

Key Points:

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Staying healthy in later life

This factsheet is aimed at people over 60.

Those living in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may wish to contact:

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9SD, tel: 029 2037 1566 (national call rate); website: www.accymru.org.uk;

Age Concern Northern Ireland, 3 Lower Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR, tel: 028 9032 5055 (national call rate) Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1pm.

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1. Introduction

Growing older is inevitable but poor health in old age is not. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is an important step to take if you want to increase your chances of keeping healthy and maintaining your independence in later life.

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.

It's also important to try and make time to do things that make you 'feel good' and try not to put yourself under unnecessary pressure. Good health is not simply related to your physical health, it includes your mental health too.

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

2. Keeping physically active

Why is it important for our health?

Keeping active can:

- reduce risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity and stroke;
- maintain mobility and hence your independence;
- reduce the likelihood of falling and consequent hip fractures;
- help ensure you have a good appetite;
- help maintain regular bowel movements;
- help with insomnia and other sleep problems;

- help you cope with feelings of stress;
- help you get out and meet people;
- help maintain mobility and minimise discomfort in those with arthritis or Parkinson's disease or following a stroke.

Are we doing enough to keep active?

Recent research suggests 60% of men and 70% of women are not sufficiently active to benefit their health.

Keeping physically active includes what is popularly referred to as 'exercise'. However there are plenty of day-to-day and social activities that can help you keep physically active without joining an exercise class. The problem is that for many people their 'day to day' lives involve less walking and more driving; greater use of labour saving gadgets at work and at home and gardens that are easy to manage. Many popular social activities involve little physical activity.

However a little activity is better than no activity and it is never too late to start. To be of benefit, you should aim to build up to around 30 minutes each day on most days of the week. The 30 minutes don't have to be continuous. Ten minutes at a time, at different times of the day works as well.

Why is it important as you get older?

Physical activity can develop and improve:

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

These become increasingly important as you get older. They influence your ability to participate in personal and every day activities, which are vital if you are to maintain your independence and sense of wellbeing. Varying your activities is helpful, as different types of activity can provide different benefits.

Activities to promote stamina, strength, suppleness and balance

Stamina

Activities that improve stamina are those that 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 weight by burning up calories;
- help you lose weight as part of a calorie controlled diet.

Swimming, walking briskly, walking up a gentle hill, climbing stairs, digging the garden, sweeping up leaves, cleaning windows can all make your heart beat that bit faster.

If you are walking you should aim for a pace that makes you a little breathless, feel warm but allows you to comfortably hold a conversation. As you get fitter, your walking pace will become faster.

These activities often make you feel tired which can be helpful if you have sleeping problems.

Activities such as walking, running, playing tennis and those that form part of an 'aerobics' class also provide what is known as 'weight bearing' exercise. This is important not only to develop stamina but also strong muscles. It will also help strengthen bones. This is important in the prevention of osteoporosis, a condition in which bones have become more fragile and consequently more susceptible to breaking. See sections 3 and 6.

Strength

Activities that develop strength will strengthen and tone your muscles. Taking part in such activities is the only way to slow or even reverse the loss of muscle and bone strength that occurs with ageing.

Strong muscles help with daily tasks such as:

- getting out of the bath or up out of a chair;
- carrying a bag of shopping;

- holding a jar without dropping it;
- picking up your grandchild;
- climbing stairs.

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

Strong muscles will:

- 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.

In order to strengthen muscles, you need to take part in activities which are repeated a number of times and which tighten then relax muscles. Muscles in your hands, arms, legs and back are particularly important.

You can do this by:

- pushing against an immovable object that provides 'resistance' such as a wall, then moving away;
- 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.

Day to day things you could try include repeatedly 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 and gym equipment will often focus on activities that strengthen a range of muscles.

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 a skirt.

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 muscle flexibility, you may prefer to join an exercise or gym class so that a qualified teacher can guide you.

Balance and co-ordination

Strong muscles that respond quickly will help you to maintain your balance.

Good balance is important in the prevention of unnecessary falls. Falls have the potential to result in a broken wrist or fractured hip.

Ball games such as table tennis, tennis, bowls, even playing 'catch' can promote good co-ordination. There are special exercises that will also help with muscle tone and balance. T'ai chi classes can be helpful but be sure your teacher is qualified.

Value of typical activities and exercise

Activity/Exercise	Balance	Flexibility	Stamina	Strength
Brisk walking			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Walking up a hill			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Climbing stairs			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Digging			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Swimming			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cycling on the road or exercise bike	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Dancing		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Playing bowls or golf	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Exercise classes and local activity groups

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

- be an opportunity to socialise and make new friends;
- act as a motivator that encourages you to build regular activity into your day to day life. If you do something regularly, it becomes a habit and ultimately something you would miss if you didn't do it!

Many local authorities and community centres arrange a wide variety of classes, including T'ai Chi, Pilates, yoga and exercise classes especially for people over 50 or over 60. Contact your local library, community or leisure centre for more information on these and other local activity groups such as 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 are able to offer exercise classes, as an NHS referral, to those people they believe would benefit. This might include patients at risk of coronary heart disease. 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 throughout the United Kingdom that work in a local partnership to promote healthy ageing. Older volunteers are recruited as Senior Health Mentors, who are trained to work within their communities to give information and advice on healthy living and accident prevention to other older people. A range of activities are also organised, which may include exercise and walking groups, art projects, line dancing and opportunities to develop IT skills. A range of free leaflets is also available. See section 6, Further information if you would like to know if there is a project near to you.

Over *200 Healthy Living Centres* have been set up in local communities in England with the help of Government and lottery funding. They are located in areas where the general health of the population is poor and people have difficulty accessing services. Before deciding which activities to make available through these centres, 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 developed.

The '*Walking the way to health initiative*' is supported by the Countryside Agency and British Heart Foundation. It is a five year programme that has been running since October 2000.

The aim is to improve the health and fitness of over a million people, particularly those who currently do little exercise. Group walks and independent walking are included in 'walking for health' schemes. There are currently around 200 schemes in England, catering for people of all ages and abilities. 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 walking activities are offered, contact the WHI team (see section 6) or look on the website: www.whi.org.uk

There are several exercise regimes that take into account the health of both the body and the 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, teaching body awareness, breathing, strength and flexibility, balance and co-ordination. Pilates aims to stretch and strengthen muscles without increasing their bulk. Exercises are usually on a mat on the floor or may involve special machines.

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 will concentrate on the martial arts aspect of T'ai Chi, while others will offer classes that focus on exercises that develop flexibility, suppleness and muscle tone.

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 either while sitting down or standing up but holding on to a chair to help you. This means there are exercise programmes you can follow if you would have difficulty with standing-based exercises either at home, in a day centre or a care home.

Organisations such as Help the Aged produce 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 their 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. It can help maintain mobility and limit pain. In the long term it can help prevent disability. 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.

Osteoporosis is a condition you become more prone to as you get older. It affects your bones which become porous and fragile. This is particularly true of women - osteoporosis will affect one in three women - but can also affect men - it will affect one in 12 men.

As a result of osteoporosis, bones are less able to withstand any force such as falling and can break easily. This is particularly true of hip and wrist bones. Most broken hips occur in people over the age of 75 after a fall. The bones in the spine can also be affected by osteoporosis and begin to crumble. This can result in curvature of the spine and a loss of height. This in turn puts extra strain on muscles and ligaments in the back causing muscle spasm and pain.

Regular weight bearing exercise is important in the development and maintenance of strong bones throughout life.

Exercises 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. There are a range of common reasons 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;
- I'm too fat;
- 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 all the reasons why you believe you would benefit by being more active. Then write down the barriers to becoming more active. If there are significantly more barriers than benefits, your chances of keeping up any activity you start will be low. Therefore before you start any additional activity, try to think of how you can tackle or overcome the barriers. You might prefer to do this on your own or with the help of a friend.

Things to remember before you start

If you plan to significantly increase your activity level or join an exercise class you should 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;
- make sure you 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 assume that eating a healthy diet and enjoying your food are not compatible. However there are no 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods just 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' diets. Therefore to eat 'healthily', there should be no need to cut out foods you currently enjoy - although eating some foods less often or in smaller portions may be worth considering.

The likelihood of suffering from common diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis is affected by our 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 actually widen your horizons and make eating more enjoyable.

Today's healthy eating messages try to 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 foods;
- eat fewer salty foods;
- eat less sugary foods and drinks.

Eat more fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are rich sources of many vitamins and fibre (roughage). Evidence is growing that people who eat plenty of fruit and vegetables are 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. You may have noticed the logo on packaged fruit and vegetables in the shops.

The message is not referring only to *fresh* fruit and vegetables. Frozen vegetables and fruit are good, as the freezing process preserves their vitamins. If you cook vegetables, be careful not to overcook them, as this will destroy valuable vitamins. Canned fruit and vegetables, canned or cartoned fruit juice and dried fruit count too.

Baked 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, minerals and other nutrients as fruit and vegetables. The main thing to remember is that *each of your five portions should be different.*

Ways to eat five portions each day

This may seem a difficult. As a start, identify as many fruits and vegetables as you can - fresh, frozen, canned - that you enjoy and can afford. 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* sliced banana added to your cereal.

Snacks - 1 portion

A medium sized apple *or* banana, *or* small bunch of grapes *or* other fruit.

Lunch - 1 portion

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

Main meal - 2 portions

Choose from the following and aim for about 3 tablespoons as an average portion of vegetables:

frozen/canned peas *or* fresh carrots *or* canned sweetcorn *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, pasta, rice or potatoes. It is important to try to include wholemeal as well as white varieties 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 will increase your fibre intake too.

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

Eat less fat and fatty 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. The significance of particular foods in *your* diet will depend on *how often* you eat them and *how large a portion* you eat.

Changes you may have already made or could consider making to reduce the fat in your diet include:

- view crisps, other corn or potato based snacks, salted nuts, chocolate, biscuits, pastries and cakes as 'treats' only;
- 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 less oil or other fat when cooking;
- have chips or roast potatoes on fewer occasions and/or have smaller portions;
- choose oven chips;
- choose straight, 'chunky' chips as 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 for a mince-based dish. Fry the mince in its own fat, in a non stick pan, then drain off excess fat before adding the remaining ingredients;
- remove skin from chicken before you cook it;
- 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 hard cheese or houmous are still relatively high fat foods;

If you regularly eat 'ready meals' or 'take away' meals you will not be able to control the amount of fat or oil in the recipe. Therefore try and choose a meal that has not been fried or which is based on a starchy food. Also only eat as much as you want, which might not necessarily correspond to the portion size provided.

There is considerable research that suggests the type of fat we eat has a role to play in the development of heart disease. The fat in food is made up of a mixture of different fatty acids - saturated, mono-unsaturated and poly-unsaturated fatty acids. The fat will contain a mixture of these but usually one type predominates.

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

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

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

This is a brief summary of what is a complex issue. If you would like to know more about different types of fat or the role of fat and other factors in the development and prevention of heart disease, see section 6.

Eat fewer salty foods

Salt is essential in our diet but only in relatively small amounts. Most people have much more than they need.

Eating too much salt has been linked to higher than average blood pressure. This may lead to an increased risk of heart disease or stroke. If there is a history of high blood pressure in your family, it is particularly important to avoid excessive amounts of salt.

In the UK about three quarters of the salt we eat is found in 'processed' foods. Processed foods contributing to salt intake include:	
* 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

The remainder of the salt in our diet is added during cooking or at the table.

Salt (sodium chloride) will appear on a food label as 'sodium'. It is the sodium in salt that affects blood pressure. Check how much is in a portion of food. You should be aiming for no more than 2.5 grammes sodium each day.

The label sometimes tells you the 'salt' equivalent for the sodium in the food. In terms of 'salt', you should be aiming for no more than 6 grammes. The average adult currently consumes around 9 grammes salt each day. This is 50% more than considered to be healthy.

Tips to reduce salt intake:

- limit the number of salty snack foods you eat;
- be aware of the processed foods in the table on page 14 and limit the frequency with which you eat them;
- don't put the salt pot on the table;
- gradually reduce the amount of salt used in cooking and add flavour by using pepper and other spices and herbs;
- look for low salt versions of canned vegetables and baked beans;
- read the label on 'ready meals' and other manufactured foods, as many are relatively high in salt.

You can also buy potassium based salt substitutes for cooking and seasoning food. Before changing to such a product, you should discuss it with your GP.

Eat less sugary food and drinks

Overweight and tooth decay are often associated with a high sugar diet.

Sugar does not cause overweight or obesity. It can be associated with overweight because most people find sugary foods enjoyable. As a result the temptation to eat them frequently can be high, so that without realising it, you can be consuming more calories than you need each day. Sugar is often associated with fat in foods such as biscuits, cakes, ice cream and chocolate bars. This combination of sugar and fat makes intake of excess calories even more likely.

Tooth decay is not linked to the total amount of sugar you eat. It is *how often* you have sugary foods and drinks *rather than how much* sugar you have that is important. The *more often* teeth are bathed with a sugary solution, the more opportunities there are for the decay process to begin. So if you are going to have sugary foods or drinks, try to ensure it is at mealtimes. This is a better time as chewing during a meal stimulates the flow of saliva, which helps to 'wash' your teeth.

Is tooth decay significant for adults? More adults lose their teeth due to advanced 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 and older people*.

Ways to reduce the sugar in your diet might include:

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

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 milk and products such as yogurt, cheese, fromage frais as sources of calcium.

Calcium is important throughout life. Children and adolescents need calcium for their growing bones; adults need calcium to maintain strong bones. 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 when you eat the bones such as in canned sardines or mackerel; 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 are spending 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:

- making a casserole rather than buying more expensive items such as chops;
- making a casserole using less meat and adding another source of protein such as red 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. Vitamins such as vitamin C and folic acid, which are found in many fruits, potatoes and green leafy vegetables, are destroyed by overcooking in too much water.

So remember to cook vegetables lightly in the minimum of water. Steaming them or cooking in a little water in the microwave oven will help preserve their vitamins.

We get most of our vitamin D not from food but due to the exposure of our skin to sunlight. 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.

Sitting outside or beside an open window on a sunny spring or summer day is therefore good for your health. However if you think you may need to take a vitamin D supplement, discuss this with your GP. Vitamin D is found in oily fish, eggs, liver and fortified foods such as margarine and some breakfast cereals.

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 similar snacks - often high in sugar and/or fat - during the morning.

Breakfast also offers a good opportunity to start the day with fruit juice and a high fibre cereal or wholemeal toast, which will be a good start to a 'healthy eating' day.

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.

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. Regular exercise can also help those with constipation.

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 can decrease the likelihood of blood clots forming and so reduce your risk of a heart attack. There is evidence that if you have already had a heart attack, eating oily fish twice a week can reduce your chance of having another one.

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. These are designed to monitor your health and anticipate potential problems.

They may include checks for *high blood pressure, diabetes or blood cholesterol*. Check your practice leaflet or discuss what checks are offered with the practice nurse. You may also be invited to have a *medication check*. This is an opportunity for you to ask any questions and check the full range of prescription and other medications you may be taking – such as supplements from a health food store - with your GP or a local pharmacist.

There is also the *national breast screening programme*. By the end of 2004 all women between the ages of 50 and up to and including 70 years will be routinely invited for screening every three years. Over the age of 70 women will have the right to be screened every three years on request. Prior to this age extension, only women between the ages of 50 and 64 were routinely invited for screening, with women aged 65 and over able to ask for screening every three years.

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 (local call rate). You may also like to look on the NHS website www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk. Contact NHS Direct if you need details of your local screening unit.

People aged 60 or over are eligible for *free NHS sight tests*. It is generally suggested that adults have a sight test every two years. However for those aged 70 and over, a sight test every 12 months has been recommended by a joint working party of the Department of Health and those representing opticians. As well as affecting your quality of life, poor vision is known to be associated with falling and consequent fractures to the wrist or hip.

There is no standard NHS sight test. When making an appointment, check that you are booking a free 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, 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 NHS sight tests. See section 6.

6. Further Information

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

Physical activity and exercise

BHF and Countryside Agency 'Walking the way to health initiative', The Countryside Agency, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham GL50 3RA, tel: 01242 533258, website: www.whi.org.uk. Look on the website or telephone to find out if there is a walking group local to you.

The Central Council of Physical Recreation (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 Francis House, Francis St, London SW1P 1DE, tel: 020 7854 8500, website: www.ccpr.org.uk.

The Keep Fit Association is a national governing body, with classes around the country. It can be contacted at Astra House, Suite 1.05, Arklow Road, New Cross, London SE14 6EB, tel: 020 8692 9566, website: www.keepfit.org.uk.

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. 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.

The British Wheel of Yoga, 25 Jermyn Street, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 7RU, tel: 01529 306851, website: www.bwy.org.uk. This is the governing body for yoga in England and can help you find a qualified instructor, who should also have appropriate public liability insurance. Contact it for the name of your county representative who will have details of classes in the area.

Register of Exercise Professionals, Charter House, 29a London Road, Croydon CR0 2RE, tel: 020 8686 6464, website: 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. It currently has members who work in the fitness industry, local authorities, NHS Trusts, voluntary sector which embraces all disciplines including gym instruction, group exercise, circuits, keep fit, personal training, yoga, pilates, aqua, advanced instruction techniques, working with special population groups, exercise referral patients and people involved in physical activity programmes.

Pilates

There is no nationally recognised training structure for Pilates teachers. The main Pilates bodies in the UK are looking to develop a national standard and are working through the Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ) and the Sports and Recreation Industry Training Organisation to achieve this.

Body Control Pilates Association, 6 Langley Street, London WC2H 9JA, tel: 020 7379 3734, website: www.bodycontrol.co.uk. There are currently 500 teaching members across Europe who work to a strict Code of Practice governing teaching standards and professional ethics. Send a sae for details of your nearest qualified teacher or search the website.

The T'ai Chi Union for Great Britain, 1 Littlemill Drive, Balmoral Gardens, Crookston, Glasgow G53 7GF, tel: 0141 810 3482, website: 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.

Exercise books and videos

Strength and Balance Exercises for Healthy Ageing is available from Help the Aged Publishing Services, 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. Price: £4.00 + 40p to cover postage and packing. It has been published as part of the Government's Falls Prevention Initiative and is aimed at health professionals involved in falls prevention initiatives. 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. The booklet can be viewed on the Help the Aged website:
www.helptheaged.org.uk/Health/HealthyAgeing/Falls_practitioners.htm

Be Strong, Be *Steady* is a new video to be launched in autumn 2004 by Help the Aged. 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. For further details about the video, its cost and how to order it please contact Help the Aged, 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ, tel: 020 7278 1114, website: www.helptheaged.org.uk.

Fitness for the over 60's by Susie Dinan and Dr Craig Sharp and YMCA Fitness Industry Training, published by Piatkus 2002. Price: £10.99. ISBN 0-7499-2318-0. An illustrated book that explains the Fitness for Life plan. This aims to improve stamina, strength and flexibility and support good posture. Exercises can be done sitting or standing.

Easy exercises for the older person by Monica P. File, published by Springfield. Price £4.95. ISBN 0-9533579-0-1. The author is a chartered physiotherapist who has produced a short booklet of simple exercises for all parts of the body - neck, arms, hands, trunk, leg, hips and knees. Again many exercises can be done sitting down.

Exercise classes in care homes or day care settings

Extend, 2 Place Farm, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8SB, tel/fax: 01582 832760, website: www.extend.org.uk. Extend is a network of teachers providing movement to music for the over 60s and people with disabilities. Classes can be held in nursing homes, sheltered housing developments and hospitals.

National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA), Unit 211, Black Bull Yard, 24 - 28 Hatton Wall, London EC1N 8JH, tel: 020 7831 3320, website: www.napa-web.co.uk. Provides information for organisers of activities in care homes and day care settings.

BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health, Loughborough University, Loughborough, LE11 3TU, tel: 01509 223259, website: 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. See below for contact details.

Healthy Eating

Food Standards Agency (FSA), Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH, tel: 020 7276 8000, website: 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. The 'ask the expert' section includes answers to topical questions about a wide range of issues including healthy eating, food allergy, eating out, food and various illnesses. 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 (local call rate).

NHS Direct, 0845 46 47 (local call rate), website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk. Confidential 24 hour helpline. Able to provide information on particular health conditions, self help and support groups. Information on particular health conditions such as stroke and diabetes is also available on the website.

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. Arthritis Care produces a range of materials for those with arthritis including *Fit for Life* - looks at a range of exercises for keeping healthy; *Food for Thought* - looks at diet and its influence on arthritis.

Asthma UK, Providence House, Providence Place, London N1 0NT, advice line: 08457 010 203 (local call rate), website: www.asthma.org.uk. Information line (for enquiries about publications) 020 7704 5888. 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 (local call rate), website: www.bhf.org.uk. The British Heart Foundation produces a range of materials on prevention of heart disease as well as 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* and the helpline is staffed by specially trained cardiac nurses and information officers, who can also answer queries by email if you prefer.

Diabetes UK, 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA, Careline: 0845 120 2960 (local call rate), textphone: 020 7424 1031, website: www.diabetes.org.uk. Produces a range of materials on managing diabetes which include diet and exercise advice. Careline staff can also discuss managing diabetes by phone or email.

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. 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 for between 1 and 5 items is £1.05.

National Osteoporosis Society, Camerton, Bath BA2 0PJ, helpline (for medical queries): 0845 450 0230 (local call rate), general enquiries: 01761 471771, website: 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.

Yoga for Health Foundation, Ickwell Bury, Biggleswade, Beds SG18 9EF, tel: 01767 627271, website: www.yogaforhealthfoundation.co.uk. Runs weekend and five day residential yoga courses for those with chronic illnesses. Always discuss first with your doctor before embarking on any exercise programmes or courses. Courses are run for those with arthritis, Parkinson's Disease, Breathing Disorders, Multiple Sclerosis, Cancer and ME. Send sae for further information or call for details of course availability.

Other healthy lifestyle issues

NHS Smoking Helpline, tel: 0800 169 0169 (free call), website: 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 the Blind (RNIB), 105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE, helpline: 0845 766 9999 (local call rate). For Typetalk service dial 18001 0845 766 9999, website: www.rnib.org.uk. Produces a range of publications and helpline support.

Men's Health Forum, Tavistock House, Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9HR, website: 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

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
- further information or if you have questions arising from this factsheet
- 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's series of over 40 factsheets is available as a subscription service to those whose work involves older people. For details please call 0870 500 99 66 (national call rate) and ask for our factsheet subscription leaflet.

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

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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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