which group can identify the most specific things that water does within their body to improve how it functions.
3. Give the two groups five minutes to come up with their own lists, using paper or sticky notes.
4. Ask each group to share their ideas and use the feedback group to develop a full group discussion. (Are all their responses true? Are there duplications?)
5. Announce the winning team and celebrate with a glass of water (cheers everyone!)
6. Use the prompts in the *Feel great, hydrate!* Introduction to reinforce the learning and cover anything that they've missed.
7. Ask them to all commit to one thing they will do to help them build a 'sticky habit' to remind them to drink more water and share with the group.



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of effective hydration habits to support healthy ageing.
- Participants will feel more motivated to improve and maintain their hydration habits.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to bust common hydration myths, build understanding of why hydration matters as we age, and motivate simple, realistic behaviour change.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Hydration is something we all need to focus on, so here are a few surprising facts to get us thinking:

- **Even 2% dehydration can affect your concentration, memory, and mood.**
- Dehydration is one of the most **common causes of fatigue, headaches, and low energy** and it's one of the easiest things to fix.
- **As we get older, our sense of thirst weakens**, so we may not feel thirsty even when our body urgently needs fluids. That makes good hydration habits even more important for staying energised, focused, and ageing well.





So, we know that good hydration is essential for how we think, feel, and function every day. And yet, hydration is surrounded by myths. People say, 'You must drink eight glasses of water a day' or 'Coffee doesn't count', or turn down a drink because they are 'fine' and 'just not thirsty'. Some of things you hear might be helpful, but others are misleading or simply aren't true. This is what we're going to explore.

This activity is called **Hydration myths and truths: understanding hydration**, and it's all about cutting through the noise so you can understand what your body needs and feel more confident building hydration habits that work for you.

2. Myth or Truth?

Read out statements one by one. Ask participants to vote by moving to different sides of the room (or using a show of hands, depending on space). After each one, briefly explain why. Keep the pace quick and light so it feels energising and not like a test.

Drinking plain water is the only way to rehydrate.

Answer: Myth - This is not true. Water is great, but not the only option. Milk, flavoured water, and herbal teas can all help (check with a pharmacist if you're on medication). Foods like fruit and vegetables often contribute about 20% of our fluids, although most of our hydration still comes from drinks.

We need to drink the equivalent of 6-8 cups or glasses of fluid a day to keep hydrated.

Answer: Partially true - 6–8 is a helpful guide, but individual needs vary. Your body size, activity level, health, and even the climate and season all affect how much fluid you need. Also, remember that some hydration comes from our food.

All fluids are good for hydrating our bodies.

Answer: Myth - Not all drinks hydrate well. Alcohol can have a diuretic effect and dehydrate you. Sugary drinks can affect blood sugar levels, so these types of drinks are not good for hydration.

You should drink fluids during and after exercise.

Answer: True - We lose fluid through sweat, so it's important to drink during exercise and continue hydrating afterwards as your body continues to lose water.

If you are thirsty, you could be dehydrated.

Answer: True - Thirst can signal dehydration, but it isn't always reliable, especially as we get older. By the time you feel thirsty, you are probably already dehydrated, so don't use this as your only guide for when to drink. Some health conditions and medications can also make you feel thirsty.



We can tell if we are dehydrated through the colour of our urine.

Answer: True - Dark yellow can mean dehydration, while pale yellow is a good sign. Very clear urine may suggest overhydration. Keep in mind that some foods, medicines, and conditions can also affect colour and make urine darker. If in doubt, check with your GP.

3. Ask the group.

- Which answer surprised you the most?
- Did anything challenge what you usually believe about hydration?
- On a scale of **1–10**, how well hydrated were you yesterday?

4. Explain: Now that we've busted a few myths, let's make it practical.

What's **one small change** you could make tomorrow to boost your hydration score by just one or two points? This isn't about being perfect – it's about making hydration simple and consistent. Small changes, done often, can have a big impact on your energy, focus, and overall wellbeing. Think easy wins:

- Keep a water bottle where you can see it
- Add some flavour to make it more enjoyable
- Turn it into a social habit
- Set a gentle reminder

Ask each participant to commit to one small change: **'To improve my hydration, I will...'**



Feel Great, Hydrate! Activity Three

Hydration happy hour: making water more interesting



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand why hydration is important for energy, mood, and overall wellbeing.
- Participants will explore simple, enjoyable ways to make hydration a regular habit.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants rethink hydration, making it more enjoyable, memorable, and easy to build into everyday routines.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

We all know we *should* drink more water, but many of us don't. We get busy, forget, or just find water a bit boring. But hydration plays a much bigger role in our health and wellbeing than we often realise.

Up to 75% of UK adults are regularly dehydrated, with 1 in 2 people dehydrated at any given time. Astonishingly, **30% of adults drink less than one litre of water daily**.

Even mild dehydration can affect our **energy, focus, and mood**. It can make us feel tired, sluggish, and less able to concentrate. On the flip side, staying well hydrated helps support brain function, physical performance, and overall wellbeing. So why don't we do it?

Because, like many healthy habits, we rely on **good intentions** instead of making it easy and enjoyable. Plain water can feel pretty boring and uninspiring, so this activity is called **Hydration happy hour: making water more interesting**.

It's all about finding simple ways to make drinking water more enjoyable and something you look forward to. How can we make every hour of the day a 'happy hour'?

2. Ask participants:

- On a scale of **1–10**, how hydrated do you feel right now?
- How many glasses of water do you think you drink on a typical day?
- What usually stops you from drinking more water?



3. Explain that there are lots of simple ways that we can 'glow up' water, make it part of your routine, and turn it into something social and enjoyable.

- Have you tried the classic 'spa day' water? Add thinly sliced cucumber, fresh mint leaves and a few sliced of lemon. Make a jug full and let it infuse. Add ice and use sparkling water to make you feel like you're at a luxury resort.
- Or try a berry blast with frozen berries instead of ice cubes – they'll chill the water and slowly release flavour as they melt.

4. Divide participants into small groups or pairs and set a challenge.

Explain: You've got **five minutes** to come up with as many ways as possible to make hydration more interesting, enjoyable, or easy.

- How could you make water feel like a treat?
- How could you make it easier to remember?
- How could you make it part of something you already do?

Let's get creative and include:

- flavour ideas (e.g. fruit, herbs)
- timing habits (e.g. linking to routines)
- social ideas (e.g. water breaks with others)
- visual cues (e.g. bottles, reminders)
- fun twists (e.g. challenges, tracking, rewards)



Feel Great, Hydrate! Activity Three

Hydration happy hour: making water more interesting



5. After five minutes, bring participants back together and ask each group or pair to share:

- Their **most creative idea**
- Their **most realistic idea**

Write or repeat ideas so others can build on them.

6. Ask participants to choose one idea that feels realistic for them and turn it into a simple habit using:

When I [time or existing routine], I will [hydration action].'

Remind everyone to:

- Keep it **small**
- Make it **easy**
- Make it **enjoyable**

Encourage each participant to start building their chosen habit this week:

'This week, I will try ...'

7. Remind participants that hydration doesn't have to be a chore.

When you make it **easy, enjoyable, and part of your routine**, it becomes something that happens naturally, rather than something you have to force. Small changes can have a big impact on how you feel day to day and your future health and wellbeing. It's the simplest and cheapest thing that we can all do to help us age well.

"A 2024 analysis of 18 randomised clinical trials found that increasing daily water intake to 6–8 cups (1.5–2 litres) resulted in 44%–100% more weight loss compared to control groups and reduced recurrent kidney stones by 15 events per 100 participants over 5 years."



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand how to build simple and sustainable hydration habits that fit into daily life.
- Participants will feel more confident creating and maintaining hydration habits that stick.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants move from intention to action by creating personalised, realistic hydration habits that are easy to maintain throughout their lives.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Let's be honest, even when we make a commitment to change something, it can be hard to sustain. Did you know that around **90% of people** fail to keep their New Year's resolutions, with roughly **25% quitting by the end of the first week**, and the majority abandoning them by January 19th? **Only about 8% to 10% of people actually succeed in keeping their resolutions for the entire year.**

Hydration is the most critical thing we can do to improve how we feel day to day, so we can't rely on resolutions and willpower. Every sip of water supports our bodies in remarkable ways. It helps **regulate body temperature, transport nutrients, flush out waste, cushion joints, and aid digestion.** Water also **fuels the brain, playing a major role in concentration, memory, mood, and overall mental clarity.** Even mild dehydration can leave us feeling tired, unfocused, or physically drained.

Staying hydrated is also essential for our long-term health by supporting how everything functions from the heart, kidneys, skin, and immune system. Because the body constantly loses water through sweating, breathing, and everyday activity, replenishing fluids is something we must do consistently to feel and function at our best. This activity is called ***Water you waiting for? Building your own hydration habits*** and it's all about turning hydration into something automatic, something that fits easily into your day without needing willpower.





Learning outcomes:

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This activity is called **Water you waiting for? Building your own hydration habits** and it's all about turning hydration into something automatic, something that fits easily into your day without needing willpower.

- #### 2. Explain that in order to build automatic sustainable habits, we need to explore why, despite good intentions and a commitment to change, resolutions and willpower don't work. Ask participants what they think are the main barriers to lasting change to improve our health and wellbeing.
- Use the prompts below to support a 3-minute group discussion. End the discussion by reading the prompts to reinforce the learning.

Goals are unrealistic or vague

- **Too ambitious:** Trying to change too fast, like jumping to 4 litres of water a day when you usually drink very little.



- **Too vague:** 'Drink more water' isn't clear, so you don't know what to do each day.
- **All-or-nothing thinking:** Missing a day can make people give up instead of just continuing the next day.

Lack of preparation and support

- **No clear plan:** No simple habits like carrying a water bottle, setting reminders, or tracking intake.
- **Relying on willpower:** It's easy to forget without routines in place.
- **No support:** Without reminders or encouragement, motivation drops quickly.

Biological and behavioural hurdles

- **Two-week drop-off:** Motivation fades and people go back to drinks like tea, coffee, or fizzy drinks.
- **Slow results:** Benefits can be cumulative and you don't see an immediate impact.
- **'Should' motivation:** If it feels like an obligation, it's harder to stick with.

Environment and mindset barriers

- **Busy days:** Work and routines make it easy to forget to drink water.
- **No clear reason:** Without a personal benefit in mind, the habit doesn't last.
- **Self-doubt:** Thoughts like 'I'm bad at habits' or 'I don't have any willpower' get in the way.

Let's Keep Moving! Introduction

Building movement, strength and balance to age well



Why do we need to keep moving?

You may have heard the phrase 'Move it or lose it'. Whilst it sounds a little dramatic, there is truth in it. Movement is one of the most powerful things we can do to support our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing as we age.

Our bodies are designed to move. Regular physical activity supports our muscles, bones, joints, heart, brain, balance, mood, sleep, and energy levels. Movement helps us stay mobile, independent, confident, and able to keep doing the things we enjoy for longer.

As we move through midlife and into later life, movement becomes even more important. Our bodies naturally begin to change. We may lose muscle strength more easily, feel stiffer, notice reduced flexibility, or find our energy levels aren't quite what they used to be. Long periods of sitting can also start to affect how we feel physically and mentally.

The good news is that our bodies remain adaptable throughout life. We can improve strength, balance, flexibility, fitness, and mobility at any age. Small amounts of regular movement really can make a big difference to how we feel and function as we get older.

Forget pressure and 'exercise failure'

Choose challenges that work for you and things that you enjoy. Forcing yourself through workouts you hate is harder to sustain. Let's also forget the idea that exercise only 'counts' if you end up sweaty, exhausted, or wearing Lycra!

Many people think movement must mean gyms, running, or intense exercise routines. But movement comes in many forms, and it all counts. Walking the dog, gardening, dancing in the kitchen, stretching while the kettle boils, carrying shopping, cleaning the house, taking the stairs, or getting outside for fresh air are all valuable ways to move your body. There is no perfect exercise routine. What matters most is finding movement that feels manageable, enjoyable, and sustainable for you.

Some days your body may feel strong and energised. Other days you may feel tired, stiff, stressed, or less motivated. That's part of being human. The aim is not to punish your body, but to support it and appreciate everything it allows you to do.

Think of your body as a vehicle, not an ornament. Appreciate it for carrying you through life, helping you move, work, connect, laugh, explore, and experience the world around you. Be kind to yourself, reconnect with your body, and start noticing how movement affects how you feel physically and emotionally.

Let's Keep Moving! Introduction

Building movement, strength and balance to age well



Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Keeping active is about making small, realistic changes that fit into everyday life. The aim is not perfection, but consistency over time. Tiny habits repeated regularly are often far more effective than occasional bursts of intense exercise.

You do not need to become an athlete to benefit from movement. Here are some of the key ways physical activity supports healthy ageing and wellbeing.

- **Muscle strength:** We naturally lose muscle mass and strength from midlife onwards. Regular movement and strength-building activities help maintain muscles, improve mobility, and reduce the risk of falls and injury. Healthy muscle also support healthier and stronger bones
- **Bone health:** Weight-bearing activities such as walking, dancing, climbing stairs, or resistance exercises help keep bones strong and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures as we age.
- **Heart health:** Movement strengthens the heart and improves circulation. Regular physical activity can help lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, and reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Brain health and mood:** Physical activity is not just good for the body; it also supports the brain. Movement improves blood flow to the brain, helps reduce stress, boosts mood, and helps us to boost cognitive functions, concentration memory and emotional wellbeing.
- **Balance and flexibility:** Regular movement helps improve balance, coordination, and flexibility, which can support confidence and independence in later life. Activities such as stretching, yoga, tai chi, and simple mobility exercises can all help.
- **Energy and sleep:** Although it may sound surprising, moving more can actually increase energy levels. Regular physical activity can also improve sleep quality, helping the body and mind recover more effectively.
- **Social connection:** Movement can also support social wellbeing. Walking with friends, joining a class, gardening with others, or dancing together can help us stay connected, motivated, and emotionally well.

Looking after your physical health is not about doing one thing perfectly. It's about building a lifestyle that gives your body regular opportunities to move, strengthen, stretch, recover, and feel good.

Small actions really do matter. The little things we do every day, like standing up more often, walking a little further, stretching regularly, or moving in ways we enjoy, can support healthier ageing for years to come.

Let's Keep Moving! Activity One

CTRL + ALT + RESET: Reboot your energy



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of how movement raises energy levels and improves their health and wellbeing.
- Participants will have increased motivation to develop simple, repeatable habits to increase their movement at work and beyond.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to support participants to develop positive habits to increase their movement and enable them to age well.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that movement is your body's built-in superpower? It boosts energy while helping guard against chronic disease. Science backs it up – even simple habits like short bursts of movement or daily walking can fight tiredness and build energy levels.

Movement increases our oxygen flow and strengthens our cardiovascular system, allowing oxygen and nutrients to reach tissues more efficiently. Just a 15-minute walk can provide an immediate energy boost and improve cognitive function, including attention and memory, for up to two hours. Small daily habits can make a big difference to how we work, feel and age.

This activity is called **CTRL + ALT + RESET** and it's designed to help us find ways to reboot our energy levels and build positive habits to increase our physical movement. We're going to start with a simple experiment.

2. Ask the group to stand up (adapt activity if any participants have restricted mobility).
3. Explain that we're going to do a simple experiment.
4. Ask participants to rate their current energy levels on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is low.
5. Ask participants to march on the spot rapidly for 60 seconds (adapt activity as above).
6. Ask them to re-rate their energy levels after 60 seconds and describe how they feel.
7. Explain that even this small amount of movement can boost energy levels, which is why it's important to move regularly.
8. Ask participants to split into pairs and work together for five minutes to develop ideas for sticky habits they can each use to increase their movement every day. Use the *Sticky habits* resource to support this activity.
9. After five minutes, bring the group back together to share their ideas.
10. Ask everyone to commit to one small change that they will make to increase their daily movement.

Let's Keep Moving! Activity Two

Flex appeal: building muscle strength to age well



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have a greater understanding of how we can build and maintain muscle strength as we age.
- Participants will have increased motivation to introduce strength training activities into their lives.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help people understand how to build and maintain muscle strength as they age.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that adults can lose between **3 to 8% of muscle mass per decade** after age 30? Unless we build habits to strengthen our muscles as we age, **we can lose up to 30% of our muscle mass between the ages of 50 and 70.**

Strength training is usually associated with going to the gym and building maximum strength and muscle size, but it can also be built into our everyday lives to help us maintain and rebuild the muscle mass we lose through ageing.

Regular strength training can help us feel more confident and capable when lifting and carrying things. Muscle strengthening exercises also make our bones stronger, reduce our risk of falls and fractures, and improve balance and mobility. Strength training can also help reduce stress and pain in our joints and help us live independently as we get older.

Not all strength training needs to take place in a gym.



Let's Keep Moving! Activity Two

Flex appeal: building muscle strength to age well



This activity is called **Flex appeal: build muscle strength to age well**, and it's designed to help us make strength training a daily habit.

1. Divide the group in half and deliver the activity as a competition to see which group can identify the most strength training exercises that can be undertaken every day without equipment.
2. Give the two groups five minutes to come up with their own lists, using paper or sticky notes.
3. Ask each group to share their ideas and use the feedback to develop a full group discussion. (Are all their responses true? Are there any duplications?)
4. Announce the winning team.
5. Use the prompts in the *Let's keep moving!* Introduction to reinforce the learning and cover anything that they've missed.
6. Ask everyone to commit to one thing they will try to help build their strength.
7. Use follow-up questions to make each commitment a 'sticky habit': When will you do that? What can you make visible to remind you to do it? How can you make that enjoyable? How will you make it easy?

"Research shows that UK adults frequently spend 60-80% of their waking day sedentary, which equals roughly 8-10 hours sitting. This is linked to muscle weakness, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Long periods of inactivity, even for those who exercise, can also slow metabolism and impair the body's ability to regulate blood sugar and pressure."

Let's Keep Moving! Activity Three

Wiggle room: finding the fun in moving more



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have a greater awareness of how to make physical activity feel less like a chore and more like play.
- Participants will have increased motivation to engage in physical activities and move more.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to help people understand how to focus on finding the fun in moving more.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Did you know that adding just 5 minutes of vigorous activity per day can significantly lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, and premature death? That's less time than it takes to scroll through your phone, but it can add years to your life!

Movement doesn't have to feel like a chore – it can feel like play. The secret isn't more willpower; it's designing an experience that you actually look forward to.

'Gamification', or turning movement into a game or challenge, can boost motivation. Set yourself mini challenges, track your progress, and celebrate the wins. It could be as simple as aiming to dance around the room for 5 minutes every day or beating your step count from last week. Apps and fitness trackers can make it even more satisfying, giving you instant feedback and a real sense of momentum and achievement.

Pair movement with something you already enjoy. Put on your favourite playlist, dive into a gripping podcast, or make a phone call to a friend while you walk. Suddenly, being active becomes less of a task and more of a treat.

For many people, the best kind of movement barely feels like a workout at all. Dancing, hiking, swimming, gardening, or classes like Zumba can be fun, social, and energising. Every step, stretch, and dance move counts. Small amounts of movement, done consistently, can deliver huge benefits for both your body and your brain.

- #### 2. Ask participants to complete a low-effort baseline activity for around one minute. This could be marching on the spot, jogging on the spot, or basic squats. Keep it intentionally plain and uninspiring. (Adjust the activity to different mobility levels within the group).

Let's Keep Moving! Activity Three

Wiggle room: finding the fun in moving more



3. Ask participants, 'Was that fun?' Anticipate the answer: 'Not really!'
4. Now, repeat the activity, but introduce some additional fun 'layers' after each minute. These could include:
 - A music boost: Play an upbeat song while people repeat the movement.
 - Gamifying it: Turn it into a challenge (e.g. 'How many steps can you take in the next minute?').
 - Group exercise: Pair people up or form small groups to mirror each other's movements or sync movements together.
5. Ask the group to reflect on the activity by asking: 'Which version of the activity was more enjoyable?' and 'What changed in your motivation levels?'
6. Explain that the movement didn't change, but the experience did!
7. Ask each participant to think of one small movement challenge that they would enjoy doing every day to put in their 'Wiggle room' and invite them to share their ideas with the group.



Let's Keep Moving! Activity Four

Stay in motion: building habits that increase movement, strength and balance



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand the importance of regular physical activity to improve and maintain good health.
- Participants will have a greater awareness of how to build a healthy routine that supports increased movement, strength and balance.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help people understand how to build exercise around their established routine.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Did you know that physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for poor health in later life? In fact, it is the fourth biggest contributor to ill health among older adults in the UK. Staying active is one of the best investments you can make in your future self.

Regular movement helps you stay strong, steady, and independent. It improves mobility, balance, muscle strength, and can also boost your mood and energy levels.

Building healthy habits isn't about relying on motivation. It's about creating routines that fit naturally into your day. Small changes, like leaving your walking shoes by the door or keeping a resistance band in sight, make being active much easier.

Start small. Even one or two minutes of activity can help build a lasting habit. Consistency matters more than intensity.

Make it enjoyable. Whether it's listening to music, tracking your progress, or celebrating small wins, positive rewards help habits stick.

Think identity! See yourself as someone who is active, strong, and steady. When you do, your actions will naturally begin to reflect that.

Let's Keep Moving! Activity Four

Stay in motion: building habits that increase movement, strength and balance



This activity is called **Stay in motion: building habits that increase movement, strength and balance** and it's designed to help you build sticky habits to help you move more.

2. Ask participants to break into three groups:

- **Movement**
- **Strength**
- **Balance**

Ask each group to mentally walk through a typical day, from morning to evening, and identify opportunities to build their focus area into everyday life.

Movement group

Think about times when you're less active, such as commuting, watching television, or sitting at a desk.

- Where could you add one or two minutes of movement?
- How could you move more without changing your schedule?

Examples might include marching on the spot while waiting for the kettle to boil, stretching during TV advert breaks, or taking a short walk during phone calls.

Strength group

Consider daily activities that already require strength, such as shopping or tidying the house.

- How could you make these activities a regular part of your routine?
- How might you increase the challenge over time?

For example, doing extra trips up the stairs, or adding a few sit-to-stands while waiting for food to cook.

Balance group

Think about everyday tasks that rely on balance, such as getting dressed, climbing stairs, or doing housework.

- How could you safely add a little more challenge?

Ideas might include standing on one leg while brushing your teeth, practising heel-to-toe walking along a hallway, or balancing briefly while putting on socks.

Let's Keep Moving! Activity Four

Stay in motion: building habits that increase movement, strength and balance



3. After five minutes, invite each group to share their ideas with everyone.
4. Introduce a simple habit formula:
 - Stack it:** attach a new activity to something you already do.
 - Keep it small:** one or two minutes is enough to get started.
 - Make it engaging:** add music, variety, or track your progress.
5. Ask participants, 'What's one small change you'll try tomorrow?' and invite them to share with the group.





Why do we need to look after our brain health?

Your brain is involved in everything you do. It helps you think, learn, remember, move, make decisions, manage emotions, build relationships, and make sense of the world around you.

Just like the rest of the body, the brain changes as we age. We may notice things like forgetting names more easily, struggling to concentrate when we're tired, or feeling mentally overloaded more quickly than we used to. But ageing does not automatically mean serious cognitive decline. Our brains are adaptable throughout life.

The brain's ability to build new connections and strengthen existing ones based on how we live, think, move, rest, and connect with others is called *neuroplasticity*. There are lots of everyday things we can do to help support brain health and emotional wellbeing as we age.

Forget perfection and 'brain training pressure', looking after your brain health is not about becoming a different person, completing endless puzzles, or trying to optimise every moment of your day. There is no such thing as a 'perfect brain health routine'. What matters most is building small, sustainable habits that support your brain consistently over time.

Some days your brain will feel focused and energised. Other days it may feel foggy, distracted, stressed, or tired. That's part of being human. The aim is not to judge yourself, but to better understand what helps your brain feel at its best. It needs challenge, recovery, nourishment, movement, stimulation, and connection. Be curious about what helps you feel mentally clearer, calmer, more connected, and emotionally balanced.

Supporting brain health is about making small, realistic changes that fit into everyday life. Tiny habits repeated consistently can make a big difference over time. You do not need to completely overhaul your lifestyle to support your brain as you age.





Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Here are some of the key ways we can support brain health and emotional wellbeing.

- **Sleep and rest:** Sleep is one of the most important things we can do for brain health. While we sleep, the brain clears waste products, processes memories, restores energy, and supports emotional regulation. Poor sleep can affect concentration, mood, memory, and stress levels. Prioritising rest, relaxation, and good sleep routines helps the brain recover and function well. Avoid pressure to achieve 'perfect' sleep, as worrying about sleep can make it harder to rest. Developing consistent relaxation habits matter more than any single night's sleep.
- **Nutritious food:** The brain needs good fuel to work effectively. Nutrients such as healthy fats (especially omega-3 fatty acids), antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fibre all support brain function, mood, and memory. Eating a varied diet with foods such as oily fish, nuts, seeds, berries, leafy greens, beans, and wholegrains may help protect brain health as we age.
- **Hydration:** The brain relies on water to function properly. Even mild dehydration can affect concentration, memory, mood, energy levels, and mental clarity. Staying hydrated helps the brain communicate efficiently, regulate temperature, transport nutrients, and remove waste products. Drinking water regularly throughout the day can support both brain health and emotional wellbeing.
- **Physical activity:** Movement is not just good for the body. It's one of the best things we can do for the brain. Regular physical activity improves blood flow to the brain, supports memory and concentration, reduces stress, and boosts mood. Even gentle movement such as walking, stretching, gardening, or dancing can benefit brain health.
- **Mental stimulation:** The brain benefits from challenge and variety. Learning new things, reading, playing games, doing puzzles, being creative, trying different routines, or learning new skills can all help keep the brain active and engaged. The brain enjoys novelty: it likes opportunities to think, adapt, and grow.
- **Social connection:** Humans are wired for connection. Spending time with others, having meaningful conversations, laughing, sharing experiences, and feeling part of a community all support emotional wellbeing and brain health. Strong social connection is linked to lower risks of depression, loneliness, and cognitive decline as we age.



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand how brain health influences emotional wellbeing, mood, and social connection.
- Participants will explore simple habits that can support both brain health and emotional wellbeing as they age.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants understand the link between brain health, mood, and emotional wellbeing, while exploring practical ways to support a healthy brain through everyday habits.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Have you ever noticed how much harder life feels when your brain feels tired? Maybe you feel more irritable and less patient. Do you get more emotional, or reach for sugary snacks? We often separate our brain from our emotions, but they're deeply connected.

Our brain helps regulate:

- mood
- stress responses
- concentration
- sleep
- motivation
- social connection

And just like the rest of the body, the brain needs regular care to function well. Your brain contains around **86 billion neurons**, which are nerve cells, constantly communicating with each other through electrical signals and chemical reactions. The way we live can either support or strain those connections over time. How we sleep, hydrate, move, connect, eat, learn, and manage stress all have an impact on how our brain functions.

A tired brain struggles to regulate emotions because the amygdala, which is responsible for emotional responses, becomes up to 60% more active than normal. Combined with reduced communication with the prefrontal cortex (the rational part of the brain), this leads to high irritability, anxiety, and impulsive, moody behaviour. Brain health isn't only about preventing decline later in life. It's also about helping us feel better right now.

This activity is called **Mind, mood, connection**, and it's about exploring how everyday habits can help support both brain health and emotional wellbeing, helping us feel more emotionally balanced, connected and resilient.



2. Ask participants to think about a time when they were:

- sleep deprived
- very stressed
- isolated
- mentally overloaded

Ask:

- How did it affect your mood?
- How did it affect your patience, focus, or relationships?
- What's one thing that helps your brain feel 'clearer' or calmer?

3. Brain boosters vs brain drainers

Divide participants into small groups or pairs.

Explain: Some habits help our brains feel energised and supported. Others can leave us mentally drained and overloaded. In **2 minutes, come up with as many 'brain boosters and 'brain drainers' as you can.** Examples might include:

4. The 'DOTT' (Do One Tiny Thing) Brain Habit challenge

Explain: The brain responds well to consistency. Small actions repeated regularly can strengthen wellbeing over time. The habits that support our brains, like sleep, movement, learning, relaxation, and connection, can help us feel calmer, happier, and more resilient.

Brain boosters

- sleep
- physical activity
- social connection
- learning new things
- hydration
- time outdoors
- relaxation

Brain drainers

- chronic stress
- loneliness
- poor sleep
- constant multitasking
- too much screen time
- lack of movement
- isolation

After 2 minutes, bring the group back and ask each group to share:

- One 'brain booster' they already do
- One 'brain drainer' they'd like to reduce

Healthy Brains! Activity One

Mind, mood, connection: how brain health shapes how you feel



Set the challenge: Your challenge is to **choose one small action that could support their brain health this week**. This could include movement, learning, connection, relaxation, rest, stress management. Make it **small, realistic, specific, enjoyable and easy to repeat every day**.

Ask participants to share their small action with the group.



Healthy Brains! Activity Two

Use your noodle: everyday ways to support brain health



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will explore practical ways to keep their brain active, healthy, and resilient.
- Participants will feel more confident taking small actions to support brain health in daily life, helping them age well.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants understand that brain health is shaped by everyday lifestyle habits, by harnessing the group's collective brainpower to build a visual 'Use your noodle' brain health map.

You'll need **sticky notes in different colours, pens, and six sheets of flip chart paper** (or blank wall areas around the room), each marked with a different heading: **sleep and rest, nutritious food, hydration, physical activity, mental stimulation, social connection.**

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

When people think about brain health, they often picture crossword puzzles, memory games, or trying not to forget where they left their keys. Keeping your brain active is vital, but brain health is shaped by the small things we do every day: how we sleep, eat, hydrate, move, connect with others, and challenge our minds.

Your brain is constantly changing and adapting throughout life. Scientists call this **neuroplasticity**: the brain's ability to build and strengthen connections based on how we live and what we do regularly. Neuroplasticity continues throughout life, allowing the brain to reorganise its structure and function, form new neural connections, and prune unused ones as we age.

This activity is called **Use your noodle: everyday ways to support brain health**, and your challenge is to use your collective brainpower to build the ultimate brain health map.

2. Introduce the group to their 'mission': to fill each area with as many simple, realistic, everyday brain-health actions as possible.

The rules:

- One idea per sticky note
- Keep ideas practical and specific
- Quantity matters, but creativity counts too
- Build on each other's ideas



You can start by putting an example on the board for each category:

- Sleep and rest: read before bed instead of scrolling
- Nutrition: add blueberries or chia seeds to cereal
- Hydration: wake up your brain with a glass of water
- Physical activity: dance to your favourite music before breakfast
- Mental stimulation: complete a word puzzle (e.g. Wordle)
- Social connection: call a friend

3. Ask participants to move around the room, adding sticky notes to the different categories. Build energy and momentum by setting a timer for five minutes. Encourage them to keep adding more ideas and include tiny habits and things they could realistically do on a busy Wednesday.

4. After five minutes, bring everyone back together and walk around the boards as a group. Ask:

- Which category filled up fastest?
- Which was hardest?
- Which habits are you already doing without realising they support brain health?

Brain health habits often overlap, and small actions can support the brain in multiple ways.

Highlight connections between categories (e.g. a walk with a friend supports both physical activity and social connection, or cooking a healthy meal can support mental stimulation and nutrition).

Award fun bonus points for:

- Most unexpected idea
- Simplest habit
- Most creative brain booster

5. Ask everyone to walk up to the boards and choose one small action from each category that they will try this week to support their brain to age well. Encourage them to take photos of each board so they have a record of all the ideas.

Encourage them to choose something that is:

- Small
- Achievable
- Enjoyable
- Easy to repeat



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will explore practical strategies to improve focus in everyday life.
- Participants will feel more confident using small habits to support attention and concentration.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help people develop small habits to improve their focus and concentration.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

How often have you heard people say they're 'multitasking'? This might sound productive, but in reality, **the human brain cannot focus on two complex tasks simultaneously**. What it's actually doing is performing rapid task switching, shifting attention back and forth. **This reduces productivity by up to 40%**, uses more mental energy, increases mistakes, and creates what scientists often call 'cognitive switch costs': the extra effort required every time our attention jumps from one thing to another.

True, simultaneous multitasking is only possible for simple, automatic actions, like walking while talking. For most tasks that require concentration, memory, or decision-making, the brain performs better when **focusing on one task at a time**.

If you sometimes struggle to focus, your brain might just be overloaded. The good news is that improving your focus is a skill you can develop. Small habits can help strengthen it and make a big difference to our concentration, particularly as we age. Things like silencing notifications, keeping a clear workspace, taking short breaks, staying hydrated, and focusing on one priority at a time can all help improve concentration and mental clarity.

This activity is called **Focus pocus: simple ways to sharpen concentration**, and it's all about discovering practical ways to help your brain feel clearer, calmer, and better





2. Ask participants what kind of things stop us from being focused. Use the prompts below to support the discussion, then share these with the group, once they have given their responses.

Digital distractions

- Notifications: phone and app alerts break focus
- Social media: quick, distracting scrolling
- Email checking: constantly switching to inbox
- Multitasking: doing too many things at once

Environment issues

- Interruptions: colleagues stopping to chat
- Noise: loud or busy surroundings
- Messy space: clutter reduces focus
- Poor lighting or temperature: uncomfortable workspace

Personal factors

- Stress or anxiety: reduces attention
- Tiredness: lack of sleep affects focus
- Hunger: low energy levels
- Boredom: uninteresting tasks
- Mental overload: too much on your mind

Habits and work structure

- Procrastination: putting tasks off
- Unnecessary meetings: wasted time
- Unhealthy habits: poor diet or alcohol affecting focus

3. Introduce a multitasking experiment.

Explain to participants that we're going to do a simple **timed multitasking experiment**.

- Write the numbers 1–10 on a piece of paper
- Then write the letters A–J
- Time how long it takes.



Now ask participants to try again, but this time alternating between numbers and letters: **1-A-2-B-3-C** and so on.

Afterwards, ask:

- Which felt easier?
- Which felt more mentally tiring?
- Which took longer?

4. Focus pocus habit hacks

Explain that we're going to use our collective brains to build our own concentration toolkit.

Ask participants to think of small things that genuinely help them to focus. Examples might include turning off notifications, single-tasking, writing a checklist, using timers, drinking water, taking movement breaks, practising deep breathing or meditation, or improving sleep.

Go around the room quickly and create a rapid-fire list of focus habit hacks.

Encourage participants to:

- Borrow ideas from each other
- Keep an open mind
- Notice how different people need different strategies to focus well

Then ask participants to choose ONE focus habit they'd like to try this week.

Turn it into a simple action using:

'When I [existing routine], I will [focus habit].'

5. Pair and improve

Ask participants to share their focus habit with a partner.

Encourage partners to help make it:

- Smaller
- More realistic
- Easier to remember
- More enjoyable



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of why stimulating the brain is important for maintaining brain function and helping them to age well.
- Participants will have increased motivation, understanding and skills to develop positive habits to support brain health.

How to run this activity

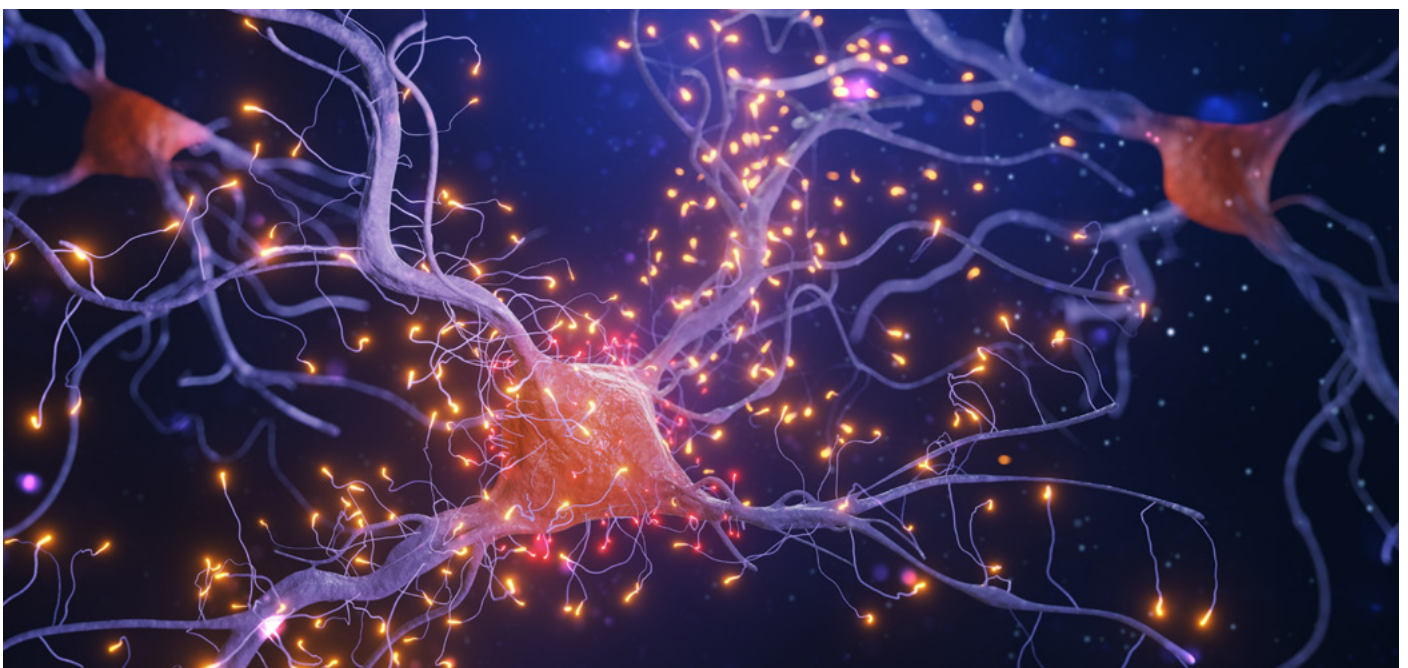
This is a 15-minute group activity designed to support participants to develop positive habits to improve their brain health and enable them to age well.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that the human brain houses between 86 and 100 billion neurons and never stops working, even when we're asleep? Information travels between the neurons at speeds of up to 268 miles per hour and there is good evidence that keeping your brain active and having a healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk of brain diseases like dementia to help you age well.

The good news is that your brain can rewire itself at any age. This is called neuroplasticity and your brain thrives on challenge, connection, and physical exercise. Small daily habits can make a big difference to how you work, feel and age.

*This activity is called **Brain gain** and it's designed to help us build 'habit hacks' – positive habits to support brain health and ageing well.*





1. Ask the group what types of activities they already do (or don't do!) to keep their brain healthy and active. Prompt them to focus on mental stimulation, social connection and physical exercise, (that increases blood flow to the brain.)
2. Give the group three minutes to share quick responses.
3. Split participants in small groups (2-4 people)
4. Ask each person to choose one habit or activity that they already do that could be adjusted to improve brain health. Give an example of the habit of phone (or 'zombie') scrolling on social media. Explain that it negatively impacts on sleep and reduces cognitive functions like memory by creating a 'dopamine loop' in the brain's limbic system. Anticipation of new content triggers rewards, hooking your attention without conscious control. *Habit hacks* might include moving the phone away from the bed and replacing scrolling with an audiobook, or sleep music. Give them five minutes, in their small groups, to create *habit hacks* to adjust each habit into a *brain gain* activity. Use the Sticky Habits resource to help design their habit hacks.
5. Bring the group back together to share their habit hacks for building brain health.
6. Ask each person to commit to at least one *habit hack* they will use.

"Research on the impact of dance on the brain suggests it may be uniquely beneficial compared to many other forms of exercise. Often described as a 'whole-brain' activity, dance combines cardiovascular movement with coordination, balance, memory, rapid decision-making, social interaction and musicality, stimulating multiple areas of the brain at the same time. Studies suggest that dancing may help support memory, attention, mood, cognitive flexibility and emotional wellbeing, while also reducing stress and encouraging social connection. Unlike some forms of exercise, dance challenges both the body and the brain together, making it an enjoyable and engaging way to support healthy ageing."



Why do we need to build and nurture social connection?

Human beings are built for connection. Our relationships don't just shape how we feel emotionally; they're deeply linked to our mental, physical, and cognitive wellbeing. Feeling connected to others helps us feel safer, more supported, and more able to cope with life's ups and downs.

Research consistently shows that strong social connection is associated with better mental health, lower stress levels, improved immune function, better cardiovascular health, and even longer life expectancy. In contrast, social isolation and loneliness are linked with increased risks of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and poorer physical health outcomes.

One of the key reasons for this is biological: positive social interaction helps regulate stress responses in the body, reducing levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) and supporting healthier heart rate, blood pressure, and immune activity. Over time, this can have a protective effect on both mind and body.

In midlife and beyond, social networks often change. Work patterns shift, family roles evolve, caring responsibilities increase or decrease, and friendships may become less frequent due to time pressures or life transitions. It's common for connection to feel less automatic than it once did.

At the same time, this stage of life can offer a chance to be more intentional about relationships, focusing less on quantity and more on the connections that feel meaningful, supportive, and energising.

The important thing to remember is that social connection is not optional for wellbeing; it's fundamental to it. Our brains and bodies continue to respond positively to belonging, shared experiences, and supportive relationships throughout life.

Different needs, same human requirement

People vary in how much social interaction they need. Some feel energised by frequent contact and larger social networks, while others prefer fewer, deeper connections and more time alone to recharge. There is no 'right' level of sociability. What matters is finding a balance that works for you.

However, while our individual needs differ, we all benefit from meaningful connection. Having people we trust, people we can talk to honestly, and people we can rely on in times of need is strongly associated with better overall wellbeing. The quality of connection quality matters more than quantity, but a lack of connection altogether can have a significant negative impact on both physical and mental health.



Forget pressure to be constantly social

Looking after your social wellbeing is not about having a busy social calendar, a large friendship group, or saying yes to everything. It's not about performing sociability or comparing yourself to others.

Some days you may feel socially energised and enjoy interaction. Other days you may need quiet, space, or solitude. Both are normal and healthy. Types of social connection vary too. It can come from deep conversations, shared activities, everyday interactions, groups, online spaces, or brief moments of recognition and warmth. The aim is not perfection; it's meaningful engagement and balance.

Start small. Keep it simple. Do it often.

Here are some of the key ways social connection supports wellbeing.

- **Protects mental health:** Strong relationships act as a buffer against stress, anxiety, and depression. Feeling understood and supported helps regulate emotions, reduce feelings of overwhelm, and increase psychological resilience during difficult times.
- **Reduces stress in the body:** Positive social interaction helps calm the body's stress response system. This can lower cortisol levels, reduce inflammation over time, and support healthier heart rate and blood pressure regulation.
- **Supports brain health:** Social engagement challenges the brain in positive ways through conversation, memory recall, empathy, and problem-solving. This stimulation is linked with better cognitive function and may help reduce risk of cognitive decline as we age.
- **Improves physical health outcomes:** People with strong social connections are more likely to experience better cardiovascular health, stronger immune responses, and faster recovery from illness. Social isolation, by contrast, is associated with a higher risk of chronic conditions.
- **Strengthens resilience and coping:** Having trusted people to turn to provides emotional support, practical help, and perspective during life challenges. This makes it easier to adapt to change and recover from setbacks.
- **Increases motivation and healthy behaviours:** Socially connected people are more likely to engage in positive health behaviours such as physical activity, attending appointments, eating well, and maintaining routines, because these behaviours are supported or shared with others.
- **Increases life satisfaction and purpose:** Feeling part of something bigger than yourself, whether through friendships, family, community, or shared interests, contributes to a stronger sense of meaning, identity, and overall life satisfaction.

Social connection is not about how many people you know, it's about feeling meaningfully connected in ways that support your wellbeing. Small actions matter. A conversation, a message, a shared moment, or reaching out can all strengthen connection over time and help build a healthier, more supported life as we age.



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of ways that social connection and stimulation improve their health and wellbeing.
- Participants will have increased motivation to build social connections.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute group activity is designed to enable participant to understand why social stimulation is essential to improve their health and wellbeing and enable them to age well.

1. Introduce the activity to the group:

Did you know that social connection and stimulation are not merely “nice-to-have”, but have a direct impact on our physical and mental health? Loneliness and social isolation put people at increased risk of anxiety, heart disease and depression. Research shows that positive social connection strengthens our immune system, reduces stress, and boosts self-esteem.

We are all different in terms of how much social connection we need, with some people needing lots and other less. But the research is clear, we all need some good quality, regular connections.

This activity is called **Hidden talent exchange**, and it's designed to build social connection and help us think about how this improves our health and wellbeing and helps us age well.

Everyone has hidden talents that people might not know about. Think about a hidden talent that you have. It could be something you're good at that others might struggle with. It could be something that you spend time doing outside work. It could be something quirky or unusual. It can be something small that you are particularly good at.

2. Ask everyone to write their hidden talent on a sticky note

3. Ask people to pair up with someone, preferably someone they don't know well.

4. Give the pairs five minutes to take it in turns to share their hidden talents and ask each other questions to understand more about their partner's hidden talent. (Question prompts: 'What do you like about it?', 'How do you use it?')

5. After five minutes, bring the group back together and ask people to talk about their **partner's** hidden talent. (Each person in turn, or a small number, depending on time.)

6. Ask the group how the activity made them feel and the benefits of the discussions.

7. Use the prompts in *Let's connect!* overview to reinforce the learning and share health benefits of social connection.

Let's Connect! Activity Two

Plug in! How connection recharges you



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand how meaningful social connection can improve wellbeing, reduce stress, and boost energy.
- Participants will feel more motivated to build and maintain strong social connections in their daily lives.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help people understand the importance of social connection in improving wellbeing and boosting energy.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Did you know that around **1 in 4 adults in the UK** report feeling lonely 'often, always, or some of the time'? While most people have some support, a significant minority lack reliable, close connections. Social connection can be just as important for your health as physical activity.

Research shows that the quality of our friendships matters more than the number of friends we have. Strong, supportive relationships are linked to better emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing as we age. People with positive social connections are more likely to be happier and live longer. Social interaction can improve our mood and increase our ability to manage stress, anxiety, and depression. It can even boost our immune system and stimulate our brain, helping to reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

This becomes especially important in midlife, when life can feel particularly busy or challenging. Careers, family responsibilities, and major life changes can sometimes leave us feeling isolated. Reconnecting with old friends, or building new relationships, can provide comfort, perspective, a sense of belonging, and a valuable reminder that we're not alone.

Because the quality of our connections is more important than the quantity, we need to nurture the relationships that energise us most and make us happy. This activity is called **Plug in! How connection recharges you**, and it's designed to help us build and experience the energising power of meaningful conversation.

2. Ask participants:

- On a scale of 1–10, how energised do you feel right now?
- Share three words that describe your current mood.

3. Ask participants to pair up and begin with light, everyday conversation using prompts such as what they had for dinner yesterday or what they are doing at the weekend.

Let's Connect! Activity Two

Plug in! How connection recharges you



4. After one minute, ask participants:

- On a scale of 1–10, how energised do you feel now?
- Share three words that describe your current mood.

5. Keep the same pairs, but now invite participants to explore deeper conversation using prompts such as:

- What's something you're looking forward to?
- What's a recent moment that made you feel proud or grateful?
- What's the best present you've ever received?

Encourage participants to:

- Listen without interrupting
- Maintain eye contact
- Show genuine curiosity

6. After five minutes, bring the group back together and ask participants to reflect again:

- On a scale of 1–10, how energised do you feel now?
- What one word best describes how you feel?

Ask the group:

- What changed between the first and second conversations?
- Which conversation made you feel more energised?
- Why do you think that was?

Encourage participants to notice how deeper, more authentic conversations can create a sense of connection, belonging, and renewed energy.

7. Reinforce the learning by highlighting the key message:

Meaningful connection acts like a recharge for our emotional wellbeing. Even brief moments of genuine connection can lift our mood, reduce stress, and remind us that we are supported.

8. Ask participants to identify one small action they will take to strengthen a social connection this week.

For example: call a friend, arrange a coffee catch-up, or send a thoughtful message.

Use follow-up questions to make the commitment more likely to stick, e.g. When will you do it? How will you remind yourself? How can you make it enjoyable? What might help make it easier?



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will have increased understanding of the barriers to social connection and how to overcome them.
- Participants will feel more confident to build and maintain strong social connections in their daily lives.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants understand and overcome barriers to social connection.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

We all know that social connection is important. It helps us feel supported, boosts our mood, gives us a sense of belonging, and helps us live longer, happier lives. **High social engagement is also strongly associated with a reduced risk of dementia.** Although the exact percentage varies across studies, a major review in 2023 found that people who are socially active in mid to late life are 30-50% less likely to develop dementia.

But even when we value connection, it's not always easy to maintain. Life gets busy, confidence can dip, routines change, and sometimes reaching out to others can feel harder than it should.

Barriers to connection can be practical, like time or distance, but they can also be internal, such as low confidence levels, worrying about how we'll be perceived, or simply getting out of the habit of connecting. It also depends on personality. Different people need different amounts of social connection. Some of us are naturally more introverted. We might need less social interaction and more time alone to recharge, but we all need meaningful connection to thrive.

The good news is that these barriers are common and can be overcome. Small, simple actions can make a big difference. Often, it's not about making big changes, but about noticing opportunities and building confidence step by step.

This 15-minute activity is called **Ice, ice... maybe? Why connection can feel tricky.** It's designed to help you identify what might be holding you back from connecting with others, and to explore realistic ways to overcome those barriers so you can build and maintain stronger social connections in your everyday life.

2. Ask participants what they think are the most common barriers to social interaction and engagement, and invite them to share with the group. Write their responses on a whiteboard if available.

Prompts include: time, transport, money, physical mobility, shyness, confidence, mental health issues such as anxiety, worry about saying the wrong thing, lack of opportunities, caring responsibilities, technology skills, and language barriers.



3. Ask people to think about their own **personal barriers to social connection** and write them down and/or remember them for the end of the session.
4. Explain that practical barriers need practical solutions, which are often easier to address when you understand what your practical barriers are. Internal barriers can be trickier, but reducing social anxiety can be achieved through simple, actionable techniques that:
 - **focus on calming the body** through breathing and relaxation techniques.
 - **change negative thought patterns**, for example, by asking yourself, *'Is this thought based on fact or fear?'* Replace *'Everyone is judging me'* with *'Most people are focused on themselves'*.
 - **relabel the feeling!** Your body can't easily tell the difference between anxiety and excitement. Both trigger similar physical responses – a faster heartbeat, alertness, and a burst of energy. Studies have found that simply telling yourself *'I'm excited'* instead of *'I'm nervous'* before social situations can improve confidence.
 - **use active listening** to feel more comfortable joining conversations and less worried about saying the 'wrong' thing. By actively listening to others, we shift the focus away from our own anxieties.
5. Ask participants to stand or sit in a circle and explain that we're going to develop active listening skills by building a story together, one word at a time!
 - One person starts with **a single word** (e.g. 'Yesterday').
 - Going around the circle, **each person adds just ONE word.**
 - Together, you create an unpredictable (and hopefully rather silly) story.
 - Example: "Yesterday... I... accidentally... adopted... a... penguin... who... loves... karaoke..."

Tips: Keep the pace fast and don't let people stall. Embrace nonsense (the weirder, the better). No correcting the story, just roll with it. You can add a twist to additional rounds by introducing one of these:

- **Emotion mode:** each word must be said in the tone of a specific emotion (e.g. excited, angry, shy).
- **Character mode:** speak as a character (e.g. pirate, robot, celebrity).



6. Explain that this activity helps reduce social anxiety because participants must actively listen to the person who spoke before them. It also introduces humour, which can help ease social anxiety. If you experience mild-to-moderate symptoms of social anxiety, there is an [NHS social anxiety self-help guide](#) for support.
7. Close by asking participants to remember the personal barriers to social connection that they identified at the beginning and **commit to one action** to help **overcome each personal barrier** this week.

“An 85-Year study on happiness, the longest study of happiness ever conducted, found that the strongest predictor of a long, happy life is not wealth or fame, but the quality of our social relationships. People who were happiest, who stayed healthiest as they grew old, and who lived the longest were people who had the warmest connections with other people.”

Harvard University



Learning outcomes:

- Participants will understand how to build sustainable habits that strengthen social connection.
- Participants will feel more confident to build and maintain strong social connections in daily life.

How to run this activity

This 15-minute activity is designed to help participants build sticky and sustainable habits that strengthen their social connection and wellbeing.

1. Introduce the activity to the group.

Staying socially connected isn't just about *who* we know, it's about what we actually *do* regularly and the *quality* of the connections we make. Most of us have good intentions and say 'We should catch up soon' or 'I must get in touch with...' But then life gets busy, and connection quietly slips down our list of priorities.

Social connection is as important for our health as things like staying active or not smoking. **People with strong social relationships have up to a 50% higher chance of living longer than those with weaker connections.** Just like exercise affects your body, social connection has real biological benefits. Regular, positive interactions can help **lower stress levels**, reducing cortisol, and boost feel-good chemicals like **oxytocin**, which are linked to trust, bonding, and happiness.

Whilst we all need strong social connection to help us age well, there's no 'right' amount of social connection. Some people feel energised by lots of interaction. Others may be more introverted and benefit from time alone to recharge. Most of us sit somewhere in between. What matters isn't just how *much* connection you have, but the quality of your connections, how they make you feel, and whether they feel **manageable and sustainable for you.**

So why is it so hard to maintain? Because we often rely on big effort, long catchups, perfect timing, and lots of energy. When those don't happen, nothing happens. This is where habits come in.

This activity is called **Stick with it! Building habits that keep you connected** and it's designed to help us build consistent habits that strengthen our social connection..

2. Explain the 5-3-1 rule.

A simple framework for developing your social connection habits is the **5-3-1 rule** developed by social scientist Kasley Killam, a leading expert in





social health and wellbeing. Think of the 5–3–1 rule as a kind of workout plan for your social health. Just like physical fitness, it's not about one intense session, it's about little and often. The goal is to gently build connection into your everyday routine.

- **FIVE** - Interact with five or more different people or groups every week. This could include a mix of friends, family, neighbours, and colleagues to keep your social network diverse.
- **THREE** - Nurture three or more close relationships. At least three times a month, engage in deeper conversations with people in your close circle to build meaningful connection.
- **ONE** - Spend one hour a day connecting meaningfully. Dedicate about one hour daily to connection, whether in one go or through small interactions.

3. Ask participants to quickly decide **one connection area (5, 3, or 1)** that they'd like to strengthen, based on what feels most beneficial to them.

Remind them of the 5-3-1 descriptions:

- **Weekly: Five or more different people or groups every week (diverse connections)**
e.g. plan a mix of coffee chats, calls, or in-person visits with varied people in your network.
- **Monthly: Three or more close relationships (deeper connections)**
e.g. prioritise focused conversations with close friends or family to deepen your bonds.
- **Daily: One-hour social interaction (regular connections)**
e.g. chat with a neighbour, speak to a colleague during your lunch break, or phone a loved one.





4. Ask participants to pair up to build their personal plans to implement the 5-3-1 framework, using the following questions as prompts:
 - **What do you already enjoy doing that connects you with other people, and how could you do more of it?**
e.g. allow more time for a chat with people I meet when I go out to the local shops to increase my '1'.
 - **What new things would you like to try to help you connect with other people?**
e.g. find a [local group](#) of people with a shared interest or passion to support my '5'.
 - **How can you stack the connection habit with something you already do?**
e.g. when I'm driving or walking to work, I'll call someone from my '3'.
 - How can you make it easier and remind yourself to do it?
 - e.g. text someone from your '3' to find out what time they're free and set a reminder on your phone
5. Bring the group back together to share their plans and the small actions they will commit to this week to increase social connection.

Remind them that the most effective way to stay connected is through small, regular actions. Building sticky habits means choosing simple actions that are easy to start, easy to repeat, and easy to fit into real life.

Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing

Want to find out more?

Useful resources and further learning

Small changes can make a big difference to how we feel as we age and there are lots of great free resources available to help support healthy habits and wellbeing.

Whether you want to move more, eat smarter, support your brain health, improve hydration, strengthen social connection, or simply feel inspired to try something new, there are lots of excellent free resources and sources of support available to help you take the next step.

Dip in, explore, and see what works for you. Sometimes the smallest ideas can lead to lasting positive change.

- **[The five pillars of ageing well](#)** Find out more about the Open University's work on ageing well that underpins this toolkit: nutrition, hydration, physical activity, cognitive stimulation, and social connection. The resource highlights how small lifestyle choices made throughout life can help improve wellbeing, independence, and quality of life as we age.



Eat smarter!

- **[NHS Eatwell Guide](#)** A practical guide to building a healthy, balanced diet, including food groups, portion guidance, and simple healthy eating tips for everyday life.
- **[NHS Inform: Healthy balanced diet](#)** Easy-to-understand advice on nutrition, healthy eating patterns, and how small dietary changes can support long-term health and wellbeing.
- **[British Nutrition Foundation](#)** Evidence-based nutrition information, healthy eating resources, recipes, and practical advice on food, hydration, and wellbeing.
- **[NHS Better Health](#)** Free NHS support, with a quiz to boost your motivation, tips, recipes, and tools to help build healthier eating, movement, sleep, and wellbeing habits.
- **[Olive Tomato](#)** A dietitian-led site exploring the traditional Mediterranean diet with practical recipes and insights into longevity, healthy ageing, and lifestyle habits.



Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing

Want to find out more?



Feel great, hydrate!

- **[British Nutrition Foundation: Hydration](#)** Clear information on why hydration matters, signs of dehydration, and practical tips for drinking enough fluids throughout the day.
- **[NHS: Water, drinks and hydration](#)** Advice on healthy drink choices, hydration needs, caffeine, sugary drinks, and staying hydrated as we age.
- **[British Dietetic Association: Fluid facts](#)** Practical hydration guidance from registered dietitians, including how fluid needs can change with age, activity, and health.



Let's keep moving!

- **[NHS Fitness Studio](#)** Free online exercise videos including strength, cardio, yoga, Pilates, and low-impact workouts suitable for different fitness levels.
- **[NHS Better Health: Get active](#)** Simple advice and activity ideas to help people move more, build fitness gradually, and make physical activity part of everyday life.
- **[We Are Undefeatable](#)** Inspiring resources and realistic movement ideas designed to help people build confidence and find enjoyable ways to stay active.
- **[Age UK: Exercise and physical activity](#)** Accessible information about movement, strength, balance, mobility, and staying active in midlife and later life.
- **[Movement snacks](#)** Encourages short bursts of movement throughout the day with simple movement snacks designed to fit around work and daily routines.



Healthy brains!

- **[NHS Every Mind Matters](#)** Practical NHS wellbeing support with personalised tips for stress, sleep, anxiety, mood, and mental wellbeing.
- **[The Open University](#)** Free and flexible lifelong learning opportunities to support curiosity, mental stimulation, confidence, and ongoing personal development.
- **[TED Talks](#)** Inspiring talks on psychology, wellbeing, brain health, ageing, learning, resilience, and behaviour change.
- **[Brain Health Scotland](#)** Evidence-based advice and tools to help protect brain health and reduce dementia risk through lifestyle, learning, movement, and social connection.
- **[Alzheimer's Society: Brain health](#)** Information about lifestyle factors linked to brain health, including movement, nutrition, sleep, social connection, and mental stimulation.

Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing

Want to find out more?



Let's connect!

- **[NHS Inform: Social anxiety self-help guide](#)** A guided self-help resource using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to help people understand and manage social anxiety.
- **[Mind: Loneliness and mental health](#)** Advice and support for understanding loneliness, building connection, and improving emotional wellbeing.
- **[Action for Happiness](#)** A global movement sharing practical actions, calendars, courses, and community ideas focused on kindness, connection, happiness, and wellbeing.
- **[Meetup](#)** A platform for finding local groups, activities, hobbies, and events to help people build social connection and meet others with shared interests.
- **[Campaign to End Loneliness](#)** Research, resources, and practical ideas focused on reducing loneliness and strengthening social connection across communities.
- **[The Silver Line](#)** A free confidential helpline and friendship service providing conversation and support for older adults experiencing loneliness or isolation.
- **[Centre for ageing better](#)** A rich collection of research, guides, reports, and practical resources focused on healthy ageing, work, community, and wellbeing inequalities.

More inspiration and support!.

- **[Ageing Well Public Talk Series](#)** Explore seven years of inspiring recorded talks, expert discussions and practical advice on how to support healthier, happier ageing through everyday lifestyle choices.
- **[It's All Academic – How to Age Well Podcast Episode](#)** An engaging podcast episode exploring the science of ageing well, with expert insights and practical ideas for supporting wellbeing at every stage of life.
- **[Rethinking Ageing: from crisis to prevention](#)** Challenges the idea of ageing as a crisis and highlights how prevention, self-care and small lifestyle changes can help people live healthier for longer.
- **[The Conversation – Are you ageing well?](#)** Take a simple five-part quiz to reflect on your habits and discover practical ways to support your wellbeing and future quality of life.
- **[AgeWell with Bridgit Care](#)** A friendly online hub offering personalised support, wellbeing tips and local resources to help people stay healthy, independent and connected.
- **[Intergenerational Live Well Together Toolkit](#)** A practical toolkit packed with activities and ideas to bring generations together, strengthen connections and support healthier communities.

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Small changes, big impact: rethinking wellbeing

A toolkit to support ageing well in midlife and beyond

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