



Health Focus



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Healthy Ageing

Sure, genetics play a part in how we age, but the good news? You have a lot of control too!

From regular exercise and a balanced diet to routine check-ups and mental health care, there's plenty you can do to age well and maintain a high quality of life. Let's dive into the key areas that can make a big difference.

Physical Health

Regular physical activity is your ticket to a longer, healthier life with fewer disabilities. A recent study¹ found that taking 8,000 steps a day significantly lowers the risk of death compared to 4,000 steps. Exercise helps maintain a healthy weight, with both obesity and being underweight posing health risks. For older adults, exercise is crucial for preserving muscle mass, which supports independence and longevity. Even without weight loss, exercise improves overall well-being. Incorporating physical activity into daily routines in various accessible ways is a great idea.

Healthy Eating

Making smart food choices for overall health is essential, particularly as one ages. Healthy eating patterns could include:

1. **Mediterranean-Style Diet** - Rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats, with more fish and less dairy than a traditional diet. This diet has been linked to a lower risk of sudden cardiac death².
2. **DASH Diet**³ - A low-salt diet designed to reduce high blood pressure, promote weight loss and lower the risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.
3. **MIND Diet** - Combines the Mediterranean and DASH diets, focusing on brain health. It has been associated with better cognitive function and slower cognitive decline.

Start with small changes, such as incorporating more fish or leafy greens, to improve health. Even late dietary changes can benefit overall well-being, and consulting a doctor for personalised advice is recommended.



Healthy Ageing continued...

Routine Health Check-Ups

Routine medical check-ups are a must for catching chronic conditions like high blood pressure or cholesterol early. Regular screenings, such as blood tests, can detect issues before symptoms even appear. Aim for at least one thorough doctor's visit a year to stay on top of your health and catch potential problems - like diabetes, cancer, or heart issues - when they're most treatable.

Sleeping Well

Good sleep is more important than ever as you age. Sleeping patterns are likely to change as you get older, with older adults sleeping more lightly, taking longer to start sleeping and sleep for shorter time spans. Older adults also tend to wake up multiple times during the night⁴. While sleep patterns often change with age, poor sleeping habits in older adults are linked to cognitive decline, including a higher risk of dementia and worsened depression symptoms⁵.

On the flip side, quality sleep boosts creativity, decision-making, and overall health. Stick to a sleep routine, avoid late naps, exercise regularly, and find relaxation techniques like meditation to help you sleep better. Older adults need about eight to ten hours of sleep during a day.

Sin Taxes

As you age, your body becomes more sensitive to harmful substances like tobacco and alcohol. It doesn't matter how long you've smoked - quitting now will improve your health. The same goes for cutting back on alcohol. Your future self will thank you.

Mental health

Your mental health is a cornerstone of overall well-being, influencing your thoughts, feelings, actions, and relationships. Here's how to keep it strong:

- **Social Connection:** Older adults often experience less social interaction, leading to loneliness and isolation. Physical changes like hearing or vision loss can make this worse. Engage in social activities, even if it feels uncomfortable - it's worth it.
- **Manage Stress:** Stress hits harder as you age, affecting memory, decision-making, and mood. Find ways to reduce stress and boost emotional stability for a healthier, happier life.
- **Recognise Depression:** Depression in older adults can be hard to spot, often showing up as disinterest rather than sadness. It's treatable, so don't hesitate to talk to your healthcare provider if you notice changes.

Embrace healthy ageing by focusing on your physical health, diet, sleep, and mental well-being. Regular doctor visits, cutting out harmful habits, and staying connected socially will help you age with grace and vitality.

¹<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32207799/> 24/03/202

²<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/diet-may-affect-risk-sudden-cardiac-death> 20/07/2021

³<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/dash-eating-plan> 29/12/2021

⁴<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/expert-answers/how-many-hours-of-sleep-are-enough/faq-20057898> 21/02/2023

⁵<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/lack-sleep-middle-age-may-increase-dementia-risk> 27/04/2021

Food Safety Awareness

Did you know that every year, about one in ten people worldwide get sick from unsafe food? That's according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The most vulnerable groups include pregnant women, young children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems⁶.

By creating awareness of what food safety should look like in our homes and in our communities, we can improve the safety of the food we consume.

Here's how you can do your part:

1. **Mind the Temperature:** Keep cold foods refrigerated below 5°C and hot foods above 60°C. Bacteria thrive in temperatures between 5°C and 60°C, so staying out of this "danger zone" is key to preventing food poisoning.
2. **Label and Rotate:** Keep your pantry organised by labelling and dating your foods. Store newer items at the back and bring older ones to the front to use first. Always check expiry dates, whether it's fresh produce or canned goods.
3. **Handle Raw Foods Carefully:** Raw poultry, meat, seafood, and eggs can carry harmful bacteria. Avoid cross-contamination by using separate chopping boards and utensils for each, and don't touch anything else with your hands while prepping. Afterward, be sure to sanitise your hands, tools, and work surfaces - including the sink!
4. **Clean as You Go:** Your hands are a common source of cross-contamination. Wash them thoroughly before and during food prep, and make sure to clean and sanitise all work surfaces afterward. This simple habit helps stop germs in their tracks.
5. **Cook Thoroughly:** Raw proteins like meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs need to be cooked to at least 70°C to kill harmful bacteria. If you don't have a food thermometer, check the colour of the meat or follow other safety guidelines to ensure its fully cooked.
6. **Ensure Safe Water and Ingredients:** If you're unsure about your water quality, boil it or use bottled water. For surface sanitation, use diluted household bleach, a good detergent, or boiling water to keep everything clean and safe.

By sticking to these simple tips, you're not just protecting yourself - you're helping reduce the global impact of foodborne illnesses and promoting a healthier, safer environment for everyone.

Stay safe and eat well!

⁶<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/354463/WHO-HEP-NFS-AFS-2022.2-eng.pdf?sequence=1.01/05/2022>





World Patient Safety Day - 17 September 2024

Every year on 17 September, the World Health Organisation (WHO) rallies the global community to take united action to improve patient safety.

Patient safety is a healthcare discipline that emphasises the reporting, analysis and prevention of medical errors that often lead to adverse healthcare events:

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) healthcare errors impact one in every ten patients around the world⁷.
- From a South African perspective, R1. 8bn was paid out for medico-legal claims in 2021 and R855. 7m in 2022 in the public sector alone. Of the 15 148 claims, 4 443 were from the Eastern Cape, 3 783 from Gauteng, 2 915 from KZN and 1617 from Limpopo⁸.
- According to the South African Medical Journal, the causes of increased medico-legal claims include clinical errors, maladministration and mismanagement. The legal profession has also contributed to the scenario alongside increased patient awareness⁹.

This year's World Patient Safety Day theme is "Improving Diagnosis for Patient Safety," with the slogan "Get it right, make it safe!" The focus is on the critical role of accurate and timely diagnoses in protecting patients and improving health outcomes.

A correct diagnosis is the first step toward effective treatment. When it's wrong or delayed, the consequences can be severe,

even catastrophic, especially if the misdiagnosis is not communicated properly.

It is essential to take a step back and look at the causes of incorrect diagnoses in the healthcare system.

- **Systemic factors** - organisational weaknesses that increase the likelihood of errors, such as poor communication between healthcare providers and patients, high workloads and ineffective teamwork.
- **Cognitive factors** - involve the training and experience of clinicians, as well as the impact of biases, fatigue and stress on decision-making.

To improve diagnosis and patient safety, we need to address:

- **Systemic Issues:** Problems like poor communication, heavy workloads, and ineffective teamwork that create opportunities for errors.
- **Cognitive Factors:** The impact of clinician training, experience, biases, fatigue, and stress on decision-making.

Improving diagnosis must be a top priority. This World Patient Safety Day, let's commit to strengthening our healthcare systems, designing safer diagnostic processes, supporting clinicians, and involving patients every step of the way in their diagnostic journey.

⁷<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/patient-safety-11/09/2023>

⁸<https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/37590/#:~:text=Altogether%2C%20R1..KZN%20and%201617%20from%20Limpopo.27/09/2023>

⁹<https://samajournals.co.za/index.php/samj/article/view/13404/04/2023>

World ♥ Day – A Global Celebration of the Heart

- 29 September 2024

Our goal is to stop the world's biggest killer

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the world's number one killer. Combined, conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels – such as heart attack, stroke and heart failure – kill more than 20.5 million every year¹⁰. The majority of these deaths happen in low- and middle-income countries.

We want to bring this number down – way down. And there's hope: 80% of premature deaths from CVD are preventable. By making small changes to our lifestyle – what we eat and drink, how much we exercise, and how we manage stress – we can better manage our heart health and beat CVD.

How you can take better care of your ♥

Eat Well

- Cut down on sugary beverages and fruit juices – choose water or unsweetened juices instead.
- Swap sweet, sugary treats for fresh fruit as a healthy alternative.
- Try to eat 5 portions (about a handful each) of fruit and veg a day – they can be fresh, frozen, tinned or dried.
- Keep the amount of alcohol you drink within recommended guidelines.
- Limit processed foods that are often high in salt, sugar and fat - unpack and unwrap less, peel and cook more!
- Search online or download an app and get lots of heart-healthy recipe tips.

Say no to Tobacco

- Within 1 year of quitting, the risk of coronary heart disease is substantially reduced.
- Within 15 years the risk of CVD returns to that of a non-smoker.
- Exposure to second-hand smoke is also a cause of heart disease in non-smokers.
- By quitting/not smoking you'll improve both your health and the health of those around you.
- If you're having trouble stopping, seek professional advice.
- E-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems are not harmless alternatives to cigarettes and are linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Get More Active

- Aim for 150 - 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 - 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week.
- If you can do more, go for it! Being more active will bring more health benefits and help offset the negative impact of sedentary lifestyles.
- Be more active every day – take the stairs, walk or cycle instead of driving. Playing, walking, housework, dancing – they all count!
- On two or more days a week, you should also do some muscle-strengthening exercises involving all major muscle groups.
- Download an app or use a wearable device to keep track of your steps and progress.



Interesting ♥ Facts

- High blood glucose (blood sugar) can be indicative of diabetes. CVD accounts for the majority of deaths in people with diabetes. If left undiagnosed and untreated, diabetes can put you at increased risk of heart disease and stroke.
- High blood pressure is one of the main risk factors for CVD. It's called the 'silent killer' because it usually has no warning signs or symptoms, and many people don't realise they have it.
- Cholesterol is associated with around 3.6 million deaths per year, so visit your healthcare professional and ask them to measure your levels, as well as your weight and body mass index (BMI). They'll then be able to advise on your CVD risk so you can take action to improve your heart health.

¹⁰https://world-heart-federation.org/?petition=close_01/07/2024

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Aon Resolution Centre (ARC)

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We are pleased to inform you that Aon has negotiated a favourable underwriting window period with some Gap Cover providers for you and your family. Please contact Aon on **0860 100 404** or arc@aon.co.za for further information. You may also contact the Aon Resolution Centre should you require a comparison between your current provider and other Gap cover providers.

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