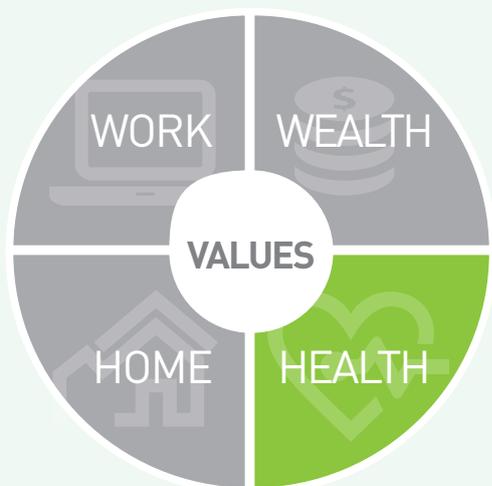




Being healthy is important when it comes to enjoying your retirement. What's the point in reaching retirement if you are not well enough to enjoy it!



Unfortunately, there are lots of myths out there about our health as we age. The fact is that when it comes to ageing well—a lot is within our control. We are able to impact the building blocks of our physical and mental health: **Eat, Sleep, Move, Connect**.

EAT

Higher levels of obesity are recorded for older people, so if this is you, please know that you're not alone! But being overweight or obese does have a negative effect on your health.

As we get older, what we eat is really important to staying healthy. It can be hard to change how we eat, and it doesn't help that there are so many opinions and contradictory advice on what 'healthy eating' looks like.

What we do know is that older people do need more of certain nutrients, and if you're less active you probably need fewer calories.

Eat for health provides three dietary guidelines for older people:

1. To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs.
2. Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five groups every day.
3. Limit intake of foods and drinks containing fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.



SLEEP

We know that in our modern world, most adults don't get enough sleep. Many of us believe that feeling tired is just part of life.

From the age of 20, adults need 7-9 hours sleep with some people falling just either side of this range.

Here are some science-based steps to help improve sleep health by setting up good habits for better quality rest:

Have a consistent routine: As much as possible wake up around the same time and go to bed at around the same time each evening.

Spend time outside: Especially in the morning, a quick walk can help with sleep as well as movement!

Watch what you drink: It can help to allow eight hours between your last caffeinated drink and going to bed, limit alcohol four hours before sleep, and not drink too much liquid two hours before bed.

Nap before 3pm: 20 minutes to recharge works well if you're low on sleep.

Turn off screens or use 'night mode': Blue light (particularly from phones and tablets) 1-2 hours before bed interferes with sleep hormones.

Have a 'wind down' routine: Doing the same activities each evening signals to your brain that its time to rest.

Try relaxation options: If you struggle to drop off to sleep, try visualisation, muscle relaxation or slow belly-breathing to relax.



MOVE

For some the idea of taking an exercise class or going to the gym can be daunting. However, there are good reasons to incorporate movement into our lives, and plenty of options too.

Research suggests that as much of half the physical decline associated with old age may be due to a lack of physical activity. While muscle strength and metabolic rate do decrease with age, some of the decline in these and other areas is because we don't stay active.

Australian Physical Activity Guidelines encourage older people to do 30 minutes of medium intensity exercise each day. This means increasing your heart rate to a level where you can talk but not sing.

Here are some tips for increasing your exercise:

- Ask a friend to walk with you.
- Walk to the coffee shop or park, rather than driving.
- Co-ordinate with your friends and family to have some 'me' time and engage in your favourite exercise.
- Use an online exercise app or youtube to work out at home.
- Make a schedule and put it in your diary.
- Discover what exercise you enjoy doing.

CONNECT

Connecting with others has many well-known benefits. It is important for our mental and physical wellbeing and can be a protective factor against anxiety and depression.

In fact, research has even shown that social isolation is correlated with higher mortality—even after taking pre-existing health conditions and socioeconomic factors into account.

See the 'Home' worksheet for more ideas about staying connected and cultivating your support networks.

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

The 'eat, sleep, move, connect' building blocks help us to protect and improve our wellbeing at all levels. Give yourself the best chance at staying physically healthy by being proactive and practicing healthy habits. Schedule in the check-ups and tests recommended for your age, taking into account your medical history.

Even so, everyone gets sick from time to time. When you're not feeling well ensure you get the support you need—see a health professional, and/or ask for the help you need from family and friends.

Asking for help can feel uncomfortable, and it's good to remind ourselves that it's okay to need help and to reach out for it. Most people like to help, and if you allow them to support you, it's likely you're making them feel good about themselves too. Plus, you will undoubtedly be able to reciprocate by helping them in the future, or at least thanking them.

When ill-health has a longer-term impact on your capacity, it is important to discuss this with your employer. Employers and employees have rights and responsibilities when it comes to safety, and work adjustments can be put in place to accommodate conditions that impact people's performance and safety.

For example, menopause is not an illness, but about 20% of women do experience severe symptoms in the lead up to menopause, and another 60% have mild to moderate symptoms that may impact them at work. It is not the role of employers to work out treatment options, but they can offer support, acceptance, and a safe working environment. Women need to be able to discuss reasonable work adjustments depending on the symptoms they experience.

From a mental health perspective, life is full of ups and downs and the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing estimate that nearly one in two Australians aged 16-85 experience a mental disorder during their lifetime.

If you experience mental health symptoms it is important to seek professional help as well as support from family and friends. There are many [mental health helplines](#) that provide free support, as well as Medicare and health insurance companies subsidising other services.

CREATING NEW HABITS

Even with the best intentions and the knowledge of what's good for us, it can still be incredibly difficult to stick to a new habit.

Contrary to popular belief, new habits are rarely formed through sheer will power alone. More than 40% of the actions we take each day aren't conscious decisions, they're habits.

There are couple of tricks you can use to turn healthy intentions into habits:

1. **Habit stacking:** Add a new habit on to something you already do. An example could be stacking reading with your end of day routine of making a cup of tea. After a bit of practice, whenever you make a cup of tea you'll also read.
2. **Make good habits easier and bad habits harder:** Perhaps you could put your running shoes next to the front door and the TV remote in a cupboard or put a sudoku book on your coffee table and switch out the sugary snack bowl for fruit.

Most of all, keep it realistic.

DON'T TRY TO REINVENT YOUR LIFE OVERNIGHT, BUT DO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE A COUPLE OF THINGS THAT WILL MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE.

“

WE DON'T STOP PLAYING BECAUSE WE GROW OLD. WE GROW OLD BECAUSE WE STOP PLAYING.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



RESOURCES

See the 'Home' worksheet on tips for connecting

See 'Reasonable Adjustments' fact sheet

Blog: [Use it or lose it](#)

Blog: [Tips for Mental Health](#)

Blog: [Coping](#)

Health information and advice: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Healthy eating: www.eatforhealth.gov.au

Sleep: www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

Mental health resources: www.headtohealth.gov.au

Menopause at work: www.menopauseatwork.org

[Find a psychologist at APS](#) (may be covered by health insurance)

[Find a professional](#) at Beyond Blue

