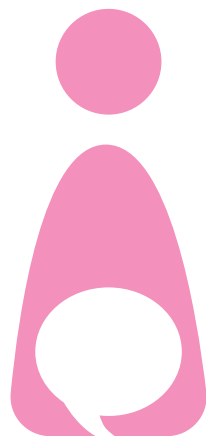




**TAKE FIVE  
TO AGE WELL**

# My Being Social Diary

A personalised planner  
for social connection in  
later life.



## Who we are



The Open University is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Since it began in 1969, the Open University has taught more than 2.3 million students worldwide.

In 2021, an assessment exercise for university research rated more than three quarters of Open University research as 4 or 3 star – the highest ratings available.

**The Open University's commitment to research and societal impact was also recognised, with 82% of its research impact assessed to be world leading or internationally excellent.**



Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. It works to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 and promote their rights and interests.

**Age Scotland's vision is of a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.** The charity's mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can enjoy better later lives.

## Introduction

**You may be aware of some of the ways you can improve your wellbeing and health as you age, such as having a healthy diet and being physically active. But perhaps you find it hard to put what you know into practice. Life can get in the way.**

The good news is that studies have found we can use our tendency to do things by habit to help us take better care of ourselves. Your habits are the things you do regularly and almost without thinking, like brushing your teeth or washing your hands.

This booklet will make you more aware of your habits regarding social connection. It explains how to use that awareness to ensure you are getting the social contact you need for daily wellbeing and long-term health.

→ **Many things other than habits affect our wellbeing, such as our finances, the suitability of our home, and any caring responsibilities, health conditions, or disabilities we have. The Age Scotland helpline can help with such matters – call 0800 12 44 222.**

While life's challenges can't all be fixed with different habits, there will be opportunities in your daily routines for small changes that boost wellbeing over time. **This guide will help you to identify and make the most of these.**

## About social connection in later life

In 1938, academics at Harvard University began following the lives of hundreds of boys and young men, rich and poor, to learn what helps people to thrive. **The major finding of this research, which now spans four generations, is that good relationships are key for a long, healthy, and happy life.**

Many other studies back that conclusion. When we feel generally close to other people, and that we belong to a group, this makes us happier and slows the ageing process. We all need social connection – although we may need it in different ways, depending on how introverted or extroverted we are.

But later life can change how socially connected we are. Retirement may bring an end to work friendships and regular social interactions. We are more likely to experience loss in later life, and to find our ability to socialise constrained by disabilities, health issues, and / or changes in income. On top of this, should we become lonely, stigma and fear of rejection can be barriers to us reaching out for support.

We can also simply get out of the habit of socialising, something the Covid-19 pandemic made clear. **Yet no matter our circumstances and personality, we can all take steps towards having more, and more fulfilling, social connection.**



## How to use the diary
















In the blank diary, record what and how much social contact you have over each day for a week. You can also record how you feel throughout the day. **Studies suggest that positive social contact floods the brain with mood boosting and stress busting chemicals.**

At the end of the week, look at your completed diary and identify any parts of your routine where you would like to improve your social connection. You can then use the planning template to write a plan that will help you achieve your goal.

When reading your diary, imagine you are doing so as a supportive friend. Don't judge yourself weak if you notice unhealthy choices. Psychologists have found that relying on willpower to reach health goals is a common mistake. This is because motivation comes and goes, and marketing and convenience are constant temptations in our society. The beauty of healthy habits is that, once set, they happen without the need for willpower.

→ **If you feel very lonely right now, the Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222 is available daytimes Monday to Friday for a friendly chat. They can also tell you about social opportunities locally that would fit with your interests and circumstances.**

## My Being Social Diary: Monday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Talk to strangers

It may seem obvious that talking to a close friend or family member will make you feel good. But studies show that chatting to strangers can also boost our wellbeing and is not nearly as awkward as we expect.

So, smile at people you pass in the park, at the bus stop, in a shop or café, or delivering your groceries. If they smile back, try starting a conversation. A note of caution – the human need for social connection can be preyed on by confidence tricksters. **Call the Age Scotland helpline on 0800 12 44 222 for a free advice guide on Avoiding Scams.**

## My Being Social Diary: Tuesday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Practice kindness

Research suggests we can train ourselves to be kinder, and doing so helps us connect with others, and be healthier and happier. From volunteering to offering a cuppa or sharing a smile, studies show that giving time to help others will also help you.

Ask yourself, when did I last give someone a genuine compliment? Studies have found giving compliments boosts the wellbeing of both parties and feels far less awkward than we may anticipate. Think about how you might compliment someone you value, give it a go, and see what happens.

## My Being Social Diary: Wednesday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Meet your neighbours

Research shows that 1 in 6 people don't even know their neighbour names, but there are plenty of benefits to being sociable with your neighbours. Studies have found that where people know their neighbours, they feel safer and less lonely. It also contributes to feelings of usefulness.

So, today, why not invite a neighbour over for a chat or to go for a walk? If that feels too much, maybe try a simple conversation in the street. Be gently curious about their life to get to know them better.

## My Being Social Diary: Thursday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Be a joiner

Research shows we can bond through shared activities such as movement (dance, fitness classes and other forms of physical activity), music (playing, listening, participating), food (cooking, eating, sharing knowledge) and more. Some studies suggest that activities where generations mix offer extra wellbeing benefits.

**Age Scotland's Community Connecting service, available through the Age Scotland helpline 0800 12 44 222, can help you find and connect with local opportunities that match your interests and situation.**

## My Being Social Diary: Friday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Show gratitude

Research suggests focusing regularly on what you feel grateful for in life lays the groundwork for better social connection. **Try writing daily, 1. a person you feel grateful to; 2. a pleasure you feel grateful for; and 3. something you are looking forward to.**

If there is a living person you feel especially grateful to, you could write them a 'thank you' letter. Be specific about what they did and how it helped you. Studies suggest that reading your letter aloud to them could powerfully deepen your bond, although this does carry risk, as you can't be certain how they will react.

## My Being Social Diary: Saturday
















Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Be aware of hearing loss

Hearing naturally worsens with age, making social situations more difficult. If you think you may need a hearing test, ask your GP to refer you to your local audiology department for a hearing test. Digital hearing aids are available free from the NHS, and new batteries and other maintenance for NHS hearing aids are also free.

**For information and advice about hearing loss contact RNID through their website [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk) or call 0808 808 0123.**

## My Being Social Diary: Sunday

Time	What social contact I have	How I feel (Tick one)
Early morning		  
Late morning		  
Early afternoon		  
Late afternoon		  
Evening		  

### ★ Suggestion for the day – Look up an old friend

Scan your address book. Is there a friend with whom you've lost touch? You could call or write to them. Having a shared history may mean you are able to pick up where you left off without much effort.

If you, or a friend or family member, use social media, this may help you find and reconnect with old friends.










**Sadly, the further we go into later life the greater the likelihood that we look up old friends only to learn of their death. Cruse Scotland has a free helpline you can call, 0808 802 6161, for support with loss.**

## Now read your completed My Being Social Diary




























Look for patterns in your social contact (or lack thereof) throughout each day. These are likely to be your habits. Use your notes on how you felt to help you identify habits relevant to your health and wellbeing.

For each habit, write down what you notice about it. For example, are you avoiding social situations due to hearing loss? For sociable habits, what has helped you stick with them? Circle the colour that says best what you want to happen with each habit:

To **STOP IT** , to **SWAP IT**  for a healthier habit, or to **STEP UP**  and do more of it. For example:

Habit	I notice that...	What I want (Circle one)
A chat with the newsagent most mornings.	I feel good, she takes time to listen.	  
I don't speak to people I pass daily.	I feel a bit sad that I know so few people in my area.	  
I avoid going out when the weather is wet.	I can end up not seeing anyone for days at a time.	  

## My social habits

Habit	I notice that...	What I want (Circle one)
		  
		  
		  
		  
		  
		  
		  
		  
		  

## Write a plan for being more socially connected

You should now know more about your social habits and have an idea of what you might like to change for your wellbeing and health.

Here are tips based on psychology research that will help you write a plan with a better chance of success.

### 1. Start small and make it easy

If your change in routine is small and easy to do, you are more likely to stick with it whether your day is going well or not. For instance, you could, over breakfast, jot down in a notebook who or what you feel grateful for in life, in just one or a few words.

### 2. Make use of habits you have

Our habits happen when we notice something, without being fully aware, that triggers us to behave in a certain way. So, for example, when you hear the doorbell, you might find yourself answering the door without having consciously made the decision.

We can use habits we already have as reminders for new ones. For instance, if you routinely queue at the Post Office, you could aim to start a conversation with other people in the queue each time. Eventually you should find this happening automatically.

### 3. Look for triggers around you

Your habits can be triggered by items around your home, and in other places you routinely spend time. So, for example, you could remind yourself to look up old friends by putting your address book in plain view.



#### 4. Make habits harder, or easier

To break a habit, make it harder or less pleasant. For instance, if you routinely watch daytime TV instead of going out and meeting people, you could take the batteries out of the TV remote control. You can still watch TV if you wish, but that extra step of replacing the batteries each time gives you more opportunity to consciously decide if TV is best for your wellbeing.

You can also make sociable habits easier. For example, if you often talk yourself out of going to a club you enjoy, arrange with friend from the club that you will call each other an hour or so before as a reminder and as an encouragement.

#### 5. Use other healthy habits to make you more social

Supportive people can help you build healthy habits such as eating well and being physically active. This applies in reverse. For instance, healthy eating and exercise improve mood, which should make you feel more like socialising.

**Call the Age Scotland helpline, 0800 12 44 222, for free advice guides on keeping active, eating well and other health topics.**

#### 6. Make it motivational

Keep a record of every time you succeed in changing your routine. You could use a notebook, calendar or, if you like and use IT, an app. Watching your progress over time can be motivational.

Don't worry if you falter now and then. Studies show that won't matter, as long as you get back to your plan as soon as possible. It will take a month, and possibly longer, for your new social habit to become easy and automatic, depending on how ambitious your goal is. But once your habit is set, you won't need to use willpower to keep it up.

## My plan for more social habits

### What I will do differently in my routine

### When I will do it, where, and for how long

### What I will do to help me succeed (e.g., use existing habits or adjust my surroundings)

### How I will record each time I successfully change my routine (e.g., with a notebook, calendar, or app)

### How I will reward myself for each success



**The Take Five to Age Well pledge offers small, simple steps to a longer, healthier life. From 1st September 2023, the campaign invites you to join a UK-wide community making a small change in daily routine for better ageing.**

Your pledge will be to choose and keep up a healthy change, or changes, for a month (or three months if you are pledging with others as a group). We'll support you to turn that change into a habit for long-term health and wellbeing.

### Why pledge?

Ageing is not optional, but we have choices about how we age. From our 30s, we start to lose muscle, our metabolism slows, and our skin begins to line. Despite these unavoidable changes, there are simple habits that can help keep us strong, sharp, independent, and feeling good. The **Take Five to Age Well** pledge will empower you to adopt these habits over a month-long period.

There are more than 16 million people in the UK over the age of 60 and rising. In pledging to age better you will become a role model for current and future generations. There are five areas in which you can choose to make a change – all evidence-based to give you the opportunity to really take charge of your ageing health.

They are:



**Eat:** adjusting what, when and how much you eat can boost your health and wellbeing.



**Connect:** making and maintaining social connections is essential for health and wellbeing.



**Drink:** hydration, and what you drink, are key to healthy ageing.



**Move:** exercise boosts body and mind.



**Think:** using your brain better can help you stay sharp.

The **Take Five to Age Well** pledge is an initiative of the Open University in collaboration with partner organisations across all four UK nations. Pledge participants will be invited to contribute to follow-up research, to help us understand how people create and follow up new routines for health, with the aim of informing future support for healthy ageing.

**The pledge's five action areas are based on the Five Pillars for Ageing model that underpins the Open University's Ageing Well Public Talk Series.**

Both the model and talks have been developed by Dr Jitka Vseteckova. The talks are designed to be easily accessible to all, with older people involved in their preparation and featuring frequently as co-presenters.

**Visit [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk) and search for 'ageing well public talks' to find out more.**



# TAKE FIVE TO AGE WELL

## How helpful was this diary?

We would welcome your feedback.  
There's a short survey at the website below.

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/MyDiaryFeedback](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MyDiaryFeedback)

You can also open the survey by  
using the camera on a smartphone  
with a QR reader to scan this code:



**Alternatively, call 0333 323 2400 and ask to  
speak to a member of the Age Scotland Health  
and Wellbeing Team.**

**For more information, please visit:  
[wels.open.ac.uk/take5](http://wels.open.ac.uk/take5)  
[www.age.scot](http://www.age.scot)**

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