



**November 2007**

**Key Points:**

- Replaces previous version dated November 2006
- Draws attention to importance of having eye checks annually

## **Staying healthy in later life**

This factsheet is aimed at people aged 60 and over.

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## **1. Introduction**

Growing older is inevitable but poor health in old age is not. It's never too late to think about adopting a healthier lifestyle. It can increase your chances of staying healthy and maintaining your independence.

Most people know this includes trying to:

- keep physically active;
- eat a 'healthy' diet;
- keep your weight within the normal range;
- give up smoking;
- drink sensibly.

Looking after your mental wellbeing is as important as taking care of your physical health. So be sure to make time for activities you enjoy and maybe think about taking up new ones.

This factsheet looks at two components of a healthy lifestyle - keeping physically active and eating a healthy diet. It tells you where to go if you want more information on this and other aspects of a healthy lifestyle. The importance of regular health checks, particularly eye checks, is also raised.

## **2. Keeping physically active**

### **Why is it important for our physical and mental wellbeing?**

Keeping active can help:

- reduce your risk of coronary artery disease, diabetes and stroke;
- reduce the likelihood of falls, which can result in a broken hip;
- you have a good appetite and keep your weight in the normal range;
- maintain regular bowel movements;
- you sleep better;
- you keep mobile and minimise discomfort if you have arthritis or Parkinson's disease;

- you cope with feelings of stress;

Evidence shows that regular exercise increases the release of chemicals in the brain that affect our mood and make us feel happier.

### **Are we doing enough to keep active?**

Research suggests that among over-50s, only 17% of women and 25% of men are sufficiently active to benefit their health. Research conducted in the late 1990s also suggested that 25% women and 7% men aged 70 – 74 do not have sufficient strength in their legs to get out of a chair without using their arms.<sup>1</sup>

Keeping physically active includes taking 'exercise' but there are plenty of day-to-day and social activities to help keep you physically active. You don't need to join an exercise class.

It is never too late to begin or to start being active again. **Greatest gains are achieved when someone with a very low level of activity is encouraged to become a little more active, more often.**

The aim is to build up to around 30 minutes on five or more days of the week. No need to think only in terms of a 30 minute session - two sessions of 15 minutes or three sessions of 10 minutes over the course of a day has similar benefit.

### **Why is it important to keep active as you get older?**

Physical activity can develop and improve:

- stamina;
- strength;
- flexibility and suppleness;
- balance and co-ordination.

These affect your ability to carry out every day activities, which are vital if you are to maintain your independence and sense of wellbeing. Having strong muscles, particularly in your legs, and good balance helps minimise the risk of falling. No single activity develops all these qualities, so it is important to vary your activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Physical activity in later life. Further analysis of the Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey and the Health Education Authority National Survey of Activity and Health. London :Health Education Authority.

## **Activities to promote stamina, strength, suppleness and balance**

### **Stamina**

Activities that improve stamina exercise your lungs and get your heart beating faster. They can help:

- control blood pressure;
- strengthen the bones in your spine and lower body;
- maintain a healthy weight by burning up excess calories;
- help you lose weight as part of a calorie controlled diet.

Swimming, walking briskly, walking up a gentle hill, climbing stairs, mowing the lawn and digging the garden will make your heart beat that bit faster.

If you are walking, aim for a pace that makes you feel warm and a little breathless but allows you to hold a conversation comfortably. As you get fitter, you will be able hold a conversation at an increased walking pace.

Activities that build stamina often make you feel tired, so are helpful if you have sleeping problems.

Walking, playing tennis and activities in an 'aerobics' class also provide what is known as 'weight bearing' exercise. This helps strengthen bones which is important in the prevention of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a condition in which bones become fragile and are more susceptible to breaking. See sections 3 and 6.

### **Strength**

Certain activities help strengthen and tone your muscles. Strong muscles:

- support your back;
- support the joints in your ankles and knees;
- help you maintain your balance when you stand up from a sitting position;
- help you to get up, should you fall down.

They help with daily tasks such as:

- getting out of the car or the bath or up out of a chair;
- climbing stairs;
- carrying a bag of shopping;
- holding a jar without dropping it;
- picking up your young grandchild;

Finding difficulty with such things is often the first sign that you are 'not as young as you were'.

Taking part in activities that are repeated a number of times and which tighten then relax muscles is the only way to slow down or reverse the loss of muscle and bone strength that occurs as a normal part of ageing. Muscles in your hands, arms, legs and back are particularly important.

Day to day things you could try include - getting up out of a chair (you push against the 'resistance' of the floor) then sitting down again. Don't do this more than a couple of times to start with and gradually build up the number of times you do it.

You could also make a point of getting up out of the chair to change the TV channel rather than always using the remote control.

Exercise classes often focus on activities that strengthen a range of muscles. These might include:

- pushing against an immovable object that provides 'resistance' such as a wall;
- lifting up then putting down something that is relatively heavy such as a bottle filled with sand or water. You should always start with a relatively light weight and build up gradually to something heavier. If doing this from a standing position, be sure to bend your knees so you don't strain your back.

### **Flexibility and suppleness**

Activities that involve stretching muscles in your back, neck, arms, hands or legs can improve their flexibility.

This will help you to:

- reach up to get something off a shelf;
- look over your shoulder while driving;
- take a sweater on and off;
- fasten a zip at the back of your clothes.

Stretching exercises can strengthen lower back muscles and improve posture. They can also improve your balance.

You should be careful when deliberately stretching a muscle. Muscles can easily be damaged if they haven't been 'warmed' up adequately. It is also important not to over-stretch a muscle. Therefore if you would like to develop or improve flexibility, you may prefer to join an exercise class so that a qualified teacher can guide you.

### **Balance and co-ordination**

Strong muscles that respond quickly, help you maintain your balance. Good balance is important in the prevention of falls, which can result in a broken wrist or fractured hip.

There are special exercises that can help with balance and muscle tone. T'ai chi classes can be helpful but if you plan to join a t'ai chi or any exercise class, be sure your teacher is qualified.

Good co-ordination is encouraged by ball games such as table tennis, bowls, tennis, even playing 'catch'.

### **Value of typical activities and exercise**

<b>Activity/Exercise</b>	<b>Balance</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Stamina</b>	<b>Strength</b>
Brisk walking			☑	☑
Walking up a hill			☑	☑
Climbing stairs			☑	☑
Digging			☑	☑
Swimming			☑	☑
Cycling on the road or exercise bike	☑		☑	☑
Dancing	☑	☑	☑	☑
Playing bowls or golf	☑	☑	☑	

## **Exercise classes and local activity groups**

You don't have to join an exercise class or local activity group to keep physically active. However this can:

- be an opportunity to socialise and make new friends;
- act as a motivator and encourage you to build regular activity into your everyday life. By doing something regularly, it becomes a habit and ultimately something you would miss if you didn't do it!
- give you confidence that you are exercising safely and effectively.

Many local authorities and community centres arrange a wide variety of classes, including T'ai Chi, Pilates and yoga. Many run exercise classes especially for people over 50 or over 60. Contact your local community or leisure centre or library, for more information on these and other local groups. There may be walking groups, dancing classes, keep fit, swimming clubs and aqua aerobics. The important thing is to choose something you think you will enjoy.

In some parts of the country, GPs can offer exercise classes as an NHS referral, to people they believe would benefit. This may include patients at risk of, or diagnosed with, heart disease and diabetes. These classes have also proved effective for people with mild or moderate depression. You may like to ask your GP if such a service is available in your area.

**Ageing Well UK** is Age Concern's national programme promoting better health in later life. There are over 100 Ageing Well projects in the United Kingdom. Each works in a local partnership to promote healthy ageing. Older volunteers are recruited as Senior Health Mentors from within their local community. They are trained to give information and advice on healthy living and accident prevention to other older people. A range of activities - which may include exercise and walking groups, art projects, dancing classes - from ballroom to salsa - and opportunities to develop IT skills - is also organised. Free leaflets are also available. Contact your local Age Concern to see if there is a project near you or use the 'search' facility on the Age Concern website. See Section 7, Further information from Age Concern.

Over **350 Healthy Living Centres** have been set up in local communities in the UK with the help of Government and lottery funding. They are started in areas where the general health of the population is below average and people have difficulty accessing services.



Before deciding which activities to make available, each local community is asked what would help them to live a healthier lifestyle. As a result, activities that will encourage people to keep physically active and healthy eating initiatives such as cookery classes and food co-ops are being introduced.

The '***Walking the way to health initiative***' is supported by the British Heart Foundation and Natural England. There are currently around 350 health walk schemes, catering for people of all ages and abilities.

The aim is to improve the health and fitness of those who currently do little exercise. Group walks and independent walking are included in 'walking for health' schemes. Regular walks take place in town, city and rural locations at various times of the day and usually last up to an hour.

If you want to find out more about the benefits of walking or see if there is a walking scheme near you and what activities are offered, contact the WHI team (see Section 6) or look on the website: [www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk) or ask at your local library.

There are several exercise regimes that take into account the health of both body and mind. These include yoga, T'ai Chi and Pilates. See Section 6 for more information about these classes and how to find a qualified teacher. This is important if you are to avoid injury during a class.

## **Yoga**

Yoga originated in India and combines exercise with posture, breathing and relaxation techniques. Yoga positions work on every part of the body. They involve stretching and toning muscles, joints, the spine and the entire skeleton. Hatha yoga is the more popular type of yoga.

## **Pilates**

This combines western and eastern philosophies. It teaches body awareness, breathing, strength and flexibility, balance and co-ordination. Exercises are usually on a mat on the floor.

## **T'ai Chi**

T'ai Chi originates from China and forms part of the day-to-day routine of millions of Chinese people. It is a form of martial art which also gently exercises the whole body, strengthens muscles, increases flexibility and improves balance.

Exercises are generally performed standing up but can be adapted for a sitting down position. Some teachers concentrate on exercises that develop flexibility, suppleness and muscle tone, while others focus on martial arts aspects of T'ai Chi.

### **Exercising when sitting down**

You don't have to be moving around to improve the flexibility and strength of your muscles.

There are exercises you can do sitting down or while standing but holding on to a chair to help you.

Organisations such as Help the Aged produce videos and an illustrated booklet outlining such exercises. There are also organisations that can arrange activity based sessions in care homes. For details see Section 6.

### **Exercising for those with a chronic illness**

A specialised exercise programme can help those with chronic conditions that affect muscles and joints such as **arthritis**, **Parkinson's disease** and **osteoporosis**. However the 'wrong' type of exercise for your particular condition can actually make it worse. It is therefore very important to first take specialist advice from your doctor or a physiotherapist.

For people with *arthritis*, the 'right' type of exercise can protect joints by keeping muscles strong. This can help maintain mobility and limit pain. The 'right' exercise can help people with *Parkinson's disease* improve joint mobility and reduce muscle cramping. It can also help improve co-ordination and balance.

You become more prone to *osteoporosis* as you get older. It ultimately affects one in three women and one in 12 men.

As a result of osteoporosis, bones become porous and fragile and less able to withstand any force such as falling. Bones - particularly hip and wrist bones - are liable to break easily.

Bones in the spine affected by osteoporosis will begin to crumble, leading to curvature of the spine and a loss of height. As bones crumble, extra strain is placed on back muscles and ligaments, which can cause muscle spasm and pain.

Regular weight bearing exercise is important in the development and maintenance of strong bones throughout life. Exercise can also help people who have been diagnosed with osteoporosis. The National Osteoporosis Society has booklets on exercise to help prevent osteoporosis and for people with osteoporosis.

For further information about organisations and publications that may be helpful for you or a friend with a chronic illness see Section 6.

### **Motivation**

Lack of motivation is often the biggest barrier to becoming more active. A range of reasons is given for not taking steps to be more active:

- I can't see how it will help me;
- I'll never keep it up;
- I haven't the time;
- It'll be expensive;
- I've never been an exercise type of person;
- I'm too old to start now;
- I'm too overweight;
- I've no one to do it with;
- I'll be too embarrassed to join a class, others will be better than me.

You aren't alone if you think like this and can probably add your own reasons too!

You might find it helpful to write down why you would benefit from being more active....then what might stop you from doing so.

<b>Why will I benefit from being more active</b>	<b>What might stop me from being more active</b>
It will help my arthritis	Haven't time

If there are significantly more barriers than benefits, your chances of keeping up any activity will be low. Therefore try to think of how you can overcome the barriers. You could do this on your own or with the help of a friend.

### **Things to remember before you start**

If you decide you want to significantly increase your activity level or join an exercise class always:

- choose something you think you will enjoy;
- discuss it with your GP or practice nurse first;
- if joining an exercise class, make sure your teacher has appropriate qualifications, experience and public liability insurance;
- discuss any medical conditions and/or injuries you have had with the class teacher before you begin your first class;
- make sure you don't exercise when you are tired, feeling unwell or in a hurry;
- make sure you don't eat for two hours before vigorous exercise;
- do some kind of warm-up exercises to avoid injuring your muscles;
- wear appropriate clothing and shoes;
- start slowly so your body can gradually get used to being more active;
- set goals you believe you can achieve with that bit of extra effort;
- stop if you feel pain, feel dizzy, feel sick or experience cold sweats;
- ensure you breathe regularly and aren't holding your breath while exercising;
- make sure you wind down gradually to avoid muscle soreness;
- if exercising to improve stamina, slow down gently, don't stop abruptly.

### **3. Healthy eating**

Healthy eating is important for everyone. So too is enjoying your food. Many people believe that eating a healthy diet and enjoying your food are incompatible. However there are no 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods just 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' diets. To eat 'healthily', there should be no need to cut out foods you currently enjoy - although it may be worth considering eating some foods less often and/or in smaller portions.

The likelihood of suffering from heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis is affected by your diet.

Eating more than you need and taking little exercise means you are more likely to be overweight. This in itself is a health risk. It can reduce your mobility and aggravate conditions such as arthritis and back problems.

#### **What is a healthy diet?**

Eating a variety of foods is an important step to take in the quest for a healthy diet. This may involve trying new foods, which can widen your horizons and make eating more enjoyable.

Today's healthy eating messages draw attention to imbalances in the average UK diet. Hence the messages to:

- eat more fruit and vegetables - aim for five portions each day;
- eat more starchy foods such as bread, pasta, cereal and potatoes;
- eat less fat and fatty or fried foods;
- eat fewer salty foods;
- eat less sugary foods and drinks.

You can find out more about this advice on the Food Standards Agency website: [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk). It also tells you about the new "traffic light" labelling scheme. See Section 6 Further Information.

#### **Eat more fruit and vegetables**

Fruit and vegetables are rich sources of many vitamins and fibre (roughage). People who eat plenty of fruit and vegetables are shown to be less likely to develop heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Most people in the UK eat around three portions of fruit and vegetables each day rather than the 'five-a-day' that is recommended. A '5-A-DAY' logo has been developed by the Government to encourage greater consumption of fruit and vegetables<sup>2</sup>. You may have noticed the logo on packaged fruit and vegetables in the shops.

The message refers not only to *fresh* fruit and vegetables. Frozen vegetables and fruit are good because the freezing process preserves their vitamins. When cooking vegetables, be careful not to overcook them, as this destroys valuable vitamins. Canned fruit and vegetables, canned or cartoned fruit juice and dried fruit count too.

Beans and other pulses also count but only as one portion, even if you have them more than once in a day. This is because they don't contain the same range of vitamins and minerals as fruit and vegetables.

**Remember:**

***“try to ensure each of your five portions is different”***

**Ways to eat five portions each day**

This may seem a challenge. As a start, identify as many fruits and vegetables that you like and can afford. They can be fresh, frozen or canned. Then decide at which times of the day you would enjoy them. Below is an example of how five portions may be achieved:

**Breakfast -1 portion**

A glass of fruit juice **or** a heaped tablespoon of dried fruit **or** medium banana with breakfast cereal.

**Snacks - 1 portion**

Medium sized apple **or** medium banana **or** handful of grapes.

**Lunch - 1 portion**

Medium tomato and lettuce in a sandwich **or** three tablespoons baked beans on toast.

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<sup>2</sup> See website [www.5aday.nhs.uk](http://www.5aday.nhs.uk) for more information.

## **Main meal - 2 portions**

Choose 2 of the following. About 3 tablespoons would be an average portion of vegetables:

frozen/canned peas **or** fresh carrots **or** canned sweetcorn **or** ackee **or** seasonal vegetables of your choice **or** a piece of fresh fruit **or** serving of canned fruit in natural juice **or** serving of stewed fresh **or** dried fruit.

## **Eat more starchy foods**

Try to plan your meals around starchy foods like bread, cereals, pasta, rice or potatoes.

It is important to include some wholemeal products such as wholemeal bread, chapattis or pitta bread or wholegrain breakfast cereals. These contain more fibre which helps avoid constipation. If you enjoy the skin on new or baked potatoes, this increases your fibre intake too but wash the potatoes well before cooking.

Once you have chosen what to base your meal around, choose moderate amounts of a 'protein' food - such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese or pulses such as beans and lentils - to accompany it.

## **Eat less fat and fatty or fried foods**

It is generally accepted that a high fat diet - as consumed by many children and adults in the UK - increases the risk of heart disease and some types of cancer. It can also make you more prone to becoming overweight.

Changes you may have made or could make to reduce fat in your diet include:

- view as 'treats' only - crisps, other fried corn or potato based snacks, salted nuts, chocolate, biscuits, pastries and cakes;
- choose a low fat spread or spread butter or margarine more thinly on bread or toast;
- choose semi skimmed or skimmed rather than full fat milk;
- use a non stick pan so you can use less oil or other fat when frying;
- have chips or roast potatoes on fewer occasions and/or have smaller portions;

- choose oven chips rather than deep fried chips;
- choose straight, 'chunky' chips. They absorb less fat than 'french fries' or crinkle cut chips;
- choose leaner meat or trim fat from meat;
- do not add oil when frying mince. Fry the mince in its own fat in a non stick pan, then drain off excess fat;
- remove skin from chicken before you cook it. Choose breast meat rather than dark meat;
- use the minimum amount of oil when preparing curries and dahl;
- buy a stronger cheese and grate rather than slice it - you should be able to use less and still achieve a good flavour in sandwiches and sauces;
- limit the number of times you eat fried food;
- grill or steam rather than fry food;
- choose lower fat versions of salad dressings, sausages and dairy products *but remember* lower fat versions of some foods such as pâté, hard cheese or houmous are still relatively high fat foods;

If you eat 'ready meals' you are not be able to control the amount of fat or oil in the recipe. Therefore try not to choose meals with a rich sauce or cheese sauce too often. Also eat only as much as you want - the portion size provided may be more generous than you would normally eat.

Remember - the significance of a particular food in your diet will depend on *how often you eat it* and *how large a portion you eat*.

Research suggests that the type of fat also has a role to play in the development of heart disease. Fat in food is made up of a mixture of different fatty acids - saturated, mono-unsaturated and poly-unsaturated fatty acids. Fat from different foods will contain a mixture but usually one type of fatty acid predominates.

Saturates	Reducing saturates in the diet can help reduce the risk of heart disease. They are found in foods of animal origin such as meat and full fat dairy products. Palm and coconut oils are also a relatively rich source.
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They are used to make hard margarines and often used by food manufacturers for biscuits, cakes and pastry goods.

**Monounsaturates** There is increasing evidence that these are beneficial to health. This might be one reason why the Mediterranean diet is associated with a lower risk of heart disease. Olive oil, groundnut oil and margarines made from these oils are good sources. They are also present in meat and dairy products.

**Polyunsaturates** Moderate amounts of polyunsaturates appear beneficial in reducing blood cholesterol. High blood cholesterol increases the likelihood of suffering from heart disease. Some polyunsaturates are found in sunflower, corn and soya oil and margarines made from these oils. Another type is found in oily fish and nuts.

This is a brief summary of what is a complex issue. To find out more about fat and other risk factors for heart disease, see section 6.

### **Eat fewer salty foods**

Salt is essential in our diet but only in relatively small amounts.

Eating too much salt is linked to high blood pressure. High blood pressure increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. It is particularly important to avoid a high salt diet, if there is a history of high blood pressure in your family.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has developed a campaign, including TV adverts, to encourage people to reduce the amount of salt in their diet. The aim is to eat no more than 6g of salt a day. The average adult currently consumes 50% more than this - around 9g of salt each day.

The FSA has lots of useful information on salt and how to cut down on its website: [www.salt.gov.uk](http://www.salt.gov.uk).

### **About 75% of the salt we eat is found in 'processed' foods.**

The remaining 25% is added during cooking or at the table.

<b>Processed foods that can significantly contribute to salt intake include:</b>	
• salted nuts and snacks	• preserved meats, such as ham and salami
• savoury biscuits	• smoked mackerel
• cheese	• canned soups
• bacon	• many 'ready meals'
• bread	• pickles and sauces
• breakfast cereals	• stock cubes

Sodium chloride is the chemical name for salt. It is the 'sodium' in salt that affects blood pressure. Food labels will tell you how much 'sodium' is in 100g of the food and sometimes the amount per portion.

As a general rule:

- if a food contains more than 0.5g sodium per 100g food, this is considered a lot. If you eat many foods with this amount of salt in, you are likely to have more than 6g of salt per day.
- if a food contains between 0.1 and 0.5g sodium per 100g it contains a moderate amount of salt.

**Note:** 100g is about 4oz.

It can be interesting to compare the sodium content of different brands of the same product such as baked beans or sausages or pizza or chicken casserole. Try and choose the brand with the least sodium.

Tips to reduce salt intake:

- limit the number of salty snack foods you eat;
- be aware of the processed foods in the table above. Limit how often you eat them and perhaps the portion size;
- read the label on 'ready meals' and other manufactured foods – do they contain more than 0.5g sodium per 100g;
- gradually reduce the amount of salt you add when cooking and add flavour by using herbs and spices;
- use half a stock cube rather than a whole one when making a casserole and use herbs and spices to provide extra flavour;

- look for low salt versions of baked beans and canned vegetables;
- steam or microwave vegetables rather than cook in salted water. This also helps to preserve their flavour and vitamins;
- don't put the salt pot on the table.

Reduced-sodium alternatives are available for cooking and sprinkling on food. Before changing to one of these, discuss it with your GP.

### **Eat less sugary food and drinks**

Overweight and tooth decay are often associated with a high sugar diet. Eating sugar or sugar-rich food and drinks does not cause overweight. They can be associated with overweight because most people find sugary foods enjoyable. The temptation to eat them frequently can be high, so that without realising it, you are consuming more calories than you need each day.

The combination of sugar and fat in foods such as biscuits, cakes, ice cream and chocolate, makes an excess intake of calories even more likely.

Ways to reduce the sugar in your diet might include:

- using artificial sweeteners or a sugar substitute in hot drinks;
- not 'rewarding' yourself with a sugary snack;
- eating biscuits, chocolate bars, pastries and cakes less frequently;
- having a piece of fruit rather than a sugary snack;
- choosing reduced sugar soft drinks or mixers.

It is **how often** you have sugary foods and drinks **rather than how much** sugar you have that is important when thinking of tooth decay. The **more often** teeth are bathed with a sugary solution, the more opportunities there are for the decay process to begin. Chewing food during a meal stimulates the flow of saliva, which bathes your teeth and helps to stop the sugar sticking to your teeth. So for these reasons, if you are going to have sugary foods or drinks, try to have them only at mealtimes.

## **Is tooth decay significant for adults?**

More adults lose their teeth due to gum disease than to decayed teeth. For more information about dental health, preventing gum disease and the importance of dental check ups - whether you have your own teeth or dentures, see Factsheet 5, *Dental care*.

## **Milk and dairy products**

Health messages about dairy products in the 1980s and 1990s focused on their fat content. Today the focus is on choosing lower fat versions and the importance of the calcium in milk and products such as yogurt, cheese, fromage frais.

Calcium is important throughout life. Children and adolescents need calcium for their growing bones; adults need calcium to keep bones strong. Calcium and vitamin D, along with regular weight bearing exercise, are important in the prevention of osteoporosis. See Section 6 if you would like more information about osteoporosis.

Calcium is found in lesser amounts in non dairy foods. These include products made with white flour, particularly white bread, which is fortified with calcium; green leafy vegetables; fish such as in canned sardines or mackerel - but you must eat the bones; nuts and seeds such as almonds and sesame seeds; pulses such as chickpeas and kidney beans.

Milk substitutes for vegans or those allergic to milk, are usually fortified with calcium. These include soya milk or rice milk but check the label to see if calcium has been added.

## **Five frequently asked questions about a healthy diet**

- is it more expensive to eat healthily?
- do I need to take vitamin supplements?
- is it important to eat breakfast?
- is eating bran a good way to increase my fibre intake?
- why is it important to eat oily fish?

## **Is it more expensive to eat healthily?**

It really depends on what you are currently eating and how much you spend on items you may want to eat less of such as chocolate bars, biscuits, crisps, soft drinks or snack foods.

Calculate how much you are spending on these foods. A piece of fruit often costs no more than a chocolate bar or packet of crisps.

Other ways that following healthy eating advice can be cheaper include:

- buying stewing meat or chicken to make a casserole rather than more expensive items such as chops;
- using less meat than usual when making a casserole and adding another source of protein such as kidney beans or lentils instead;
- serving larger portions of bread, pasta or rice with smaller portions of meat or fish;
- eating fewer 'ready meals' or 'take away' meals particularly those relatively high in salt and/or fat;
- choosing vegetables and fruit in season when they are good value for money.

### **Do I need to take vitamin supplements?**

The Food Standards Agency believes most people should get all the vitamins they need by eating a healthy diet.

**Vitamin C and folic acid.** We need to be careful with these vitamins, found in potatoes, many fruits and green leafy vegetables. Both are destroyed by overcooking vegetables in too much water. So lightly cook them in a small amount of water. Steaming vegetables or cooking in a little water in the microwave will help preserve their vitamins.

**Vitamin D.** This is found in oily fish, eggs, liver and fortified foods such as margarine and some breakfast cereals. However we get most of this vitamin from exposure of our skin to sunlight and not from our food.

Therefore people who may need to think about a vitamin D supplement are those who:

- are unable to get out regularly;
- keep their skin covered when they go out;
- are housebound.

If you think you may need to take a vitamin D supplement, discuss this with your GP.

Sitting outside or beside an open window on a sunny spring or summer day is therefore good for your health. However, always use sunscreen lotion to protect your skin from the sun's harmful rays.

### **Is it important to eat breakfast?**

Breakfast is an important meal of the day as it breaks an overnight fast. People who do not have breakfast are often tempted to eat biscuits and snacks - often high in sugar and/or fat - during the morning.

You can make a good start to a 'healthy eating' day by having a glass of fruit juice followed by wholemeal toast or a high fibre cereal with milk.

### **Is eating bran a good way to increase my fibre intake?**

Bran is a concentrated source of fibre but does not provide the other nutrients found in fibre-rich starchy foods, such as wholemeal bread or wholegrain breakfast cereals. Bran can also limit the absorption of important nutrients. It should therefore be used with care.

If you take bran to help prevent constipation, see if you can achieve the same effect by eating wholegrain breakfast cereal and/or wholemeal bread. Taking regular exercise can also help this problem.

When you have plenty of fibre in your diet it is important to drink plenty of fluids. It is also important to take plenty of fluids if you are constipated, as this helps keep food moving through your system.

Taking bran but not drinking sufficient fluid can actually make constipation worse.

### **Why is it important to eat oily fish?**

Oily fish such as mackerel, trout, salmon, pilchards, sardines and herring are good sources of vitamin D. Their oil also contains fatty acids that reduce the likelihood of clots forming in your blood. This reduces your risk of a heart attack. It has been shown that if you have had a heart attack, eating oily fish twice a week can reduce your chance of having another.

This section has only been able to touch on healthy eating. If you would like to know more, please see section 6.

## 4. Other healthy lifestyle issues

Drinking moderately and giving up smoking are important ways of reducing your risk of heart disease, stroke and certain cancers. If you would like to know more, see Section 6.

## 5. Health checks

You can take advantage of a number of health checks that may be available through your local GP practice or pharmacy. These are designed to monitor your health and anticipate potential problems.

Checks for **high blood pressure, diabetes or blood cholesterol**. Check your practice leaflet or ask what checks are offered at your practice.

You may be invited by your local pharmacist to have a **medicine use review**. This is an opportunity to ask questions about the medicines you take and how and when you take them. This will include the full range of prescription and other medicines you are taking - such as supplements from a health food store. Remember if you have any questions about your medicines or find difficulty taking or using them, your pharmacist can usually offer advice.

**The national breast screening programme.** Women from the age of 50 and up to and including 70 years old are routinely invited for screening every three years. Once you reach 70 you have the right to request to be screened every three years. It is important to remember to do this, as you are still at risk of breast cancer.

To request a leaflet about breast screening and the importance of being 'breast aware' during the time between each screening, contact NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 (lo-call rate). You may also like to look on the NHS website [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk). Contact NHS Direct if you need details of your local screening unit.

**The NHS bowel screening programme** was launched in the Midlands in August 2006. It **will be rolled out nationally over a three year period**. It is targeting men and women aged 60 – 69, although when the programme reaches their area, people over 70 can request a screening kit by calling a freephone number.

Those eligible for screening will receive an invitation letter explaining the programme and a leaflet – Bowel Cancer Screening – the facts. About a week later they will receive a test kit which they will use at home and return to the laboratory. Full instructions on how to use the kit will be provided along with a helpline number to call if you have questions about the kit. You can read more about the programme on the website: [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/index.html](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/bowel/index.html)

**Free NHS sight tests** are available to those aged 60 or over. Adults should have a sight test every two years. However **those aged 70 and over, are recommended to have one every 12 months**. These tests check the health of your eyes as well as your eyesight. This means problems that could lead to blindness can be identified at an early stage, before you have any symptoms. For example, early-stage glaucoma has no symptoms. Lack of symptoms of sight loss does not mean your eyes are healthy. 40 per cent of sight can be lost before you realise something is wrong. Recent research by the RNIB suggests about one third of people over 70 do not have an annual eye check and so they are running a campaign to raise awareness of their importance.

As well as affecting your quality of life, poor vision or not having glasses fitted with the appropriate prescription is known to be associated with falling and consequent fractures to the wrist or hip.

When making an appointment, check that you are booking an NHS sight test and that it includes tests for conditions such as glaucoma and other eye diseases more likely in older people. People of Afro-Caribbean origin, people with diabetes or who have a relative with glaucoma are at higher risk of developing a sight problem. Contact the Royal National Institute for the Blind for more information on eye problems and sight tests. See Section 6.

If you receive pension credit, guarantee credit you are eligible for help with the cost of glasses. If you have a low income and capital less than £16,000, you may be eligible for help towards the cost of glasses through the NHS low income scheme. For more information see *our Information Sheet 20 Help with health costs*, or pick up a leaflet from your optician or contact the Low Income Scheme helpline on 0845 610 1198 (lo-call rate).



## 6. Further Information

There are many organisations and groups that can provide information and publications on diet, physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

### **Physical activity and exercise**

**Ageing Well UK project**, run by the ActivAge Unit (AAU) of Age Concern England, Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER, tel: 020 8765 7231, website: [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk). This project supports older people by offering health advice, gentle exercise programmes and walking groups. Contact the ActivAge Unit or look on the website to see if there is a project near to you.

**BHF and Natural England 'Walking the way to health initiative'**, The WHI Team, Natural England, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham GL50 3RA, tel: 01242 533258, website: [www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk). Look on the website or telephone to find out if there is a walking group near you.

**Body Control Pilates**, 35 Little Russell Street, London WC1A 2HH, tel: 020 7636 8900, website: [www.bodycontrol.co.uk](http://www.bodycontrol.co.uk). Can help you locate a teacher and it also runs teacher training courses. A UK standard for Pilates was introduced in August 2005 and is endorsed by SkillsActive and the Register of Exercise Professionals. Students graduating from the Body Control Pilates matwork teacher training course will meet this standard.

**British Wheel of Yoga (The)**, 25 Jermyn Street, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 7RU, tel: 01529 306851, website: [www.bwy.org.uk](http://www.bwy.org.uk). This is the governing body for yoga in England. It can help you find a qualified instructor, with the appropriate public liability insurance, by giving you the name of your county representative who will have details of classes in the area.

**Central Council of Physical Recreation (The) (CCPR)** is an umbrella organisation which covers large and small sports and recreation organisations. Its membership includes a wide range of sports from the Model Flying Association to the British Dragon Boat Racing Association, British Blind Sport and English Folk Dance and Song Society. Contact CCPR at Burwood House, 14-16 Caxton Street, London SW1H 0QT, tel: 020 7976 3900, website: [www.ccpr.org.uk](http://www.ccpr.org.uk).

**Keep Fit Association (The)** is a national governing body, with classes around the country. Contact 1 Grove House, Foundry Lane, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5PL, tel: 01403 266000, website: [www.keepfit.org.uk](http://www.keepfit.org.uk).

**Register of Exercise Professionals**, 8-10 Crown Hill, Croydon CR0 1RZ, tel: 020 8686 6464, website: [www.exerciseregister.org](http://www.exerciseregister.org). This register uses a process of self regulation that recognises industry-based qualifications, practical competency and requires members to work within a Code of Ethical Practice. Members of the public can check the list of instructors online or contact the office on the number above.

**The T'ai Chi Union for Great Britain**, 5 Corunna Drive, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 5HG, tel: 0141 810 3482, website: [www.taichiunion.com](http://www.taichiunion.com). This is an association of practitioners of recognised styles of T'ai Chi and can help you find a teacher. The website features a searchable list of teachers by area. If you cannot access the website, write to the above address, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

### **Exercise books and videos**

For further details about the following three Help the Aged products and how to order them, contact Help the Aged, 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ, tel: 0870 770 0441 (national call rate), website: [www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk).

**Strength and Balance Exercises for Healthy Ageing book** Price: £6.00 + £1.75p to cover postage and packing. Also available to download from website 'Resources & Publications' section. Published as part of the Government's Falls Prevention Initiative, this book is aimed at health professionals involved in falls prevention. It is an A4 size illustrated publication with a hard cover and stand. It features one exercise per page and is spiral bound at the top so that each page can be flipped over. Many of the exercises can be done while sitting down.

**Be Strong, Be Steady video, ref HA001** price £11.99 + £4.99 postage and packing (58 minutes). It is available in English or with voice over in Bengali, Cantonese or Punjabi. It is a complete programme of strength and balance exercises designed specifically for older people. It has been designed to be used by care homes and day centres in conjunction with exercises classes they run. It could be used by individuals in their own homes but they should speak to their GP before ordering it if they do not normally exercise.

**Step to the Future video / DVD, ref HA005 (DVD), HA0007 (video),** price £11.99 + £4.99 postage and packing. It is available in video (English only with English subtitles) and DVD (English or Hindi, with English subtitles). This is a new exercise programme devised to help older people keep strong and active in later life. You progress through standing, chair based and floor exercises that help to strengthen muscles, increase flexibility and improve stamina and balance.

### **Exercise classes in care homes or day care settings**

**BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health,** School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leics LE11 3TU, tel: 01509 223259, website: [www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk). This British Heart Foundation centre is based at Loughborough University and aims to identify ways of promoting initiatives that will stimulate more people to take more activity as part of everyday life. As well as looking at prevention of coronary heart disease, the centre is also exploring the beneficial role of exercise in managing other medical conditions and improving people's quality of life.

*Active for Later Life resource* has been produced to help those professionals involved in physical activity programmes for older people of all ages and abilities. This resource is available from the British Heart Foundation for a suggested donation of £20 per pack. See below for contact details.

**Extend,** 2 Place Farm, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8SB, tel/fax: 01582 832 760, website: [www.extend.org.uk](http://www.extend.org.uk). Extend has a network of teachers providing movement to music for the over 60s and people with disabilities. Details of regional organisers and teachers can be found on their website or by writing to the above address. Classes can be held in nursing homes, sheltered housing developments and hospitals.

**National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA),** Bondway Commercial Centre, 5th Floor 5.12, 71 Bondway, London SW8 1SQ, tel: 020 7078 9375, website: [www.napa-activities.net](http://www.napa-activities.net), provides information for organisers of activities in care homes and day care settings.

## Healthy Eating

**Food Standards Agency (FSA)**, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH, tel: 020 7276 8000, website: [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk). The FSA is an independent food safety watchdog set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food.

Its consumer friendly website contains useful information about diet and health, healthy eating, food labelling, food hygiene and food safety issues. A range of leaflets on healthy eating, eating out and food safety issues are also available. These can be ordered on the publications line 0845 6060 667 (lo-call rate).

**NHS Direct**, 0845 46 47 (lo-call rate), website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk). Confidential 24 hour helpline. Can provide information on particular health conditions such as stroke and diabetes, self help and support groups.

### Specialist support groups offering diet and physical activity information

**Arthritis Care**, 18 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD, tel: 020 7380 6500, helpline 0808 800 4050 (free call), website: [www.arthritiscare.org.uk](http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk).

Arthritis Care produces a range of materials for those with arthritis including *Exercise and Arthritis* - looks at a range of exercises for keeping healthy; *Healthy Eating and Arthritis* - looks at diet and its influence on arthritis.

**Asthma UK**, Summit House, 70 Wilson Street, London EC2A 2DB, advice line: 08457 01 02 03 (lo-call rate), website: [www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk). Information line (for enquiries about publications) 08456 038143. Produces a range of publications including a free booklet *Take Control of your Asthma*. This is also available online.

**British Heart Foundation**, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 6DH, tel: 020 7935 0185, helpline: 08450 708070 (lo-call rate), website: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk). The British Heart Foundation produces materials on prevention of heart disease and for those who have already suffered a heart attack.

Useful publications include the free leaflet: *Get Active*; free booklets: *Put your heart into walking*, *Eating for your heart and so you want to lose weight - for good*. The helpline is staffed by specially trained cardiac nurses and information officers, who can also answer queries by email if you prefer.

**Diabetes UK**, Macleod House, 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA, Careline: 0845 120 2960 (lo-call rate), tel: 020 7424 1000, website: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk). Produces materials on managing diabetes which include diet and exercise advice. Careline staff can discuss managing diabetes by phone or email.

**National Osteoporosis Society**, Manor Farm, Skinners Hill, Camerton, Bath BA2 0PJ, helpline (for medical queries): 0845 450 0230 (lo-call rate), general enquiries: 01761 471771, website: [www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk). Produces a range of publications including those for which a charge is made. *Exercise and Osteoporosis* (for those diagnosed) and *Exercise and Bone Health* (for prevention of osteoporosis) are chargeable publications.

**Parkinson's Disease Society**, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ, tel: 020 7931 8080, helpline: 0808 808 0303 (free call), website: [www.parkinsons.org.uk](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk). Produces a range of materials including a free booklet *Keeping Moving*.

There is also a video with the same title, available at a cost of £18. It illustrates an exercise programme developed by two senior physiotherapists. Always discuss first with your doctor if you intend to embark on an exercise programme.

Publications and the video are available from the PDS distributors: Sharward Services, Westerfield Business Centre, Main Road, Westerfield, Ipswich IP6 9AB, tel: 01473 212115. Postage free of charge for up to 49 items.

### **Other healthy lifestyle issues**

**NHS Smoking Helpline**, tel: 0800 169 0169 (free call), website: [www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk). Can offer friendly, practical advice and publications to help those wishing to give up smoking. Can explain the support that may be available from your GP.

**NHS Drinkline Helpline**, tel: 0800 917 8282 (free call). Can offer free and confidential advice about your own or someone else's drinking habits.

**Royal National Institute of Blind People(RNIB)**, 105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE, helpline: 0845 766 9999 (lo-call rate). For Typetalk service dial 18001 0845 766 9999 (lo-call rate), website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk). Produces a range of publications and helpline support.

**Men's Health Forum**, Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HR, general information tel: 020 7388 4449 website: [www.malehealth.co.uk](http://www.malehealth.co.uk). A charity working to improve men's health. It is supported by the Department of Health and includes a section on men's health and lifestyles issues.

## 7. Further information from Age Concern

The following book may be useful:

*Feeling Good! Easy steps to staying healthy* by Dr Alan Maryon Davis.  
Price £9.99.

Available by telephone orderline. Lines are open 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday: **0870 44 22 120** (national call rate), or visit our **website: [www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop)** (secure online bookshop).

If ordering by post, please send a cheque or money order, payable to Age Concern England, for the appropriate amount plus p&p to Age Concern Books, Units 5 & 6, Industrial Estate, Brecon, Powys LD3 8LA.

**(Postage and packing:** mainland UK and Northern Ireland: £1.99 for the first book, 75p for each additional book up to a maximum of £7.50). Free on orders over £250. For customers ordering from outside the mainland UK & NI: credit card payments only; please telephone the hotline for international postage rates or **email: [sales@ageconcernbooks.org.uk](mailto:sales@ageconcernbooks.org.uk)**).

If you would like

- to find your nearest Age Concern
- any additional factsheets mentioned (up to a maximum of 5 will be sent free of charge)
- a full list of factsheets and/or a book catalogue
- to receive this information in large print

phone 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or write to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ. For people with hearing loss who have access to a textphone, calls can be made by Typetalk, which relays conversations between text and voice via an operator.

Age Concern factsheets and other information materials can be downloaded free from our website at: [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk). To receive a free e-mail notification when new and updated factsheets are published, please either contact the Factsheet Subscription Service on tel: 020 8765 7200 by email: [factsheet.subscriptions@ace.org.uk](mailto:factsheet.subscriptions@ace.org.uk), or sign up on-line.

Age Concern provides factsheets free to older people, their families and people who work with them. If you would like to make a donation to our work, you can send a cheque or postal order (made payable to Age Concern England) to the Personal Fundraising Department, ACE Freepost CN1794, London SW16 4BR.

Find out more about Age Concern England online at [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk)

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No factsheet can ever be a complete guide to the law, which also changes from time to time. Therefore please ensure that you have an up to date factsheet and that it clearly applies to your situation. Legal advice should always be taken if you are in doubt. (*Age Concern England is unable to give financial or legal advice*).

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