



**TAKE FIVE
TO AGE WELL**

My Eat Well Diary

A personalised planner
for healthy eating in
later life.



**The Open
University**



In partnership with

Who we are



The Open University is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Since it began in 1969, the Open University has taught more than 2.3 million students worldwide.

In 2021, an assessment exercise for university research rated more than three quarters of Open University research as 4 or 3 star – the highest ratings available.

The Open University's commitment to research and societal impact was also recognised, with 82% of its research impact assessed to be world leading or internationally excellent.



Age UK is the country's leading charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life. **Age UK's vision is for a world where every older person feels included and valued.** The charity's mission is that together, we provide crucial support for older people and drive change locally, nationally, and internationally.

The Age UK network also includes Age Scotland, Age Cymru and Age NI. This guide has been developed by Age Scotland and the Open University.

Introduction

You may be aware of some of the ways you can improve your wellbeing and health but perhaps you find it hard to put what you know into practice.

The good news is that studies have found we can use our tendency to do things by habit to help us take better care of ourselves. Your habits are the things you do regularly and almost without thinking, like brushing your teeth.

This booklet will make you more aware of your eating habits. It explains how to use that awareness to ensure your body has the nourishment it needs for daily wellbeing and long-term health.

While life's challenges can't all be fixed with different habits, there will be opportunities in your daily routines for small changes that boost wellbeing over time. **This guide will help you to identify and make the most of these.**

→ **For advice on other factors that can affect our wellbeing, such as finance, housing and caring, call:**
England: Age UK – Freephone 0800 678 1602
Scotland: Age Scotland – Freephone 0800 12 44 222
Northern Ireland: Age NI – Freephone 0808 808 7575
Wales: Age Cymru – 0300 303 44 98 (charged at local rate)

About nutrition in later life

A healthy diet will support the growth, repair, and maintenance your body tissues, help keep your body at the right temperature, improve your body's ability to fight off illness, and boost your brain health.

A healthy meal includes a combination of lean protein, fruits and vegetables, whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat pasta) and dairy (milk or its alternatives). Foods high in salt and / or sugar are best eaten infrequently and in small amounts. Although some fats are bad – generally those in highly processed foods – other fats are healthy when eaten as part of a balanced diet. Good sources include oily fish, nuts, avocado, flaxseeds, and tofu.

Having unplanned weight loss, feeling weaker than usual, or becoming unwell more often can be signs you are undernourished. There can be other causes too, such as side effects from medications. Speak to your GP to have your health checked.

If neglected, muscles decline with age. But a higher protein intake, plus daily physical activity, can help us maintain and even build muscle. Aim to have protein in every meal. Good sources include eggs, fish, lean meat, beans, chickpeas, lentils, mushrooms, and tofu.

Please note that the advice in this booklet is general. For advice tailored to specific health conditions, speak to your GP or another relevant medical practitioner.



How to use the diary

In the blank diary, record what you eat each day for a week. You can also record how you feel through the day. **What, when, and how much (or little) you eat can change how you feel – for instance research has found that Trans fats, a type of fat often found in processed foods, can bring your mood down.** The diary will help you to become more aware of these changes.

At the end of the week, look at your completed diary and identify what, if anything, you would like to change in your routines for better nutrition. You can then use the planning template to write a plan that will help you achieve your goal.

When reading your diary, imagine you are doing so as a supportive friend. Don't judge yourself weak if you notice unhealthy choices. Psychologists have found that relying on willpower to reach health goals is a common mistake. This is because motivation comes and goes, and marketing and convenience are constant temptations in our society. The beauty of healthy habits is that, once set, they happen without the need for willpower.

→ **The Age UK network partners offer information and resources complementary to this guide. Call the helplines on page 3 or visit:**

Age UK: www.ageuk.org.uk

Age Scotland: www.agescotland.org.uk

Age NI: www.ageni.org

Age Cymru: www.agecymru.wales

My Eat Well Diary: Monday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Dine mindfully

If you are distracted during meals, for instance because of your TV or a smart phone, this can make the experience less enjoyable, and unhealthy choices more likely.

Declutter and set the table, even if alone. Create ambience, e.g., with a candle. Reflect on how your meal has reached you, and give thanks. Take a slow breath before each bite. Eat slowly. Pause to notice and enjoy tastes, textures, colours, smells, and sounds.

My Eat Well Diary: Tuesday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – A hearty, healthy breakfast

Instead of a breakfast fry-up, try grilling, and swap white bread for wholemeal. Poached eggs (in place of fried) are nutritious and delicious. Boil water in a pan, stir a 'whirlpool' with a slotted spoon, crack in an egg, wait for three minutes, then fish it out with the spoon.

Before bed, place 50g of rolled oats in a bowl. Add 100ml of water or milk, and a pinch of cinnamon. Refrigerate. In the morning, add berries, honey, yoghurt, nut butter or another topping as preferred.

My Eat Well Diary: Wednesday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Eat the rainbow

Studies suggest that the colours in fruits and vegetables indicate different benefits. Orange and yellow (butternut squash, lemon, etc.) may improve heart and eye health. Green (courgette, avocados, etc.) may lower the risk of some cancers. Blue and purple (aubergine, beetroot, etc.) may help protect our cells. Red (tomatoes, peppers, etc.) may reduce blood pressure and cholesterol. White and beige (parsnips, mushrooms, etc.) may aid heart and muscle health.

Try to eat foods with a range of colours every day.

My Eat Well Diary: Thursday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Batch cook

Many soups, sauces, chilli, and curries freeze well, so if you have a freezer, make extra portions to enjoy when you don't feel motivated to cook. Set your freezer to -18°C . Package meals in plastic food containers or bags, and label's what's inside, when it was frozen, and cooking instructions (if needed). You could record what's in your freezer in a notebook – many foods last at least three months, but none forever. Defrost your meals thoroughly in the fridge before reheating and use within 24 hours once defrosted.

My Eat Well Diary: Friday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – A daily snack box

Chocolate and other sugary snacks can be tempting, but also make us hungrier later, and more sluggish.

Snacks such as fruit, yoghurts, nuts, oat or rice cakes, and wholegrain cereal bars can make us feel energised, and fuel the brain and body. If you are partial to snacking, try putting together a daily snack box containing a variety of healthy snacks. Anytime you feel peckish reach for your snack box – but once it runs out, that's it!

My Eat Well Diary: Saturday
















Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Eat little and often

Eating smaller portions, more often, is good for you! When we eat a big meal, we burden our digestive system, and our blood sugar levels fluctuate dramatically throughout the day.

Smaller, more regular meals can also increase variety in your diet. Try halving your breakfast and eating the second half an hour later. If you have a sandwich for lunch, halve it and eat one half with some fruit. Eat the second half an hour later, with a carrot or some soup.

My Eat Well Diary: Sunday

Time	My food choices	How I feel (Tick one)
Breakfast		  
Between breakfast and lunch		  
Lunch		  
Between lunch and dinner		  
Dinner and up to bedtime		  

★ Suggestion for the day – Adjust your eating times

Research suggests that when you eat matters. Your digestive system needs time to rest each day, and a big meal close to bedtime may disrupt sleep.

Try waiting an hour after waking before breakfast, having dinner earlier, and avoiding after-dinner snacks. Do you notice any changes in how you feel? **Please note, this is about eating the same amount over less time. If you are on medication or have any concerns, you should speak to your GP first.**

Now read your completed My Eat Well Diary

Look for patterns in what and when you are eating. These are likely to be your habits. Use your notes on how you felt to identify eating habits you think may be relevant to your health and wellbeing.

For each habit, write down what you notice about it. For example, does it happen when you are bored? For healthy habits what has helped you stick with them? Circle the colour that says best what you want to happen with each habit:

To **STOP IT** , to **SWAP IT**  for a healthier habit, or to **STEP UP**  and do more of it. For example:

Habit	I notice that...	What I want (Circle one)
Having fruit and nuts with my breakfast.	I feel good and energised.	  
Having chocolate biscuits with every cuppa.	I feel sluggish half an hour or so after.	  
Eating dinner with the TV on.	I don't really notice what I'm eating or enjoy my food.	  

My eating habits

Habit	I notice that...	What I want (Circle one)
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +
		! <> +

Write a plan for better eating

You should now know more about your eating habits and have an idea of what you might like to change for your wellbeing and health.

Here are tips based on psychology research that will help you write a plan with a better chance of success.

1. Start small and make it easy

If your change in routine is small and easy to do, you are more likely to stick with it whether your day is going well or not. For instance, you could keep tins of nutritious chickpeas or beans (not baked beans) in a kitchen cupboard, so you can easily add these to soups and salads. Once a healthy eating habit has stuck, you can gradually introduce further changes.

2. Make use of habits you have

Our habits happen when we notice something, without being fully aware, that triggers us to behave in a certain way. So, for example, when you hear the doorbell, you might find yourself answering the door without having consciously made the decision.

We can use habits we already have as reminders for new ones. For instance, if you always make a hot drink before bed, try making overnight oats while the kettle boils, so they are ready for the next morning. Eventually you will find that you're doing this automatically.

3. Look for triggers around you

You may find triggers for your habits around your home, and in other places you routinely spend time. For instance, a biscuit tin on the kitchen worktop can be too tempting, so put it somewhere of sight. To start a healthier habit, try

placing things you'd like to eat more of in plain view, such as a jar of nuts or a fruit bowl.

4. Make habits harder, or easier

To break a habit, make it harder or less pleasant. For instance, to avoid evening snacking, brush your teeth just after dinner so that if you grab a sugary snack, it won't taste so good. You can also make healthy habits easier. For instance, you could buy bags of pre-chopped vegetables for batch cooking healthy soups and stews.

5. Make it social

Healthy habits are easier to keep if they are social. If you have supportive family or friends, tell them about your healthy eating goal and involve them if they are willing. For instance, if you regularly meet a friend for lunch, you could start a challenge together to try a different tasty and healthy menu option each time.

6. Make it motivating

Keep a record of every time you succeed in changing your routine. You could use a notebook, calendar or, if you like and use IT, an app. Watching your progress over time can be motivational.

Give yourself an immediate and appropriate reward each time you succeed. For instance, rewarding yourself for healthy eating with cake isn't helpful, but you could keep aside money you save by not buying biscuits and put it towards the cost of a fun outing.

Don't worry if you falter now and then. Studies show that won't matter, as long as you get back to your plan as soon as possible. It will take a month, and possibly longer, for your new habit to become easy and automatic, depending on how ambitious your goal is. But once your habit is set, you won't need to use willpower to keep it up.

My plan for healthy eating habits

What I will do differently in my routine

When I will do it, where, and for how long

What I will do to help me succeed (e.g., use existing habits, involve friends, or adjust my surroundings)

How I will record each time I successfully change my routine (e.g., with a notebook, calendar, or app)

How I will reward myself for each success



Take Five to Age Well offers small, simple steps to a longer, healthier life. This May, join a UK-wide community making a small change in daily routine for better ageing.

Your commitment will be to choose and keep up a healthy change, or changes, for a month (or three months if you are taking part with others as a group). We'll support you to turn that change into a habit for long-term health and wellbeing.

Why make the commitment?

Ageing is not optional, but we have choices about how we age. From our 30s, we start to lose muscle, our metabolism slows, and our skin begins to line. Despite these unavoidable changes, there are simple habits that can help keep us strong, sharp, independent, and feeling good. **Take Five to Age Well** will empower you to adopt these habits over a month-long period.

There are more than 16 million people in the UK over the age of 60 and rising. By committing to age better you will become a role model for current and future generations. There are five areas in which you can choose to make a change – all evidence-based to give you the opportunity to really take charge of your ageing health.

They are:



Eat: adjusting what, when and how much you eat can boost your health and wellbeing.



Connect: making and maintaining social connections is essential for health and wellbeing.



Drink: hydration, and what you drink, are key to healthy ageing.



Move: exercise boosts body and mind.



Think: using your brain better can help you stay sharp.

Take Five to Age Well is an initiative of the Open University in collaboration with partner organisations across all four UK nations. Participants will be invited to contribute to follow-up research, to help us understand how people create and follow up new routines for health, with the aim of informing future support for healthy ageing.

The initiative's five action areas are based on the Five Pillars for Ageing model that underpins the Open University's Ageing Well Public Talk Series.

Both the model and talks have been developed by Dr Jitka Vseteckova. The talks are designed to be easily accessible to all, with older people involved in their preparation and featuring frequently as co-presenters.

Visit www.open.ac.uk and search for 'ageing well public talks' to find out more.



How helpful was this diary?

We would welcome your feedback:

takefive@open.ac.uk

For more information, please visit:

wels.open.ac.uk/take5

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