



Healthy ageing & lifestyle

Fact Sheet No.2

Checklist for healthy ageing with a disability or long-term condition

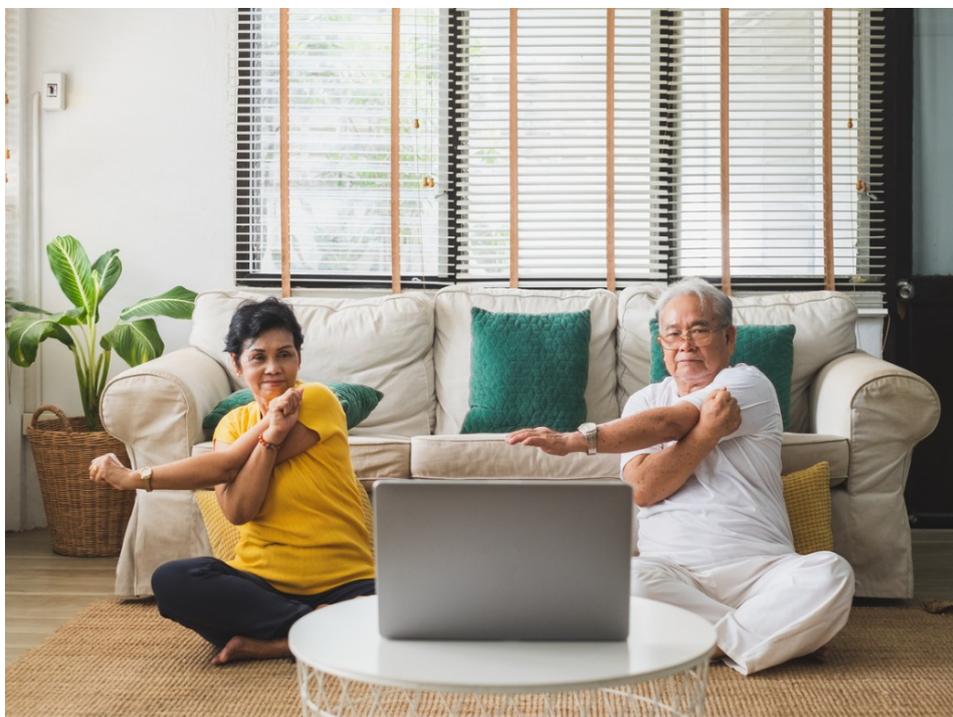
Eating well

It makes good sense to eat properly, if you wish to feel well, and eating regular meals that contain quality protein, along with fresh vegetables and fruit, is vital; the latest advice is that consuming 5 to 7 portions of fruit and vegetables per day will supply us with enough vitamins and minerals to maintain good health, though many fruits contain quite a lot of natural sugar and it is recommended that only 2 portions per day are included in your total intake.

Maintaining a healthy weight is also important in helping you to stay as fit as possible, as it will reduce the risk of lifestyle conditions such as diabetes and heart disease and help maintain independence and improve self-esteem.

Exercising

This is a topic that has seen an increasing amount of attention in the media, with advice changing regularly, but you may feel it is impossible to exercise if you are both ageing and living with a disability. Taking up some form of physical activity will benefit your overall health and well-being, and this can be carried out at home, a local leisure centre, gym or a club. If participating outside the home is impossible for you then try to incorporate physical activity into your daily life, making sure at all times that you are safe and not making your condition worse. During the winter months it can be difficult to motivate oneself to start a new activity or hobby, so if you are short of ideas, here is a list of possibilities to consider:



Physical activities at home:

Yoga, Tai Chi, light weights, DVDs, videos from You tube, resistance techniques, massage.

Physical activities away from home:

Walking, swimming, snooker / pool, bowls, gym or leisure centre membership.

Health Check-ups

Because of your condition you may be under regular review by a specialist consultant at a District General Hospital, and there is now a number of nationwide screening programmes in which you can participate, such as bowel cancer and mammography.

Health conditions:

Diabetes: regular monitoring of your blood glucose level is important as it can dramatically affect your general health when levels become unstable.

Top tip: taking good care of your feet is vital, it will help to avoid serious complications.

Pain: you can ask your GP for a referral to a pain management clinic at your local District General Hospital, where the appropriate analgesic drugs (painkillers) will be prescribed, along with a regular monitoring to measure progress in your condition.

Top tip: to control chronic pain, alternative therapies are often used alongside conventional drugs.

Fatigue: there are many causes of fatigue and many different ways of treating it: see the 3 information sheets on fatigue.

Top tip: don't ignore chronic fatigue, it probably won't go away without some sort of medical intervention.

Insomnia: this can be caused by all sorts of problems, such as chronic pain, mental health issues, continence problems. Your GP or specialist organisations are able to give support.

Top tip: if you don't address this problem seriously its effects can lead to a devastating effect on your daily life.

Depression: depression presents in many forms and affects people differently. Your GP can help you directly by prescribing antidepressant drugs and / or refer you to a counsellor. **Top tip:** recognise the early signs of depression and seek professional help.

Skin care: ageing skin becomes thin and loses its elasticity, the circulation of blood to your skin becomes sluggish and makes it more susceptible to breaking down, the result of which can be pressure ulcers (bed sores). You may require extra protection in the form of a different mattress and a hoist; it is important that the equipment is fit for purpose and is replaced when necessary.

Equipment

Your equipment requirements will need to be reviewed from time to time e.g. bed, mattress and lifting gear. It is important to protect your joints, limbs and skin and also to protect your carer(s) from sustaining injuries: seek professional advice from an Occupational Therapist and / or Physiotherapist; a referral can be made by your GP. Having the right equipment and replacing items when they are no longer fit for purpose will help to keep you safe and maintain your quality of life.

Social

It is important to keep in touch with family and friends, sometimes easier said than done, but if you live alone it is all too easy to become lonely and isolated.

- Keeping mentally stimulated is important - use it or lose it! - there may be local groups you can join, or a befriending service.
- Being lonely and isolated can lead to depression, and if you become depressed you may start to neglect your personal care.
- Your local church should offer activities to both churchgoers and non-churchgoers.

Planning for the future

Making plans for your future needs will give you the chance to enjoy a smoother transition into your twilight years. Planning for your health needs and thinking about what extra equipment or care you might require could avoid having to react to a crisis.

Disclaimer

The information and opinions shared on this website are based on my personal experience of working in the health sector and research I have carried out whilst writing articles; it is of a general nature and should not be used as a substitute for seeking medical advice. My aim is to ensure that this information is accurate and kept up to date, but you should always consult the appropriate healthcare professionals if you have a concern about your health.

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