



**TAKE FIVE  
TO AGE WELL**

# My Hydration Diary

A personalised planner  
for staying hydrated 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 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 habits around hydration. It explains how to use that awareness to ensure you are taking in enough water 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.**

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➔ **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)**

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## About hydration in later life

**The easiest thing you can do to feel better today is to keep your body hydrated.** Around two thirds of your body is water, and you won't feel as well as you could if you don't keep your water levels right throughout the day.

Being properly hydrated helps your body to:

- maintain the right temperature
- regulate blood pressure
- flush out toxins
- support your immune system
- digest your food
- circulate oxygen and nutrients
- process medications (if taken)

**National guidance is that you should drink around 6–8 glasses of fluid a day (roughly 1.5 to 2 litres).**

This should ideally be water, but many drinks and water-rich foods also contribute. You will need extra fluids if you are in a warm environment, are taking exercise that makes you sweat, or if you are unwell.

**In later life, our bodies can become less able to tell us that we are thirsty.** This diary aims to raise your awareness of whether and how your daily routine is keeping you hydrated, and to empower you to look after your hydration needs.



## How to use the diary

In the blank diary, record your fluid intake each day for a week. You can also record how you feel through the day. **What and how much you drink will affect how you feel – for instance, signs of dehydration include irritability and headaches.** 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 need to change in your routines to ensure you stay hydrated. 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](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

**Age Scotland: [www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

**Age NI: [www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)**

**Age Cymru: [www.agecymru.wales](http://www.agecymru.wales)**

## My Hydration Diary: Monday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Eat water-rich foods

Drinks aren't the only way to get fluid into your body. There are lots of foods that are high in water. These include leafy greens, melon, tomatoes, jelly, custard, milk, and yoghurt. Soups and stews can also help you stay hydrated. You can include in your diary a note of any water-rich foods you eat.

## My Hydration Diary: Tuesday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Water everywhere

Fill a water jug or bottle and put it somewhere obvious so you have a visual reminder to drink. You could put jugs or bottles in more than one room in your home. You could also buy a water bottle with markers that suggest how much to drink through the day. If you find it boring to drink just water, try adding a twist of citrus fruit or mint leaves.

## My Hydration Diary: Wednesday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Check your wee

Clear or very light-yellow wee is a sign that you are hydrated. But if it's a darker shade of yellow, you may need more fluid. Some people worry that drinking more will cause them problems getting to the toilet in time. However, limiting fluid intake is likely to make incontinence worse as it reduces the bladder's capacity. **If you are affected by incontinence, speak to your GP, or pharmacist, who can help you manage this.**

## My Hydration Diary: Thursday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Ease off the caffeine

Caffeinated drinks contribute to your fluid intake, but at high levels they can dehydrate you. In moderation tea and coffee may have some health benefits, although drinking them in the afternoon or evening can result in a poor night's sleep. Try switching to decaffeinated tea or coffee, or herbal and fruit teas, after lunch. Note that green tea, and some other alternatives to black tea, also contain caffeine.

## My Hydration Diary: Friday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Mind your alcohol units

Alcohol makes you wee more and, in excess it can cause dehydration. If you enjoy alcohol, drink water alongside it, or try alcohol-free alternatives. **UK health advice is for adults to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week (about 6 pints of 4% strength beer, or 6 medium glasses of 13% wine).** Have a few alcohol-free days each week and spread drinking over the other days. Be aware that our bodies become less able to process alcohol as we age.
















## My Hydration Diary: Saturday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		😊 😐 😞
Between breakfast and lunch		😊 😐 😞
Lunch		😊 😐 😞
Between lunch and dinner		😊 😐 😞
Dinner and up to bedtime		😊 😐 😞

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Squeeze the juice

Sugary soft drinks can dehydrate you and fool your brain into thinking your thirst has been quenched. Natural fruit juices, while having some nutritional benefits, can also be surprisingly high in sugar, as can smoothies. If you enjoy soft drinks, try sparkling water instead, with a splash of juice, sliced citrus, or even some fresh herbs.

## My Hydration Diary: Sunday

Time	My fluid intake	How I feel (Tick one)
Before and at breakfast		  
Between breakfast and lunch		  
Lunch		  
Between lunch and dinner		  
Dinner and up to bedtime		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Drink milk

Drinking milk, and plant-based milk alternatives, can help you stay hydrated. You may have read general health advice to switch from full fat to semi-skimmed or skimmed milk. But some people lose appetite as they get older, in which case full-fat milk can help them stay nourished. If drinking plant-based milk alternatives, choose ones that are fortified with calcium and other vitamins and minerals.

## Now read your completed My Hydration Diary

Look for patterns in when and what you are drinking (or not drinking). These are likely to be your habits. Use your notes on how you felt to identify habits that 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)
Soup, bread, and water at some lunches.	Making a big pot twice a week helps me do it.	  
A strong coffee after dinner.	I feel a little anxious in the evening.	  
Wine after dinner at weekends.	I wake less refreshed the next morning.	  

## My hydration habits

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

## Write a plan for better hydration

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

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 reduce your caffeine intake, you could swap an after-dinner coffee for a decaffeinated alternative. Then, once the habit has stuck, you might gradually find alternatives for all caffeinated drinks you have after lunch.

### 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 would like to drink more water throughout the day, pour a glass of water each time you make a cup of coffee or tea. 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, cans of fizzy juice in the fridge may tempt you, so put them somewhere out of sight. To start a healthier habit, you might place things you'd like to drink more of in plain view, such as a jug of water.

#### 4. Make habits harder, or easier

To break a habit, make it harder or less pleasant. For instance, it's more effort to get fizzy juice if cans are in a room outside of the kitchen instead of in the fridge. That gives you thinking time in which to decide whether you really want that drink. You can also make healthy habits easier. For example, you could prepare and freeze extra portions of soup to make nutritious and hydrating ready meals for when you don't feel like cooking.

#### 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 hydration goal and involve them if they are willing. For instance, if you regularly meet a friend for afternoon coffee, you could start a challenge together to try a healthy decaffeinated alternative each time. If you are part of a club that has refreshments, ask for water to be made available alongside teas and coffees.

#### 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 drinking with a glass of wine won't be helpful, but you could keep aside the money you save by not buying wine 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 hydration 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](http://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](mailto:takefive@open.ac.uk)**

For more information, please visit:

**[wels.open.ac.uk/take5](https://wels.open.ac.uk/take5)**

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