

# Wellbeing in Older Age

A guide to keeping active and positive in older age



## INTRODUCTION

Physical, social and emotional health are all important aspects of our overall health and wellbeing. Keeping active in older age is vital for each of these aspects of our wellbeing. This may mean being physically or socially active, or keeping the mind active.

Everyone has different interests and activities they like to pursue, and these may change from time to time as circumstances change. However, it is important that we continue to pursue things of interest that give purpose to our lives, regardless of our age or ability. This can help us feel positive and lift our mood when we are feeling flat or low.

The aim of this booklet is to assist you to reflect on positive aspects of your life and think about how to continue being active in older age. There are questions in this booklet that can be used to reflect on your current activities and see if there is an opportunity for you to be more active.

Please note that this booklet is not intended to provide professional medical advice. If you are concerned about your physical or mental health in any way, please see your doctor.



## ACTIVITIES

As we all know, being active is a very important part of keeping healthy. Being active may come in many forms, from spending time with friends and family, to listening to the radio, playing games, pursuing hobbies or working.

As we age, we may need to modify or review our interests and activities to suit any change in our circumstances. This will ensure that we continue to enjoy being active in older age.

- What activities do you find pleasant and like doing?
- What activities do you think you might enjoy, but haven't tried before?
- Is there something you used to like doing that you haven't tried for a while?

*“Trying something entirely new can be very rewarding and spirit-raising. I learned computer use from the Council on the Ageing, and this has been a great blessing.”*



### Some interesting activities to try:

- gardening
- photography
- knitting
- computing
- fishing
- bush walking
- bird watching
- swimming
- walking
- aerobics
- strength training class
- Scrabble
- chess
- cards
- mah-jong
- travel

## SOCIAL CONTACT

Having social contact is important for maintaining friendships and connecting with family members, and may even help to prevent feelings of loneliness. The need for social contact can vary greatly from person to person.

For some, talking over the telephone or using email is adequate while others prefer meeting friends and family in person. Some people enjoy having daily social contact while others are content with a less frequent amount.

- How often do you have contact with friends or family?
- Do you feel that you would like to have more social contact?
- How do you think this could be achieved?

*“I lost my dear husband of 46 years earlier this year, and felt devastated by the loss. The Healthy Parks Healthy People walking group has helped me to move on, and climb out of my rut of despair.”*

### Enjoy social contact with:

- family
- friends
- a choir
- a craft group
- a men’s shed group
- a senior citizens’ group
- public worship services.



## LONELINESS

Loneliness is a feeling commonly experienced by many older people.

Life-changing events, such as being recently widowed or moving house, can bring on feelings of loneliness. Some people may feel lonely even though they have lots of contact with other people.

For some people these feelings will improve over time. Others may need time to think about how to actively overcome their loneliness. This may involve seeking out new opportunities for meeting other people, or finding a new interest or hobby.

- Have you recently been feeling lonely?
- What could you do to manage these feelings?

*“Since my wife died, I tend to get lonely very easily. But she would never have put up with that; she knew I was very capable – so I go and visit my friends.”*



### **You can help overcome feelings of loneliness by:**

- visiting a neighbour or friend
- inviting family or friends over
- chatting to a close friend on the telephone
- joining a social club.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

Having a good social support system is important to help us deal with problems that may crop up in life.

Developing a supportive network to help when things go wrong can make dealing with troubling situations easier.

Support may come from friends, family, neighbours or community organisations. People who are able to identify supports early on are more likely to maintain their independence in older age.

- Are you able to think of people or organisations that can assist if something goes wrong?

*“I have very good neighbours; they keep an eye on me. It’s nice to know someone is there if I need them.”*

*“I know that I can always call the local council and ask them for some help. It’s a great comfort knowing the help is there if I ever needed it.”*



### Find support from:

- family
- friends
- neighbours
- local council
- local home care provider
- Commonwealth Carelink.

## HELPING OTHER PEOPLE

Being part of a community and helping others is another way of achieving wellbeing. Everyone has some skills or experience that they can use to benefit other people or animals.

Belonging to an organisation, donating to charity, caring for a pet, or helping a young neighbour or family member with homework may create a sense of satisfaction and increase your overall wellbeing.

- Would you like to increase your involvement with others in the community?
- With your experience and knowledge, is there some way you could contribute in the community?

*“Twisting crepe paper was one of the most rewarding times of my life. I really enjoyed helping at the local primary school.”*

*“Helping my next door neighbour who didn’t have transport gave me a sense of purpose. Before that I was locked in my own house.”*

### **You can help others by:**

- volunteering
- donating to a charity
- helping at the local school
- becoming a member of an organisation
- helping a neighbour or friend
- knitting or making quilts for the children’s and maternity hospitals.



## TAKING CARE OF 'YOU'

While being active is important for good health, it is equally important not to take on too much. Many older people have the responsibility of caring for their children, grandchildren, partners, or others in their lives.

Unfortunately, support can sometimes be difficult to find when you are responsible for caring for a loved one. At other times, you may feel guilty about leaving a loved one in the care of another person. However, it is important that you give yourself 'time-out' and continue to pursue things of interest in your own life.

- What could you do to take care of 'You'?
- Is there a support system in your area that you could connect with?
- What would you like to do, if you had some respite time?

*"Taking some time for myself means that when I come back to care for my husband, I am refreshed and happy. I think my husband feels better too."*



### Take a break by:

- meditating
- reading a book
- drawing
- painting
- going on a short holiday
- using respite services
- joining a support group.

## GOAL SETTING

This booklet has covered some aspects of being socially active, and being a part of the community, for the benefit of your overall health and wellbeing. Hopefully you have been able to identify the positive aspects of your life that you already enjoy. However, if there are some aspects of your life that you would like to change, then setting goals can help.

Goals work best when they are specific and easy to implement. Setting a goal can help you work out how to achieve something that is personally important. Thinking back to some of the areas covered in this booklet, write down a simple goal that you would like to achieve. Then, break this down into small steps of how you could go about achieving your goal. Setting a time limit on each goal will also help you to stay motivated. It is also important that you reward yourself once you have achieved your goal.

There is some space on the next two pages for you to write down your goals.

Sometimes, achieving one goal will open up many opportunities to try new activities. Then you may be able to think of more goals to aim for, in order to help you keep active.



My goal is to:

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The small steps I will take to achieve this goal are:

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I plan to have achieved this goal by:

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I will reward myself once I have achieved this goal by:

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**Department for Communities**  
Level 7 Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

**Telephone:** (08) 6217 8700  
**Facsimile:** (08) 9324 2408  
**Email:** [info@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@communities.wa.gov.au)  
**Website:** [www.communities.wa.gov.au](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au)

Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS National): 131 450

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