

# Staying well as you age

To enjoy life in older age, it is important for you to care for the health of your mind and body. There are many things you can do for your mental health that will help you feel good.

## Tips for better mental health

- **Stay active:** At least 150 minutes a week of regular physical activity can help your mood, self-confidence and memory, and help reduce feelings of depression. Swimming, running, walking, gardening, tennis, cycling, bowls and dancing are good ways to stay active. You might need to talk to your doctor about what activity suits your body.
- **Eat well:** Eating well is important for your brain and body. Every day, eat foods like:
  - green leafy vegetables, such as kale, rocket, spinach or silverbeet
  - colourful fruit, such as prunes, figs or blueberries (fresh or frozen)
  - wholegrain cereals, nuts, seeds and protein (eg, eggs, lean meat)

It's also important to include oily fish, such as salmon or sardines, at least once a week. And don't forget to drink plenty of water.

- **Reduce alcohol:** Having more than two standard drinks of alcohol a day can affect your sleep, mood and mental and emotional health. If you do drink, try to have at least two days a week when you don't drink.
- **Connect with others:** Social connection can benefit your mental health in many ways. It can help you feel less lonely and isolated, and improve your mood and self-confidence. Connection can be about giving to others,

as well as feeling appreciated. You can connect by volunteering, joining community groups (such as a local walking group, neighbourhood house or craft group) and spending time with family or friends. Social connections are important to fight loneliness and isolation in older age.

- **Get good sleep:** Getting a good night's sleep is important for your mental health. It can refresh your body and mind and help you manage your day better. Some things that can help you sleep better are:
  - being active during the day
  - avoiding drinks with caffeine in the evening
  - a cool, dark bedroom
  - reducing screen time (eg, TV, phone or computer) before bed.
- **Relax:** Finding an activity that helps you to relax can help to support your mental health, reduce stress and improve sleep. Things such as mindfulness and meditation, gardening, art or colouring in, reading, journaling – or any other activity you find calming – can help.



## Need help or support?

If you need more information or support, please talk to your doctor about whether a referral to a counsellor or psychologist might help you.

## Challenges as we age

As you get older, there are things that might make it harder to feel positive, such as:

- **Money:** Stress and worry about money is common, and can affect your mental health. If you are finding it hard to pay bills or rent, or if you have other money problems, there is help and support available.

Some places to get help are your local council or community health service. The National Debt Hotline (1800 007 007) provides free financial counselling. You can also visit [www.moneysmart.gov.au](http://www.moneysmart.gov.au)

- **Relationships:** Conflict at home, or with family and friends, can be a common cause of fear and anxiety. So too can be bullying, racism, war and/or religious persecution, or experience as a refugee.
- **Elder abuse:** This is a form of violence and affects more women than men. It can be neglect, or financial, psychological, physical, social and/or sexual abuse.

Everybody has the right to feel safe and free from harm. If you need help or support, speak to your doctor or contact elder abuse support services at 1800 ELDERhelp (1800 353 374) or 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732).

- **Loss and grief:** As you get older, it can be common to experience grief with the sickness or loss of parents, partners, friends, or children. You can also experience grief because your lifestyle, identity or role in society is changing as you age.

These feelings are common. You can get support to deal with them by talking to your doctor or friends, or through the resources listed below.

These tips can help improve your life as you get older.

For more information on healthy ageing, visit [www.jh.today/mind16](http://www.jh.today/mind16)

### Further resources

Beyondblue: [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au) or call 1300 224 636

1800RESPECT: [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au) or call 1800 737 732

Smiling Mind: [smilingmind.com.au](http://smilingmind.com.au)

Elder abuse support services: 1800 ELDERhelp (1800 353 374)

Moneysmart: [moneysmart.gov.au](http://moneysmart.gov.au)

National Debt Hotline: 1800 007 007.

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This fact sheet generally uses the terms 'women' and 'girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women, and women with a transgender experience.

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