



**TAKE FIVE
TO AGE WELL**

My Get Active Diary

A personalised planner
for being physically active
in later life.



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 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 habits regarding physical activity. It explains how to use that awareness to ensure you are getting the physical activity you need 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 physical activity in later life

Physical activity is any body movement that works your muscles and requires more energy than resting. So, not only sports and exercise classes, but also activities such as gardening and housework.

Regular physical activity boosts mood and mental wellbeing, helps keep body and mind healthy, and helps people to live well with a range of long-term health conditions. The recommendation for older adults is to do half an hour of an activity where you breathe more heavily, but can still chat, on most days of the week. For instance, cycling or brisk walking. Alternatively, 15 minutes on most days of sport, jogging, or other activities during which talking is hard.

You can spread physical activity across the day, for example with three ten-minute walks. Any activity beats none, as moving even a bit more can make a big difference if you are mostly physically inactive.

Being physically active can help you to stay independent and doing the things you enjoy as you age. We slowly lose muscle and bone strength from our 30s, a process that speeds up in later life. Yet we can build strength throughout life by doing activities such as yoga and gym workouts, twice a week or more. Similarly, activities including dancing, Tai Chi and bowls boost balance, which otherwise worsens from our 40s onwards.



How to use the diary

In the blank diary, record what and how much physical activity you do each day for a week. You can also record how you feel throughout the day. **What, and how much (or little) you move can change how you feel – for instance, research has found that 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day almost halves the likelihood of depression.**

At the end of the week, look at your completed diary and identify what, if anything, you would like to change in your routines to make you more physically active. 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 Get Active Diary: Monday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Get out of your chair

Frequently sitting for long periods without moving accelerates ageing, even if you exercise. Take every opportunity to stand up and move. Even gentle activity such as dusting can improve your overall health.

If you cannot move around easily, aim to stand up at least once every waking hour. Enjoy a stretch and roll your shoulders. You could set an alarm clock or use a mobile phone alarm to remind you. Try standing up to take phone calls. If you use a wheelchair, some light seated exercises are a great way to break up long periods of sitting still.

My Get Active Diary: Tuesday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Get out

Being outdoors is hugely beneficial for health and wellbeing. In sunlight our bodies make Vitamin D, which helps keep bones, teeth, and muscles healthy (a supplement is advised in winter). Contact with nature relieves stress and helps with brain health. And getting outdoors early in the day helps us enjoy good sleep.

Try a daily walk in the park, or potter in the garden. **Call your nation's Age UK network partner helpline on page 3 for help finding outdoor activities in your area.** In poor weather, try to get at least some fresh air, even if that's standing and having a stretch at your front door.

My Get Active Diary: Wednesday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Learn something new

Being a beginner is good for the brain, and skills and activities that involve both thinking and moving are especially beneficial. Dancing and Tai Chi are great examples, or any sport where there's lots to learn.

Almost every area will have a few clubs or classes that boost body and brain, and welcome beginners.

Ask in your local sports or community centre, or library. You can also call your nation's Age UK network partner helpline on page 3.

My Get Active Diary: Thursday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Make the world your gym

Opportunities for movement are everywhere. When unpacking shopping, do a light workout lifting bags and cans. While the kettle boils, hold onto the kitchen worktop and slowly lift and lower your heels. When getting out of a chair avoid pushing up with your arms, if you can, to give your leg muscles a work-out.

Take the stairs where you can. Walk instead of driving if possible. Extend a regular walking route, or vary it, to include a hill. Get off the bus a stop early and walk the rest of the way home.

My Get Active Diary: Friday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Play

If there are young children in your life, playing with them is great all round for your wellbeing. Make it as physically active as you can, perhaps sharing with them the playground games you remember from childhood. Take them to the local play park and join in, if you are able, instead of just watching.

If you don't have young children in your life – play anyway! Challenge a friend to a game of crazy golf. Throw a frisbee. Play table tennis. Go bowling. Or just clown around. **Where movement is fun, not a chore, doing it routinely need not take any willpower at all.**

My Get Active Diary: Saturday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Dance

You don't have to go to a class to dance. Simply play one or more favourite songs at home, and dance along. Or get up and move whenever a danceable theme-tune plays for a TV show you enjoy watching.

How do you feel? Research shows dance is a mood booster, and it improves brain and body health.

You could try dancing on your own, or with a friend or family member. If this feels awkward, know that studies have shown dancing together can make people feel closer to each other.

My Get Active Diary: Sunday

Time	What physical activities I do	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		☺ ☹ ☞
Late morning		☺ ☹ ☞
Early afternoon		☺ ☹ ☞
Late afternoon		☺ ☹ ☞
Evening		☺ ☹ ☞

★ Suggestion for the day – Make it social

When arranging to see family or friends, invite them to do something active with you, such as a walk. If you know someone of a similar fitness level who would like to be more physically active, plan activities with them. This will encourage you to follow through on your plan.

Call your nation's Age UK network partner helpline on page 3 for support finding social opportunities to be more physically active. Volunteering in your community may also be beneficial, for instance, helping in a charity shop can involve light exercise.

Now read your completed My Get Active Diary

Look for patterns in your physical activity (and inactivity) through each day. These are likely to be your habits. Use your notes to identify habits you think may be relevant to your wellbeing and health.

For each habit, write down what you notice about it. For example, do you always use the car to go to a shop that's within walking distance? For healthy habits, what has helped you stick with them? Circle the picture 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)
A morning walk to buy a newspaper	I feel good and energised.	  
Taking the car for short journeys.	I'm not getting much fresh air or exercise during the day.	  
Watching TV most nights, not moving.	I feel a bit stiff and sluggish.	  

My physical activity habits

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

Write a plan for getting more active

You should now know more about your physical activity 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 example, if you would like to do daily yoga, your goal could be to roll out a yoga mat first thing. Once that's become a habit, it should be easier to build up to your desired amount of yoga.

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, while brushing your teeth, try standing on one leg, then switching to the other, to improve your balance. Eventually you should find that you are 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 coffee machine beside your bed might encourage you to lie-in for longer than you'd planned.

To start a healthier habit, you could place reminders to move in plain view. For instance, an ironing board near your TV might prompt you to stand and iron while you are watching your programmes.

4. Make habits harder, or easier

To break a habit, make it harder or less pleasant. For instance, you could keep the remote control beside the TV, so you must get up to switch it on or change channel. You can also make healthy habits easier. For example, if you would like a morning swim, pack your swim bag the night before and put it by the front door.

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 goal to get more active and involve them if they are willing. For instance, if you regularly meet a friend for lunch, you could add a walk together before or after.

Look for activities in your area that involve some movement. These are often free and in a central location that is easy to get to. It's very likely you'll find people there who have joined to meet new people as well as to move, so you should fit right in.

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, you could reward yourself for walking instead of driving or taking the bus by setting the money saved aside, to go towards a new item or outfit for your physical activity.

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 more physically active 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., involve friends, use existing habits, 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.



TAKE FIVE TO AGE WELL

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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