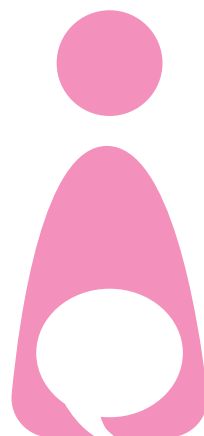




**TAKE FIVE
TO AGE WELL**

My Being Social Diary

A personalised planner
for social connection 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 regarding social connection. It explains how to use that awareness to ensure you are getting the social contact 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 social connection in later life

In 1938, academics at Harvard University began following the lives of hundreds of boys and young men, rich and poor, to learn what helps people to thrive.

The major finding of this research, which now spans four generations, is that good relationships are key for a long, healthy, and happy life.

Many other studies back that conclusion. When we feel generally close to other people, and that we belong to a group, this makes us feel better and slows the ageing process. We all need social connection – although we may need it in different ways, depending on how introverted or extroverted we are.

But later life can change how socially connected we are. Retirement may bring an end to work friendships and regular social interactions. We are more likely to experience loss in later life, and to find our ability to socialise constrained by disabilities, health issues, and / or changes in income. On top of this, should we become lonely, stigma and fear of rejection can be barriers to us reaching out for support.

We can also simply get out of the habit of socialising, something the Covid-19 pandemic made clear. **Yet no matter our circumstances and personality, we can all take steps towards having more, and more fulfilling, social connections.**



How to use the diary

In the blank diary, record what and how much social contact you have over each day for a week. You can also record how you feel throughout the day. **Studies suggest that positive social contact floods the brain with mood boosting and stress busting chemicals.**

At the end of the week, look at your completed diary and identify any parts of your routine where you would like to improve your social connections. 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.

→ **If you feel very lonely right now, the following helplines offer support:**

UK Wide: The Silver Line – Freephone 0800 470 8090, 24 hours a day, 365 days year.

Scotland: Age Scotland – Freephone 0800 12 44 222, 9am–5pm Mon to Fri.

Northern Ireland: Age NI – Freephone 0808 808 7575, 9am–5pm Mon to Fri.

Wales: Age Cymru – 0300 303 44 98 (charged at local rate), 9am–4pm Mon to Fri.

My Being Social Diary: Monday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Talk to strangers

It may seem obvious that talking to a close friend or family member will make you feel good. But studies show that chatting to strangers can also boost our wellbeing and is not nearly as awkward as we expect.

So, smile at people you pass in the park, at the bus stop, in a shop or café, or delivering your groceries. If they smile back, try starting a conversation. A note of caution – the human need for social connection can be preyed on by fraudsters. **Call your nation's Age UK network partner helpline on page 3 for advice on avoiding scams.**

My Being Social Diary: Tuesday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Practice kindness

Research suggests we can train ourselves to be kinder, and doing so helps us connect with others, and be healthier and happier. From volunteering to offering a cuppa or sharing a smile, studies show that giving time to help others will also help you.

Ask yourself, when did I last give someone a genuine compliment? Studies have found giving compliments boosts the wellbeing of both parties and feels far less awkward than we may anticipate. Think about how you might compliment someone you value, give it a go, and see what happens.

My Being Social Diary: Wednesday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Meet your neighbours

Research shows that 1 in 6 people don't even know their neighbours' names, but there are plenty of benefits to being sociable with your neighbours. Studies have found that where people know their neighbours, they feel safer and less lonely. It also contributes to feelings of usefulness.

So, today, why not invite a neighbour over for a chat or to go for a walk? If that feels too much, maybe try a simple conversation in the street. Be gently curious about their life to get to know them better.

My Being Social Diary: Thursday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		😊 😐 😞
Late morning		😊 😐 😞
Early afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Late afternoon		😊 😐 😞
Evening		😊 😐 😞

★ Suggestion for the day – Be a joiner

Research shows we can bond through shared activities such as movement (dance, fitness classes and other forms of physical activity), music (playing, listening, participating), food (cooking, eating, sharing knowledge) and more. Some studies suggest that activities where generations mix offer extra wellbeing benefits.

Call your nation's Age UK network partner helpline on page 3 for help finding social activities near you.

My Being Social Diary: Friday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		☺ ☹ ☐
Late morning		☺ ☹ ☐
Early afternoon		☺ ☹ ☐
Late afternoon		☺ ☹ ☐
Evening		☺ ☹ ☐

★ Suggestion for the day – Show gratitude

Research suggests that focusing regularly on what you feel grateful for in life lays the groundwork for better social connection. **Try writing daily, 1. a person you feel grateful to; 2. a pleasure you feel grateful for; and 3. something you are looking forward to.**

If there is a living person you feel especially grateful to, you could write them a 'thank you' letter. Be specific about what they did and how it helped you. Studies suggest that reading your letter aloud to them could powerfully deepen your bond, although this does carry risk, as you can't be certain how they will react.

My Being Social Diary: Saturday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		☺ ☹ ☐
Late morning		☺ ☹ ☐
Early afternoon		☺ ☹ ☐
Late afternoon		☺ ☹ ☐
Evening		☺ ☹ ☐

★ Suggestion for the day – Be aware of hearing loss

Hearing naturally worsens with age, making social situations more difficult. If you think you may need a hearing test, ask your GP to refer you to your local audiology department for a hearing test. Digital hearing aids are available free from the NHS, and new batteries and other maintenance for NHS hearing aids are also free.

For information and advice about hearing loss contact RNID through their website www.rnid.org.uk or call 0808 808 0123. Dial 18001 first to use Relay UK.

My Being Social Diary: Sunday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

★ Suggestion for the day – Look up an old friend

Scan your address book. Is there a friend with whom you've lost touch? You could call or write to them. Having a shared history may mean you are able to pick up where you left off without much effort.

If you, or a friend or family member, use social media, this may help you find and reconnect with old friends.










Sadly, the further we go into later life the greater the likelihood that we look up old friends only to learn of their death. Cruse Bereavement Support has a free helpline offering support dealing with loss: 0808 808 1677.

Now read your completed My Being Social Diary

Look for patterns in your social contact (or lack thereof) throughout each day. These are likely to be your habits. Use your notes on how you felt to help you identify habits relevant to your health and wellbeing.

For each habit, write down what you notice about it. For example, are you avoiding social situations due to hearing loss? For sociable 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)
A chat with the newsagent most mornings.	I feel good, she takes time to listen.	  
I don't speak to people I pass daily.	I feel a bit sad that I know so few people in my area.	  
I avoid going out when the weather is wet.	I can end up not seeing anyone for days at a time.	  

My social habits

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

Write a plan for being more socially connected

You should now know more about your social 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, over breakfast, jot down in a notebook who or what you feel grateful for in life, in just one or a few words.

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 routinely queue at the Post Office, you could aim to start a conversation with other people in the queue each time. Eventually you should find this happening automatically.

3. Look for triggers around you

Your habits can be triggered by items around your home, and in other places you routinely spend time. So, for example, you could remind yourself to look up old friends by putting your address book in plain view.

4. Make habits harder, or easier

To break a habit, make it harder or less pleasant. For instance, if you routinely watch daytime TV instead of going out and meeting people, you could take the batteries out of the TV remote control. You can still watch TV if you wish, but that extra step of replacing the batteries each time gives you more opportunity to consciously decide if TV is best for your wellbeing.

You can also make sociable habits easier. For example, if you often talk yourself out of going to a club you enjoy, arrange with friend from the club that you will call each other an hour or so before as a reminder and as an encouragement.

5. Use other healthy habits to make you more social

Supportive people can help you build healthy habits such as eating well and being physically active. This applies in reverse. For instance, healthy eating and exercise improve mood, which should make you feel more like socialising. **Call your nation's Age UK helpline on page 3 for information on keeping active, eating well and other health topics.**

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.

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 social 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 social 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 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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