



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Department of Health and Ageing

Choose Health: Be Active

A physical activity guide for older Australians



An initiative of the Australian Government in association with Sports Medicine Australia





Choose Health: Be Active

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Is this booklet for me?

This booklet is designed to help older Australians achieve sufficient physical activity for good health as they age. It is mainly for people who are not currently building 30 minutes of physical activity into their daily lives, and are looking for ways they can do so. (Recent surveys show about half of all older Australians are not doing at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day).

This booklet shows how easy it can be to stay fit and healthy as you get older. Strategies may need to be different depending on your individual lifestyle, but physical activity is achievable and even a slight increase in activity can make a difference to your health and well-being.

Having health problems doesn't mean you can't be physically active. Any increase in activity can be beneficial for physical and mental health. To assist, this booklet includes specific information on exercising with chronic illness and has some advice about healthy eating.

Read on to learn more about how to *Choose Health* through physical activity. Go for it, you will be surprised how small changes in your physical activity levels can lead to better health and well-being!

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Why is physical activity important?

Physical Activity Recommendations for Older Australians

It makes you look and feel better

- Gives you more energy
- Helps you sleep better
- Helps you to relax
- Helps you to meet people and make friends
- Is fun
- Tones your body

It is good for your mind

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Improves concentration
- Improves self-confidence
- Reduces feelings of sadness

“Activity may not add years to your life (it might) but it will certainly add life to your years.”



It is good for your body

- Helps to control:
 - weight (and reduce body fat)
 - blood pressure
 - cholesterol
 - diabetes
 - bone and joint problems (eg arthritis)
- Reduces the risk of:
 - heart disease
 - stroke
 - some cancers
- Helps to manage pain
- Helps to maintain and increase joint movement
- Helps to prevent falls and injury

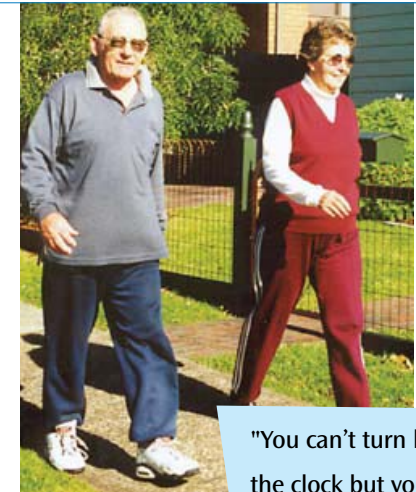
“No matter what your age, weight, health problems or abilities, you should try and do some form of physical activity.”

How much activity?

- Older people should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.
- 30 minutes is needed to keep your heart, lungs, muscles and bones in good working order.
- If you can't do 30 minutes now, start with 10 minutes once or twice a day. After two weeks, make it 15 minutes twice a day and you will have reached your goal of 30 minutes a day.
- If you can do more than 30 minutes each day there will be additional benefits.

What type of exercise?

- Try to be active every day in as many ways as possible, doing a range of activities that incorporate fitness, strength, flexibility and balance (see pages 8–9 for ideas).

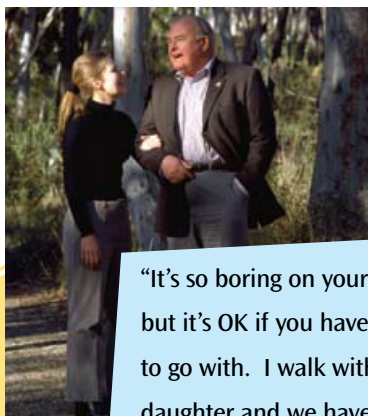


“You can't turn back the clock but you can wind it up.”

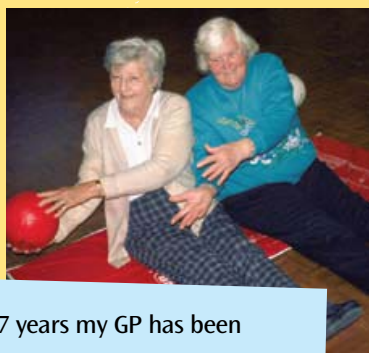
- The recommendations advise moderate intensity activity. This means you don't have to puff and pant or work up a sweat – but if you do – it's OK.
- Brisk walking is a great moderate intensity activity. If you don't like walking, try working in the garden or going for a swim.
- If you have enjoyed a lifetime of vigorous physical activity, carry on doing so in a manner suited to your capability.

I can't be more active because...

Excuses and how to overcome them



“It’s so boring on your own . . . but it’s OK if you have a friend to go with. I walk with my daughter and we have a bit of a chit-chat and catch up on the local gossip.”



“For 27 years my GP has been telling me I should do more physical activity – but I never did anything. Then six weeks ago my friend took me to an exercise class and I have been going with her every week. I feel so much better, I wish I had done it earlier.”

• I don't have the time	Make it a priority, make time. Get into a routine. Take every chance you can to be active, even if it's only for a few minutes – do exercises while waiting for the kettle to boil or while watching TV (see pages 19–20).
• I'm too tired	Once you get started, you will have more energy and feel less tired.
• I have a health problem and exercise might make it worse	Most health problems can be helped by activity. Talk to your doctor – they may be able to write an 'activity prescription' for you (see pages 16–17 for more information).
• I might get injured	If you walk or swim it is unlikely that you will get injured.
• I can't afford it	Try to find an activity that is free. Walk more instead of driving.
• I have no-one to do it with	Persuade a relative, neighbour or friend to be active with you. Play with the grandchildren in the park. Join an activity or walking group. Take out a gym membership.
• It's too hot/cold/raining	Get up early to beat the heat or walk in an air-conditioned shopping centre. If it's cold, wear gloves. If it's raining, take an umbrella.
• I'm too old	You are never too old – there is always something you can do.
• There's nothing to do where I live	Be active around your home – do exercises at home (see pages 19–21).
• I don't have transport	Walk to and from places (the shop, letterbox or a friend's house).
• I'm afraid I will wear out	You will wear out more quickly if you do nothing.
• I've never been the sporty type	You don't have to play sport to be active – try gardening, dancing, walking or exercise to music.

Four types of activity are needed to keep you healthy.

Try to include at least one activity from each group.

Moderate fitness activities

These activities help to keep your heart, lungs and blood vessels healthy.

You should aim to do 30 minutes of activity from this group on most days. This can be in three lots of 10 minutes or two lots of 15 minutes. If you are just starting out, as little as 10 minutes helps!

- Brisk walking
- Continuous swimming
- Golf (no cart!)
- Aerobics
- Cycling
- Washing the car
- Walking the dog
- Yard and garden work
- Tennis
- Water aerobics
- Dancing
- Mopping and vacuuming

Strength activities

These activities help your muscles and bones stay strong and make it easier for you to do daily tasks as you get older.

Make a time to do specific strength exercises two or three times a week, and build some of them into your everyday activities.

- Weight, strength or resistance training exercises
- Lifting and carrying (eg groceries or small children)
- Climbing stairs (instead of taking the lift or escalator)
- Moderate yard work (eg digging and shifting soil)
- Calisthenics (eg push ups and sit ups)

Flexibility activities

These activities help you to move more easily. They include gentle reaching, bending and stretching. If you stay flexible you will always be able to put on your own shoes and socks.

Try to do some form of stretching every day – even if it is only while you are watching TV (see pages 20–21).

- Tai Chi
- Bowls (indoor and outdoor)
- Mopping, vacuuming
- Stretching exercises (see pages 20–21)
- Yoga
- Dancing
- Gardening

Balancing activities

These activities will improve your balance and help to prevent falls. Make a specific time each day to do these exercises, or fit them in whenever you can – for example – while waiting for the kettle to boil (see page 19).

For ideas see pages 19 and 21

If you can, also try to reduce the time you spend sitting for long periods.

Getting started – making a plan

If you are starting an activity program it is important to start out slowly and increase your activity over time. Be realistic – don't make it too hard for yourself and remember every 10 minutes counts!

Choose your activities – Think about the four groups of activity on pages 8–9. Find activities that you enjoy and want to do.

My activities will be:

Set a date to start – There is no time like now!

My start date will be:

Choose a time – that you can stick with and remember small changes to your daily habits can make a big difference to your total activity level. Get into a routine. Make a set time to be active every day.

My activity time will be:

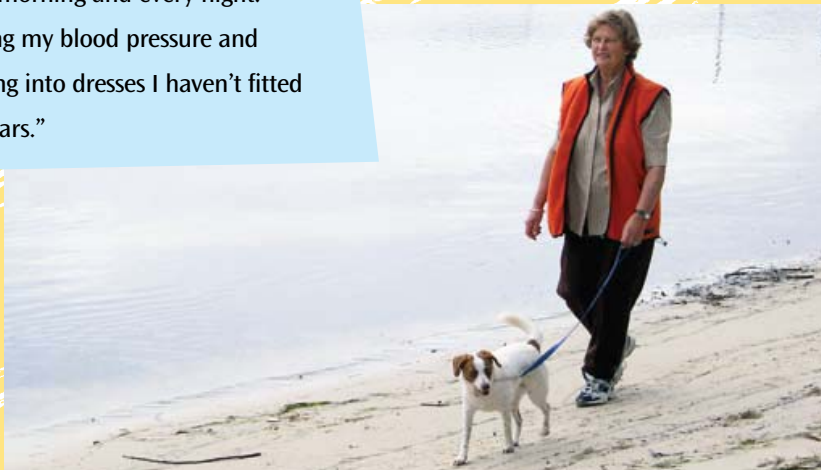
Set some goals – How about

- “I will walk every day for 10 minutes after meals”
- “I will park my car farther away from the shops”
- “I will walk with the grandchildren to the park”
- “I will walk the dog every day this week”
- “I will join a walking or cycling group”
- “I will walk to get the paper/milk/bread”
- “I will go dancing every week”

My main goals will be:

Use the table on page 14 to make an activity plan, then record your progress.

“I never used to do any physical activity. Recently I got a dog and now I walk with her every morning and every night. It is helping my blood pressure and I am getting into dresses I haven't fitted into for years.”



“Back then we stayed active – our lives depended on it...”



“Today it still does!”

Use reminders

- Placing notes around your home (eg on the front door or on the fridge) can help to remind you to do some activity.
- Place your walking shoes near the door or in the car.

Get into a routine

- Plan your activity – both the time and the place.
- Make a regular time for physical activity in your diary or on your calendar.

Be social

- Involve a friend, colleague, neighbour or relative in your activity routine - this will help keep you both motivated and committed.



“Activity can be much easier in water. I’ve started aqua aerobics – it’s great fun and I have made new friends.”

Use a diary

- Write down your activity times and how you feel after doing something. That way you can refer back to it when you feel less motivated.
- Make an activity planner (like the one on page 14) and put it on the fridge. You could even use stickers or gold stars to mark off each time you are active.

Choose a role model

- Maybe someone close to you is regularly active and fit. Talk to them and use them as a role model to keep yourself going.

Vary your activity

- You might like to change the time or the place you normally do your activity to help keep it interesting.
- You can even change the type of activity you do. Look at the list again on page 9 to give you some other ideas.

Staying active on a regular basis can be a challenge. Sometimes, things come up that break your normal routine, like going on holiday, an injury or a personal matter. The key is to treat the setback as temporary and to get back on track as soon as you can.

Common setbacks . . . and how to overcome them

Coming back after injury or illness?	Take it easy when you begin again, do small amounts of activity until you feel better, but, if you feel pain, stop.
Does your activity time no longer suit you?	Change your routine to make your activity time more convenient.
No fun being active by yourself?	Invite a friend, neighbour or relative to do some physical activity with you. You can help motivate each other and have a lot of fun. Join a club or leisure centre for activities like social tennis, bushwalking, Tai Chi or gentle exercise. Being active with a group of people can be very sociable.
Do your activities seem boring?	Maybe it’s time to try something new or involve someone new in your activity.
Does it seem like too much effort?	Set some new short term goals – give yourself a reward when you achieve them.
Lost the urge?	Try something different. Think about the benefits of being more active.

Choose Health Monthly Activity Planner

1. Plan what you will do.

2. Photocopy the page for future use.

3. Put a tick in the box each day you do that activity for the next 4 weeks.

	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
--	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	----	---	----	---	----	---	----

Fitness Activities – Aim to do something from this group for at least 30 minutes (ie 1x30, 2x15 or 3x10 minutes) on most days of the week

Walk																												
Work in the garden																												
*Add other activities here (eg swim, golf)																												
•																												
•																												
•																												

Strength Exercises – Try to do one of these activities on at least 3 days each week

Strength exercises (pages 19–20)																												
*Add other activities here (eg stairs, yard work)																												
•																												
•																												
•																												

Flexibility – Try to do some stretching exercises every day

Stretching exercises (page 21)																												
*Add other activities here (eg yoga, bowls)																												
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Balance Exercises – Do these as often as you can

Practice balancing (pages 19 and 21)																												
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Sitting Less – Mark the days you make a real effort to reduce your sitting time

Sitting less																												
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* see pages 8–9 for ideas.

Coping with chronic health problems

Most health problems can actually be helped by activity – but check with your doctor, nurse, physiotherapist, podiatrist or local fitness centre about the type and amount of activity you can do.

Remember to start slowly and don't push yourself too hard. Be kind to yourself – but be active in as many ways as you can.

“Most of us don't feel the impact of ill-health until something dramatic happens – like a heart attack or diabetes. If we had known we were going to live this long we would have taken more care of ourselves. We didn't care a tinker's curse when we were young – we thought we were bullet proof.”



Suggested activities for different health problems

Heart problems and/or diabetes

Daily moderate fitness activities like walking, swimming or cycling. Resistance (or strength) training should only be commenced under supervision, two or three times a week.

Cancer

Your ability to exercise will depend on the stage of treatment you are at. Talk to your doctor or other health professional about what you can do.

Arthritis

Hydrotherapy is excellent. If there is no program near where you live, try swimming in a warm pool.

Osteoporosis

Weight bearing activity and strength training can help to make bones stronger.

'Crook' knees and back

Talk to your physiotherapist about strengthening exercises.

Foot problems

Talk to your podiatrist about exercises that can help.

Mental health problems (including post traumatic stress disorder [PTSD])

Daily moderate fitness activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, playing sport, and strength training exercises two or three times a week.

Lung problems (including asthma)

Swimming, walking, cycling and tennis are less likely to induce asthma, especially if the asthma is well controlled. If you have other lung problems such as obstructive pulmonary disease, check with your doctor about exercise that is suitable for you.

Mobility problems

There are lots of chair based activities you can do – ask your physiotherapist to help work out what is best for you.





Start slowly

- Start slowly and allow your body time to warm up. Increase your activity level gradually over weeks not days.
- Do some stretching exercises after your activity to help avoid muscle soreness and injury.

Wear comfortable clothes

- Wear loose clothes and supportive shoes. This will make your activity safer and more enjoyable.

Drink enough water

- Remember to drink lots of water before, during and after your activity (do not wait until you are thirsty).

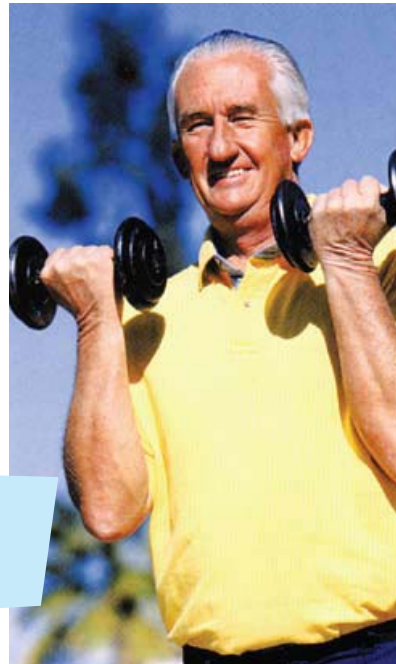
Set the right pace

- The old saying 'no pain, no gain' is not true. If you feel any pain, slow down or stop!

The old saying 'no pain, no gain' is not true. If you feel any pain slow down or stop!

Increase gradually

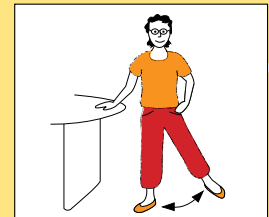
- If you have stopped physical activity or are starting a new physical activity, start at a level that you can manage easily and gradually build up.
- If you stopped exercising because of a new health problem, you may need to discuss starting again with your doctor or a health professional.



We have called the exercises on this page kettle exercises because they can be done while you are waiting for the kettle to boil or even while talking on the telephone. All you need is a stable piece of furniture about the height of a kitchen bench to hold on to. Don't hold your breath when you do these exercises.

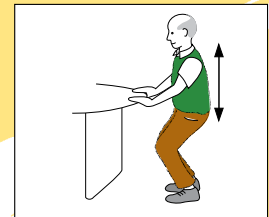
Side leg raises *(improves both strength and balance)*

Stand sideways to the bench and hold on with your right hand to support yourself. Slowly take your left leg out to your left side. Keep your back and both legs straight. Hold the position for one second then slowly lower. Repeat 8 times at first, increasing to 15. Turn around and hold on with your left hand while you raise your right leg.



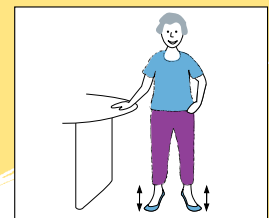
Half squats *(improves leg strength)*

Stand facing the bench with your feet apart (about shoulder width), feet facing forward and holding on with both hands. Leaning very slightly forward, but keeping your back straight, slowly bend both legs, keeping your knees over your feet. Do not go down too far. As you return to the up position, squeeze your buttocks together as if there is a \$5 note between them that you don't want to drop. Repeat 8 times at first, increasing to 15.



Heel raises *(for strength and balance)*

Stand sideways to the bench, feet apart (shoulder width) holding on with one hand to support yourself. Slowly rise up on to your toes, hold for one second and lower again. Do this 8 times to begin with, increasing to 15. Make sure your movements are not rushed.



As you progress, try these exercises holding on with one fingertip, then not holding at all. If this is easy for you, try it with no hands and with your eyes closed.

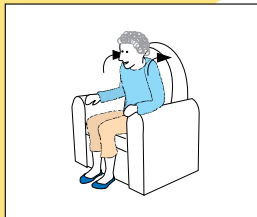


We have called these exercises **TV exercises** because they can be done when you are watching television.



Stand up and sit down (or chair raise) (for strength and balance)

Sit on a chair with your feet flat on the floor and slightly apart. Try to keep your back and shoulders straight throughout this exercise. Slowly stand up, trying not to use your hands (or as little as possible). Slowly sit back down and pause. Do this 8 – 15 times.



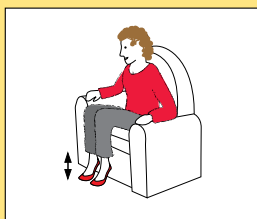
Shoulder roll (for flexibility)

Using a gentle circular motion, hunch your shoulders upwards, backwards, downwards and forwards. Do this slowly 5 times, then reverse the direction.



Knee lifts (for strength)

Sit back in your chair with your back straight. Bend your knee and lift your left leg towards your chest. Hold for a few seconds then lower slowly. Do this 8 – 10 times with each leg.

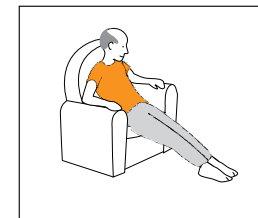


Heels up toes up (for flexibility)

Start with feet flat on the floor and lift heels as high as you can, keeping the balls of your feet on the floor. Slowly lower heels until feet are flat, then lift toes until they point upwards. Repeat these up and down movements for 30 seconds.

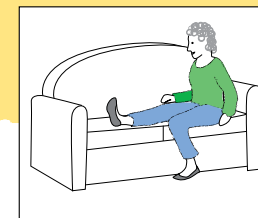
Front leg and ankle stretch

Remove your shoes and sit on the edge of a chair. Lean back and stretch your legs out in front of you. Keep your heels on the floor and stretch your ankles so that your toes point towards the floor. If you don't feel the stretch in your ankles, lift your heels off the floor. Hold this position for 10-20 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times.



Hamstring stretch

Sit on the lounge with your right leg up, toes pointing up as shown. Try to keep this leg straight. Keeping your back straight, lean forward until you feel a gentle stretch in the back of your right leg. Hold this position for 10-20 seconds. Repeat 3- 5 times, then turn around and do this stretch with your left leg.



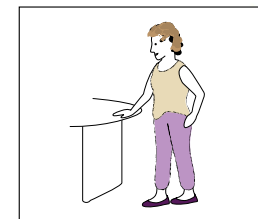
Stand on one foot

Stand next to the kitchen bench or the back of a chair – hold on if you need to. Lift your right leg and stand for 10 seconds on your left leg. Repeat 5 times. If you feel steady enough, do it without holding on. If you are very steady on your feet, try this with your eyes shut.



Walk heel to toe

Stand next to a support (the kitchen bench will do) and step forward by putting the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the other foot, so that they touch (or almost touch). If you can do this easily without holding on, try it with your eyes shut. Have someone stand next to you to support you if you need help.



Balancing activity with healthy eating

It is important to try to balance the energy being used for physical activity with energy going into your body (as food and drink). This will help you to maintain a healthy weight and will help to keep your body working well.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends twelve dietary guidelines for maximum vitality, energy and health in older people.*

One

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods

Eat something from **each** of the five food groups every day.

- bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles
- vegetables, including legumes (beans and peas)
- fruit
- milk, yoghurt, cheese
- meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts

Two

Keep active to maintain muscle strength and a healthy body weight

Increase all activities and decrease sitting for long periods.

Three

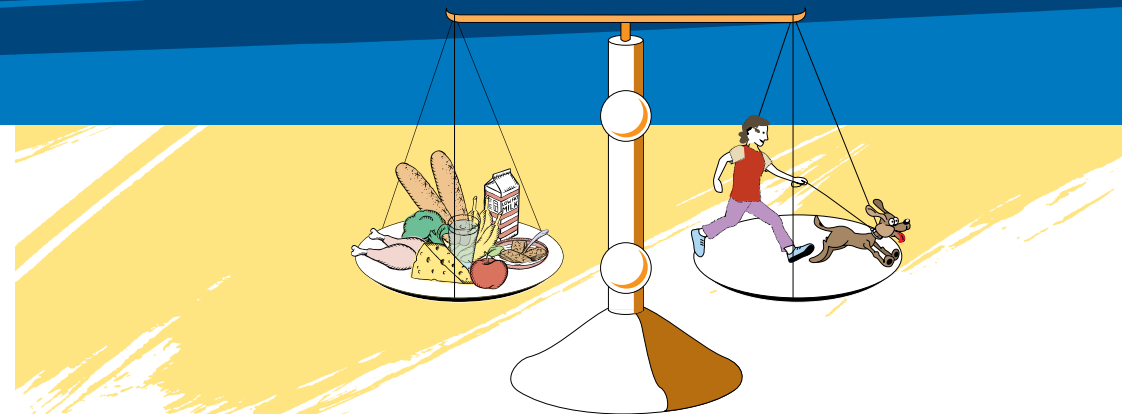
Eat at least three meals every day

Regular meals make it more likely that you will get the variety and amount of food you need. If you don't enjoy cooking every day, buy some cooked meat or chicken and have it with bread and salad. Freeze meal sized portions of left-overs when you do cook. If you eat out, try not to over do it with portions.

Four

Care for your food: prepare and store it correctly

Avoid food poisoning by selecting, handling, storing and preparing your food carefully. Clean your fridge every week, and throw out anything that has been there too long!



Five

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit

This means at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day (a serve is equivalent to a handful). Salads and legumes (beans) count as vegetables.

Six

Eat plenty of cereals, breads and pasta

These foods are good sources of energy and fibre, as well as vitamins B and E and minerals like iron and zinc. Wholegrain breads have more fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Seven

Include foods that are high in calcium

Having plenty of calcium will slow bone loss as you age and help to prevent osteoporosis. The best sources of calcium are dairy foods like milk, cheese, yoghurt, custard and ice cream, canned fish and soy products. Choose low fat or calcium enriched skim milk products.



* For more information on the guidelines search www.health.gov.au

Eight

Eat a diet which is low in saturated fat

This will help to control cholesterol. Saturated fat is usually solid at room temperature – like the fat that collects in the tray when you grill sausages. It is easy to see on the edge of pieces of meat, but can be hidden in processed meats and cheese. Use canned fish instead of deli meat on sandwiches. Avoid lard and copha – they can be hidden in some biscuits and fast foods.

Read food labels to see what is healthy (this one is not healthy!)

Try to choose foods with less than 10g of saturated fat in every 100g of food

	Per serving (35g)	Per 100g
Energy	711 kJ (170 Cals)	2030 kJ (485 Cals)
Protein	4.1 g	11.8 g
Fat	7.8 g	22.3 g
Saturated fat	5.5g	15.7g
Carbohydrate		
total	20.6 g	59.0g
sugars	0.9 g	2.5 g
Dietary fibre	1.2 g	3.6 g
Sodium	228 mg	650 mg
Potassium	95 mg	270 mg

Low salt food contains less than 120mg sodium – per 100g of food.

Nine

Choose food low in salt and use salt sparingly

This will help to control blood pressure. Salt is essential for life, but fresh food contains all the salt you need. There is no need to add salt to food. Try using herbs and spices to add flavour instead of salt.

Ten

Use added sugars in moderation

Sugars found in many natural foods such as milk and fruit are good for you. But some foods, such as soft drinks, cordial, lollies, honey and jam are almost entirely sugar. Try to eat these foods only occasionally, especially if you have glucose intolerance.

Eating lots of high sugar food will cause tooth decay.

Eleven

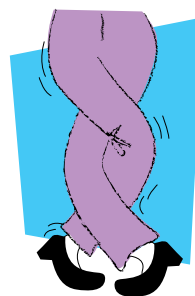
Drink adequate amounts of water and/or other fluids

If your urine is dark yellow (except first thing in the morning) you are not drinking enough.

Fluids are important because they:

- Prevent dehydration
- Quench thirst
- Ease the burden on the kidneys
- Help to prevent constipation
- Help to prevent urinary tract infections and kidney stones

Water, soup, tea, coffee, juice, custard, milk, jelly and ice cream are all fluids.



If you are incontinent or sometimes leak a little urine, you still need to drink sufficient fluids, because concentrated urine increases

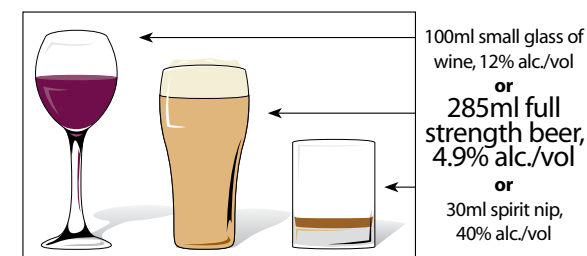
the desire to go to the toilet.

Make sure you have a night light if you have to go to the toilet during the night, and ask your doctor or physiotherapist about pelvic floor exercises.

Twelve

If you drink alcohol, limit your intake

In moderation, alcohol can be a pleasure and can enhance a meal. Small amounts (no more than two standard drinks per day) can be beneficial, but too much will damage your health.



Examples of one standard drink

As you age, your liver is less able to deal with alcohol. You will also be more likely to trip and fall (and maybe end up with a fracture) if you drink too much. Ask your doctor whether it is safe to drink alcohol if you are taking medications, and never ever drink and drive.

“Being active and good nutrition are vitally important for maintaining the best possible quality of life in older age.”

Feedback

Choose Health: Be Active aims to help all older Australians:

- understand the importance of physical activity;
- become more physically active; and
- stay active as they get older.

Your feedback on this booklet would be very helpful.

Simply answer the questions on the next page by circling your responses and writing any additional comments. Then cut along the dotted line and fold the page so that the address is clearly visible. Seal with tape and, if you can, walk to the nearest post box to post it. No stamp needed.

Your feedback is valuable to us.



Feedback form

	☹️				😊
Content How useful did you find the information in this booklet?	no use at all	fairly useful	useful		very useful
Presentation What do you think about the layout of the information?	poor	fair	good		excellent
Reading How easy is it to read the text?	very difficult	difficult	fairly easy		easy
Exercises How easy is it to follow the exercises (<i>drawings</i>)?	very difficult	difficult	fairly easy		easy
Planner How useful is the planner in the centre of the booklet?	no use at all	fairly useful	useful		very useful
Impact Did you learn anything from reading this booklet?	No – nothing at all	Only a little	Yes – quite a lot		Yes – lots
Will you try to increase your level of physical activity or do more exercise after reading this booklet?	No – I definitely will not	I will think about it	I will try		Yes – I definitely will
Are you a veteran or war widow?	Veteran	War widow	Neither a veteran nor a war widow		
What is your age?	Under 60	60-69	70-79	80-89	90 or over

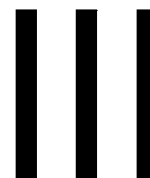
If you have any other comments or suggestions about this booklet, please write them on the next page.

Other Comments: _____

Fold along this line FIRST

Delivery Address:
PO Box 21
WODEN ACT 2606

No stamp required
if posted in Australia



Choose Health Be Active
Booklet Evaluation Form
Reply Paid 21
WODEN ACT 2606

Fold along this line LAST – so your comments are covered – then seal with sticky tape



Useful Contacts

Contact your **local council** to find out about facilities or services in your area that can help you to become more active. Below are phone numbers of State or Territory based organisations that may also be useful.

NSW

Department of Tourism,
Sport and Recreation
Ph : 131302

ACT

YMCA
Ph: 02 6162 0991

VIC

Go for your life Infoline
Ph: 1800 638 594

TAS

Sport and Recreation
Tasmania
Ph: 1800 252 476

SA

Active Ageing
Ph: 08 8232 9077

WA

WA Department of Sport and
Recreation
Ph: 08 9492 9700

NT

Sport and Recreation NT
Ph: 1800 045 678

QLD

Sport and Recreation QLD
Ph: 07 3237 9832

Want to know more about physical activity? Contact:

Heart Health – the National Heart Foundation

Ph: 1300 362 787
Website: www.heartfoundation.com.au

Diabetes – Diabetes Australia

Ph: 1300 136 588
Website: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Asthma – Asthma Australia

Ph: 1800 645 130
Website: www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

Arthritis – the Arthritis Foundation

Ph: 1800 011 041
Website: www.arthritisfoundation.com.au

Osteoporosis – Osteoporosis Australia

Ph: 1800 242 141
Website: www.osteoporosis.org.au

Cancer – the Cancer Council Australia

Ph: 131 120
Website: www.cancer.org.au

The Department of Health and Ageing

Visit our website: www.health.gov.au or the
Aged Care Information Line on 1800 500 853

Falls Prevention

For more information on falls prevention please
search www.health.gov.au

The Department of Veterans' Affairs

Visit our website at www.dva.gov.au or call the
Department of Veterans' Affairs office in your
State on 133 254. You can also find out more
by calling your local Veterans' Affairs Network
office on 1300 551 918.

Sports Medicine Australia – www.sma.org.au