

your handbook for

Ageing Well



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Introduction

02

Staying Physically Active

08

Staying Mentally Active

10

Getting Regular, Good
Quality Sleep

12

Following a Balanced Diet

16

Keeping a Healthy Mouth

22

Staying Sexually Healthy

31

Managing Stress and Change

35

Staying Present

38

Staying Connected

TABLE OF CONTENTS *(contd.)*

40

Checking in Regularly

43

Getting your Vaccinations

47

Temperature Control

52

Managing Menopause

59

Preventing (or Managing) Falls

63

Preventing (or Managing) Dementia

69

Preventing (or Managing) Strokes

72

Seeking the Right Services

82

Keeping Helpful Contacts in Place



Ageing Well

As the chapters of life unfold, the significance of maintaining healthy habits becomes increasingly apparent. Each choice we make – from staying physically active and mindful to nourishing our bodies with proper nutrition – contributes to the tapestry of our overall health.

In line with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate's overall vision to enable good health through every stage of life, this 'Handbook for Ageing Well' is a comprehensive booklet offering practical insights into building and maintaining a lifestyle that can truly make a difference.

This guide provides specific tips tailored to the unique challenges of ageing, including physical activity, nutrition, quality sleep, oral health, sexual health, and effective stress management.

It also addresses specific concerns relevant to ageing, including navigating changes in memory and cognition, and preventing or managing falls, strokes, hyperthermia or hypothermia.



This handbook is designed to support individuals as they approach the age bracket of 65+. While you may not yet be classified as a senior, it's never too early to start cultivating habits that promote long-term health and well-being.

Ageing well is not just a destination, but a continuous journey. May this guide serve as a steady companion to help pave the way for a healthier, more resilient, and ultimately more enjoyable ageing experience.

Dr. Paula Vassallo,

Director, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate



Introduction

Ageing well is an essential part of living a happy and healthy life. It is never too early or late to start thinking about how to age well. Taking care of yourself can help you live a longer, more fulfilling life.

By investing in the right health habits, we can all maximise and improve our health. This will add quality years to our life, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Additionally, practicing acceptance, kindness, and focusing on the present moment can help us to deal with the many challenges we encounter for better health and well-being.

For more tips, guidelines, and information, visit hpd.gov.mt or scan the QR code at the back of this booklet!

ageing well means...
staying physically active





ageing well means... **staying physically active**

At any age, staying physically active helps to improve overall health and maximise brain function.

- **Regular aerobic physical activity** improves mood and may prevent age-related cognitive decline in if you are at an increased risk for dementia.
- **Strength exercises** help to delay the inevitable reduction in muscle and bone mass that occurs as you grow older.
- **Balance Exercises** - These help to sharpen the body's ability to keep you from falling as you grow older.

The type and amount of physical activity required varies depending on your age.



IF YOU ARE AN ADULT AGED BELOW 65 YEARS:

150 to 300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity
like walking, dancing and swimming

OR

75 to 150 minutes per week of high-intensity aerobic activity
like running, sport, and fast swimming

AND

Muscle strengthening exercises twice a week
like yoga, pilates, gym, bowling, dancing, carrying bags, using body weights or resistance bands.

whilst reducing:

Time sitting down
like using the computer, sitting on the sofa, and watching television.



IF YOU ARE AN ADULT AGED ABOVE 65 YEARS:

150 to 300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity
like walking, dancing and swimming

OR

75 to 150 minutes per week of high-intensity aerobic activity
like running, fast walking, dancing, and swimming

AND

Muscle strengthening exercises at least twice a week
like yoga, pilates, gym, bowling, dancing, carrying bags, using body weights or resistance bands.

whilst incorporating:

Balance exercises at least twice a week
Tai Chi, standing on one leg, walking heel to toe, marching on the spot and toe lifts.



If you have not been physically active for a long time, start with small steps and increase when you feel more able.

Some tips to keep you motivated to exercise:

- **Speak to your health professional** before starting to discuss the right type and amount of physical activity for you.
- **Find activities you enjoy:** This will make it more fun and motivate you to maintain it!
- **Find ways to fit physical activity into your day.**
- If you cannot do your preferred amounts in one go, **break your physical activity up into smaller parts. It all adds up!**
- **Make it social:** Find an exercise buddy to provide support and help keep you going.
- **Keep track of your progress:** Make an exercise plan and do not forget to reward yourself with healthy rewards when you reach your goals.
- **Be kind to yourself:** If there is a break in your routine, that is okay - start slowly again and get back to your previous level of activity.

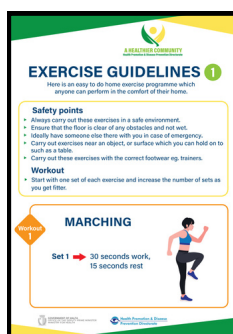


Bonus tip: What's on your exercise menu?

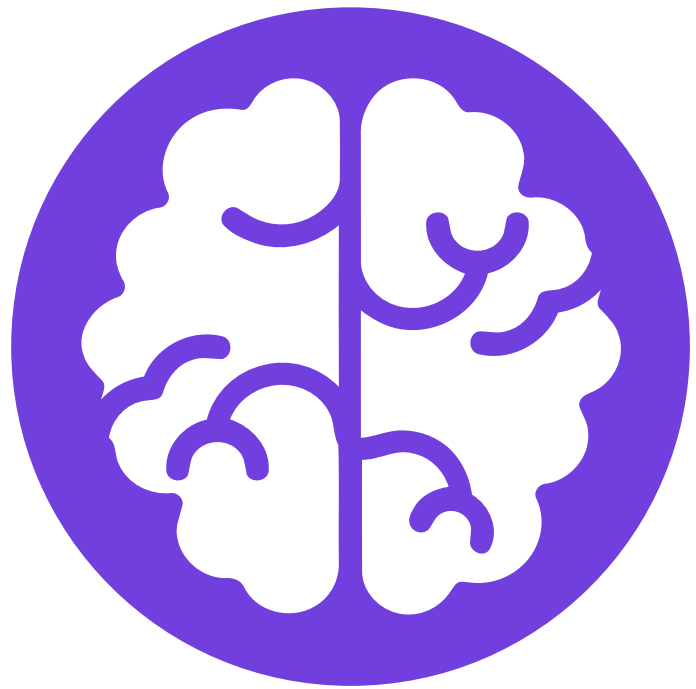
People do not always have the same energy levels. Choose a few 'starter' exercises that you can perform every day like stretching, yoga, or walking.

When you have the energy, engage in your 'mains' exercises, which are higher-intensity exercises.

For more information, download the physical activity guidelines and exercise guidelines by visiting hpd.gov.mt or calling 23266000.



ageing well means...
staying mentally active





ageing well means... **staying mentally active**

Keeping the mind engaged is as important as being physically active. This can keep you sharp, prevent falls and cognitive loss brought on by ageing.

Tips on staying mentally active:

- **Learn a new skill** - The brain is stimulated by learning new things. Do you have a skill, art, recipe, instrument, or language you have been wanting to learn?
- **Play games that challenge your mind** - Playing games like chess, or completing crossword, sudoku, or other puzzles can help sharpen your thinking and boost overall cognitive function.
- **Read newspapers, magazines and books** - Join a book club and exchange books with friends!
- **Stay social** - Keeping in touch with family and loved ones and maintaining social connections helps to keep a good spirit and the mind engaged.
- **Memorise** - The more you engage in memory tasks, the better!

ageing well means...
**getting regular,
good quality sleep**





ageing well means... getting regular, good quality sleep

As you get older, you may have trouble getting to sleep, or sleeping for sufficient amount of time. This can leave you feeling tired and irritable. Getting enough, good quality sleep on a regular schedule reduces the risks of developing dementia and other health conditions.

Tips to get good quality sleep:

- Stick to a **schedule** for going to sleep every day.
- If you need one, **try to take your day-time nap** at the same time each day to keep your routine.
- Establish a **bed-time ritual** to help you wind down for sleep.
- Make sure your **sleeping environment** is comfortable, including little noise and appropriate temperature.
- **Avoid using digital devices or screens** during this time. Put away your mobile phone and try to read a book, or listen to the radio.

Visit hpd.gov.mt or mentalwellbeing.gov.mt for more information on good quality sleep!

If you are struggling to fall asleep or are experiencing symptoms of insomnia, consult your GP.

ageing well means...
following a balanced diet





ageing well means... **following a balanced diet**

As you age, your relationship with food changes.

You may experience changes in appetite, energy levels, taste and smell, and therefore your nutritional needs will change. A varied and balanced diet is important for maintaining our energy, and lowering our risk of developing health complications related to ageing.

A healthy dietary pattern together with regular physical activity can help to:

- maintain a healthy weight
- maintain healthy energy levels
- maintain muscle and bone strength
- maintain proper blood-sugar management
- lower blood pressure
- lower risk of cancer
- lower risk of heart disease
- support brain function
- prevent cognitive decline and other dementias like Alzheimer's
- support mood regulation
- reduce the likelihood of anxiety and/or depression

Remember to speak to a health professional before making any substantial changes to your diet.



Eat plenty of brightly-coloured fruits and vegetables

Every day, try to get at least 6 portions of a variety of vegetables and 2-3 portions of fruit.



Instead of 'no fats', think 'good fats'

Opt for foods like walnuts, flaxseed, and oily fish like sardines and mackerel.



Vary your sources of protein instead of relying on red meat

include more beans, peas, fish, nuts, seeds and eggs.



Eat more foods with dietary fibre

like fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, seeds and whole grains.



Be smart about carbohydrate foods

Choose wholegrains like oats, barley, brown rice and buckwheat, whilst cutting down on sugar, white bread, white pasta and white rice.

Reduce highly processed foods which are often high in added sugars, salt and fats, and drink water and stay hydrated!



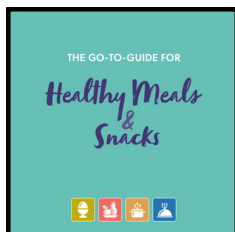
It is very important to seek out help from appropriate sources to help us age well. Visit hpd.gov.mt for dietary and lifestyle guidance and healthy meals and snacks!



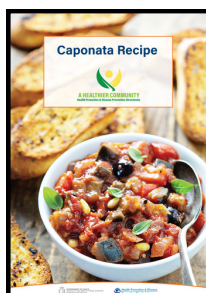
Healthy Eating: The Mediterranean Way!
Dietary Guidelines for Maltese Adults



**Dietary and Lifestyle Guidelines for Older People:
The Mediterranean Way!**
(this includes portion sizes!)



**To Go-To Guide for
Healthy Meals and Snacks**



**Loose-Sheet
Recipe Sheets**

For professional nutritional advice, or to book your place in our free Weight Management Programme, call our Nutrition Helpline on 8007 3307

ageing well means...
keeping a healthy mouth





ageing well means... **keeping a healthy mouth**

As you grow older, it becomes more and more important to keep a full oral care routine.

As we grow older, we may experience:

- Changes in tooth sensitivity
- Changes in taste sensations
- Teeth discolouration
- Difficulties with cleaning teeth due to worsening mobility (e.g. arthritis)
- Increased mouth dryness (even as a result of certain medications) leading to increased risk of tooth decay
- Gums receding (shrink back), leaving teeth more exposed and sensitive to decay
- Increased risk of gum disease
- Increased risk of oral cancers

With the right home care and help from your dental team, it is possible to prevent tooth decay, gum disease, and tooth loss.



A Healthy Mouth Checklist

1

Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste for two minutes especially before you sleep.

- **Toothbrush considerations**

- Soft-to-medium bristled brushes can help prevent gum irritation
- Toothbrush adaptors can be helpful to enhance grip, especially if you have mobility or activity limitations. Speak with your dentist or dental hygienist to get the right advice
- Electric toothbrushes can also help you
- Use interdental brushes for cleaning between teeth

- **Toothpaste considerations**

- Use a toothpaste which contains fluoride
- If you suffer from dry mouth, use non-foaming toothpaste or toothpastes specifically designed for dry mouth

2

Clean between your teeth to remove plaque and food particles that might get stuck there.



3

Regularly clean and care for your dental appliances like dentures to avoid irritation and infection.

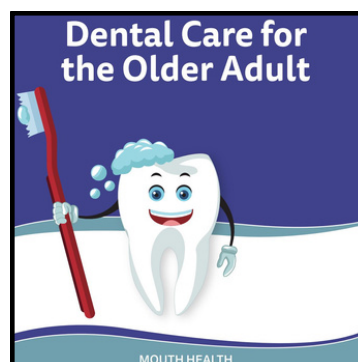
4

Maintain a balanced diet high in vitamins and minerals (like calcium), whilst limiting sugary and acidic food and drinks.

5

Visit your dentist regularly even if you only have dentures and especially before starting any medication for bone density problems.

Visit hpd.gov.mt for more information on taking care of your mouth!



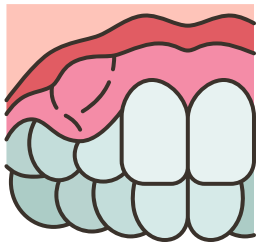


Tips to maintain a healthy mouth:

- **Use your current routine** - Incorporate brushing and cleaning between your teeth into other daily activities, like right after meals, or right before getting into bed.
- **Remind yourself** - You can use written notes, alarms, or phone reminders to prompt brushing at specific times during the day.
- **Make it enjoyable** - Use music or timers to make the process more enjoyable.
- **Make it comfortable** - Invest in adaptive tools like larger handles on toothbrushes or floss handles to make oral care more comfortable. Speak to your dental professional for more advice.
- **Stay hydrated** by sipping water throughout the day. Consider chewing sugar free gum to stimulate saliva, or saliva substitutes and oral moisturisers if you suffer from dry mouth.
- **Consult with your dentist** to determine the most suitable oral care products based on your specific needs.



Consult your dentist if you have:



- Regular or persistent toothache
- Sensitivity to hot or cold temperatures
- Receding gums
- Tender, sore, or bleeding gums
- Swollen gums
- Persistent bad breath
- White or red patches in the mouth
- Mouth sores that do not heal
- Loose teeth
- Discomfort when using dentures
- Cracked, broken or chipped teeth
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Jaw pain or locking and clicking

Do not wait - Inform your dentist of any changes in your mouth, any concerns, or discomfort.

ageing well means...
staying sexually healthy





ageing well means... **staying sexually healthy**

Sex and intimacy continue to be important aspects of life even as you grow older, with benefits for both health and well-being.

In fact, sex allows to create and maintain **emotional intimacy** and a **sense of closeness** with your partner. Sex has also been shown to help **reduce stress** by releasing hormones that help you feel more relaxed.

The changes you experience as you grow older should not be a barrier to safe, enjoyable, and consensual sex.

Note: Within this document, 'female' will refer to persons with female anatomical and physiological characteristics and 'male' will refer to persons with male anatomical and physiological characteristics.



Barriers to enjoyable sexual activity

Whilst sexual activity might decrease with age, if you are sexually active, you might still experience barriers to sexual performance like pain during sex, erectile dysfunction (an inability to maintain enough of an erection to carry out intercourse), decreased vaginal lubrication, changes in ejaculation, lack of interest or excitement, and physical obstacles as a result of health conditions.

These tend to be caused by the following factors:

- **Lower hormone levels** like a reduction of oestrogen and other hormones in menopause (if you are female) and a decrease in testosterone (if you are male).
- **Mental health and emotional barriers** can include those related to relationship problems, low moods and anxiety, fear of disease, or even related to anxiety around bodily changes and how these might effect sexual activity.
- **Medical conditions** can also make sexual activity difficult, tiring, or painful. These include diabetes, arthritis, urinary tract infections, incontinence, prolapse of the uterus, vaginal infections, circulatory diseases, and nerve diseases or conditions (like spine problems, Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis).
- **Some medicines** can reduce sexual arousal, response, desire or ejaculation. These include some antidepressants, antipsychotics, antihistamines, medicines for blood pressure and stomach ulcers, heart medicines (beta blockers), diuretics, medications used for enlarged prostate (e.g., tamsulosin).
- **Surgery or radiation.**
- **Smoking and misuse of alcohol and/or drugs.**



Tips to improve sexual activity:

1. Live healthy – Living a healthy lifestyle is a big part of maintaining good sexual health. Whilst seeing your doctor regularly and sticking to your medication regimens, take care of yourself by:

- Making smart food choices
- Getting regular exercise
- Practicing stress-reduction activities (e.g. yoga or meditation)
- Avoiding drug use, and alcohol in excess
- Avoiding or eliminating tobacco use

2. Communicate with your partner – Good communication is essential to a healthy relationship as well as an active and mutually satisfying sex life:

- **Invest time to talk** about the changes you are experiencing – this can help form more intimate bonds.
- **Let them know** if you feel you need to modify some movements during sex to reduce physical exertion or stress on joints or other areas of the body.
- **Be open** about what you expect from an intimate relationship – your likes and dislikes – and encourage your partner to do the same.
- If libido is a problem, **consider issues in the relationship** that may be inhibiting your desire for one another. A licensed therapist can help you explore and break through these relationship roadblocks.
- **Remember: consent is important!** If you or your partner are not comfortable with performing a sexual activity, you both have the right to refuse or stop at any point. 'No' means 'no'!



3. Simple behavioural changes during sex:

- **Longer foreplay** including hugging, kissing, caressing can improve the overall experience.
- **Water-based vaginal lubricants** can help reduce or stop pain resulting from vaginal dryness. (Do not use lubricants after their expiration date. Their chemicals break down and can cause an allergic skin reaction).
- **Having sex more regularly** can help maintain vaginal tissues and improve lubrication.

4. Communication with your healthcare providers:

- Ask your healthcare provider/s to **review your medications** to identify any drugs that can cause sexual problems. These may include antidepressants, antipsychotics, antihistamines, antihypertensive agents, and antacids.
- Ask your healthcare provider to help you **review your options** if you need treatment for any issue to help you continue with your sexual activities.
- **Schedule regular tests and check-ups**, at least on an annual basis if you take part in multiple-partner activities, use drugs or alcohol during sexual activities, or have unprotected sex.
- In some situations, seeing a **trained counsellor or therapist** can also help with worries or emotional factors related to sex and any sexual dysfunctions.



Asking questions is a good place to start – here are some examples of questions you can ask your doctor.

Can we incorporate sexual health into my regular check-ups?

Sex is painful/difficult/impossible for me because of _____. What options do I have to address this problem?

How might my current health condition impact my sexual well-being and are there any lifestyle factors that can help me?

What are the potential sexual side effects of the medications I am being prescribed?

What questions should I ask my partner?



Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Older age does not protect you from STIs if you are sexually active!

Whilst STIs can be transmitted through oral, vaginal, and anal sex, as well as skin to skin contact, thinner, drying vaginal walls, for example, increase the risk for micro-tears during intercourse, which makes it easier for STI transmission. Therefore, it is important to be informed about tips that can help you to prevent STIs.

Some tips for preventing STIs:



Get tested for HIV and other STIs before you start having sex with a new partner.

A person can have an STI and not know it because the symptoms are not always obvious and may not show immediately after sexual exposure. Meanwhile, some symptoms like tiredness can be mistaken for age-related health problems.



Know your partner's sexual background

before having sex. Don't be afraid to talk about your sexual histories, any past STI, and results of STI testing. If you notice sores, abnormal discharges, or odours in your partner's intimate areas, do not be afraid to stop and encourage them to get checked.



Use a condom and lubricant

every time you have sex, including during foreplay, until you know your partner's sexual history and STI status.

For more information about using condoms, visit:
sexualhealth.gov.mt



Use water-based lubricants

These can lower the chances of getting a sore or tiny cut on the penis, inside the vagina, or around the anus. These sores or cuts can increase the risk of getting STIs.



Visit www.sexualhealth.gov.mt to learn more about sexual health, including STIs, and get tested with your partner if needed.



PrEP and PEP are medications that help you to prevent getting infected from HIV.

For more information about PrEP and PEP, visit:
sexualhealth.gov.mt

STIs - What to look out for

Most STIs may not show symptoms immediately, symptoms may be delayed or not visible, but keep an eye out for any of the signs below and make an appointment for a check-up if you suspect you might have an STI.

Unusual discharge

Genital or anal bleeding

Pain during sex

Ulcers / Bumps around genital area

Burning sensation while passing urine

Rashes (including hands, feet, and chest)

Abdominal pain (pelvic area)

Swollen lymph nodes (e.g. groin area)

Knowing your body ensures that you notice immediately any changes that might need medical attention.

ageing well means...
managing
stress and change





ageing well means... **managing stress and change**

As you grow older, you will experience an increasing number of life changes. It is important to build **resilience** and find healthy ways to cope with challenges. This will help you make the most of the good times and keep your perspective when times are tough.

The good news is that **Resilience** is a set of skills that can be learned over time, and through the right habits!



Self-awareness

To build this ability to look at yourself objectively, work on building a curious mindset. Reflect on what stresses you have and how you usually manifest stress. Reflect on the situations this usually happens, and what thoughts tend to make you stressed. Reflect also on your strengths, weaknesses, values and goals. Writing or other forms of creative expression are useful!



Self-regulation

Build a toolkit of techniques that help to calm you down 'when disaster strikes' and to help keep stress levels low in the longer term. These include deep breathing, visualisation (forming mental images of relaxing scenes), music and art, yoga, tai chi, and spending time in nature.



Challenging negative thoughts



Reflect on negative thoughts and challenge them with questions like:

- is this thought about something within my control?
- what evidence do I have for this thought?
- if my friend came to me with this thoughts, what would I tell them?
- Can I reframe this into a positive thought?

To help challenge negative thoughts more efficiently, work on building **optimism** through seeking positive stories and humour, practicing gratitude, and searching for silver linings to situations.

Working on your **mental agility** (flexible thinking) by challenging yourself to solve problems, playing problem-solving games, learning something new, or engaging in a creative practice regularly!

Building meaningful connections



Engage actively and with enthusiasm in conversation. Show kindness, appreciation and empathy. Be attentive to the needs of others, and provide meaningful support when needed. At the same time, establish and protect healthy boundaries with others.

These tips will help you build a social support network where you feel seen, understood, and safe!



Be self-disciplined

Invest time in building a nourishing lifestyle to have the energy and clarity to face life challenges. Remember: physical activity, the right diet, and quality sleep are the foundations of this!



Some additional tips:

- Practice focused removal of your thoughts from the past or the future while focusing your attention on the present moment. This is called **Mindfulness**.
- **Develop your sense of purpose** by finding something that you are passionate about which you can contribute to. This will help you assess setbacks from a different perspective.
- Push yourself to view setbacks as opportunities for change and growth. This '**growth mindset**' helps you to move forward rather than staying fixed in uncomfortable situations.
- Practice **self-compassion** by approaching yourself with an attitude of warmth and kindness, without judgment. This includes accepting how you feel, reminding yourself that you are not alone, reminding yourself of your strengths and unique qualities, and offering yourself encouragement.
- Don't be afraid to **reach out and ask for help** from loved ones, or from professionals if you need additional support!



Build your Resilience

Our free Resilience Programme is a 7-week-long programme designed to help you build all of these skills through activities, opportunities for reflection, and conversations with others on the same journey.

Visit mentalwellbeing.gov.mt or call 2326 6000 to learn more about this programme!

ageing well means...
staying present





ageing well means... **staying present**

Ageing brings many gifts, and one of them is the ability to slow down, and focus on the things that matter the most.

‘Mindfulness’ means to focus our attention on what we are experiencing within and around us at any given moment.

Practicing regular mindfulness has many benefits, including:

- Better general cognition
- Better attention, processing speed, and memory
- Positive effect on immune system
- Better sleep
- Decreased blood pressure
- Improved chronic pain
- Awareness and acceptance of our thoughts, emotions, and the changing nature of our bodies, roles, environments and relationships
- Better emotion management
- Better relationship management
- Better ability to manage stress



At least 10 minutes of mindfulness practice every day can bring many improvements to your life, and could be an important tool for ageing well.

Some tips for mindfulness:

- **Scan up and down your body** and take note of sensations you feel, releasing any tension that you find stored in your muscles.
- **Embrace slow walking:** Take your time on walks to wake up your sensations, and use all your senses to take it in. Notice the colours and sounds around you, and maybe try to notice something new.
- Try to **focus on one thing at a time** and give it your full attention: from speaking to others, to eating. You can do this with any daily task!
- **Create a daily ritual:** Pick a time of the day to engage in a mindfulness exercise... and then stick to it to create the habit.

Remember, it is OK when your mind wanders. Simply take note, and bring your attention back to the present moment.

Visit mentalwellbeing.gov.mt for more more advice on mindfulness!

ageing well means...
**staying socially
connected**





ageing well means... **staying socially connected**

One of the greatest challenges of ageing is keeping your social network. Staying in touch with other people can prevent you from feeling lonely or anxious, and improves overall well-being.

Some tips for staying connected:

- **Connect regularly** with family, friends or neighbours when you can.
- **Use video-calling or messaging services** to contact friends and family who do not live nearby.
- If you find that you are no longer able to do the things you used to do, **try to develop new hobbies** and interests or think about becoming a **volunteer** for a purpose that fits your skills.
- Have a look at **Malta and Gozo's rich cultural calendar** for events and experiences that you might enjoy, and which might bring you in contact with people who share your interests!
- Sign up to stay updated about any events being organized by your **Local Council, Parish Church, or Active Ageing Centre**.

Visit mentalwellbeing.gov.mt for more more advice on staying connected!

ageing well means...
checking in regularly





ageing well means... **checking in regularly**

It is important to look out for any warning signs of any illness early. Consult your doctor. Do not delay.

Important early warning signs to look out for include:

- Unexplained weight loss or weight gain
- Unusual fatigue or weakness
- Changes in how often you have bowel movements or bowel consistency
- Difficulty swallowing or persistent indigestion
- Cough or hoarseness lasting over 3 weeks
- Persistent pain or discomfort
- Changes in moles or other changes in the skin
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent headaches or changes in vision
- Night sweats
- Changes in appetite or thirst
- Persistent joint pain or stiffness
- Changes in memory, mood, or personality
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Unusual lumps



It is beneficial to make the most of your doctor and schedule in regular check-ups to make sure that you are keeping an eye on your health.

Get regular checks for your:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Teeth and mouth
- Blood pressure
- Blood sugar level

Home safety also plays an important role in preventing falls. Check your home for inadequate lighting, trip hazards, and uneven or slippery surfaces.

Do not be afraid to ask your doctor to review the medications, vitamins, and supplements you are taking.

ageing well means...

getting your vaccinations





ageing well means... **getting your vaccinations**

Vaccines enhance the body's immunity. As you grow, infections may be more severe than expected. Therefore, preventative vaccination is critical.

You would benefit from paying attention to the following vaccines and complete them as recommended by doctors:

- **Influenza** is common across all age groups but causes more serious illness in people aged 65 years and over, including more severe symptoms, health complications and sometimes even hospitalisation. The influenza virus strains change every year – and the vaccine changes every year to match the new strains. This is why it's important for people to get the vaccine every year.
- **COVID-19** – Older adults are more likely than younger people to get complications or be hospitalised due to COVID-19 so it is important to make sure that you get your yearly booster shots.

Remember:

The Influenza and the COVID-19 vaccines are given for free every year by Primary Care Services.



- **Pneumococcal disease** is a serious infection that spreads from person to person through air. It often causes pneumonia which is an infection in the lungs and it can affect other parts of the body. Older adults are at higher risk than younger people of getting very sick or dying from pneumococcal disease. This is why it is recommended that adults aged 65 and older should get the pneumococcal vaccination as it helps to protect you from getting a serious infection, including pneumonia. This vaccine is given as one shot and does not need any booster doses.
- **Shingles (also known as Herpes Zoster)** is a common condition in older adults that causes a painful rash. It is caused by a dormant virus which is reactivated and affects any nerve in the body. It can sometimes lead to serious problems such as long-lasting pain, hearing loss, or blindness. It is recommended that people at higher risk from shingles, including adults turning 65 and over, and those aged over 50 with a severely weakened immune system get the vaccine. This vaccine will reduce your chances of getting shingles and reduce your risk of experiencing serious problems if you do get shingles. This vaccine is given in 2 doses, 2 months apart.

If you have medical risk conditions, you may require additional vaccines. Speak to your health professional about additional vaccines you may need.



- **Travel Vaccines** – Check with Travel Vaccine Unit at Primary Health Care about vaccines you may need if you're planning to travel to other countries. These depend on your destination, planned activities and medical history. Plan ahead – sometimes multiple vaccines or doses are needed, and it's best to get them at least 4 to 6 weeks before you travel to allow time to build up your immunity and get the best protection.

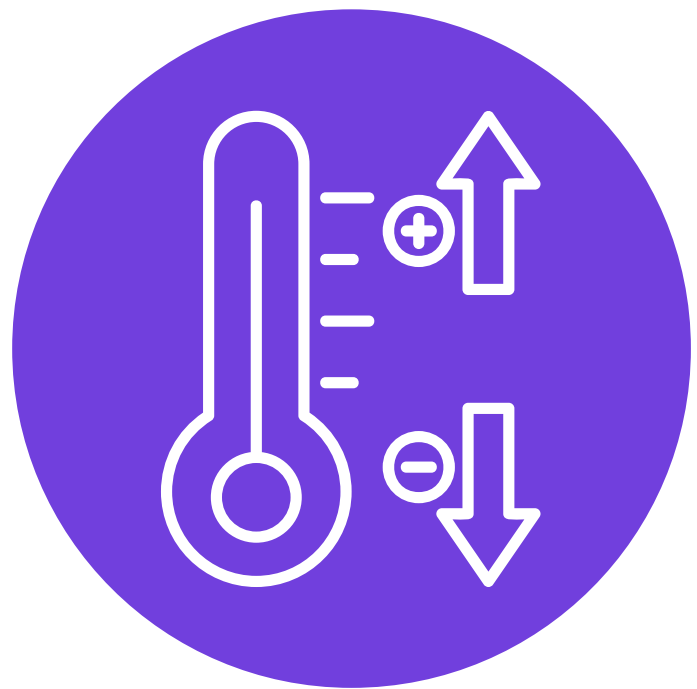
Before getting any vaccine, talk with a healthcare provider about your health history, including past illnesses and treatments, as well as any allergies.

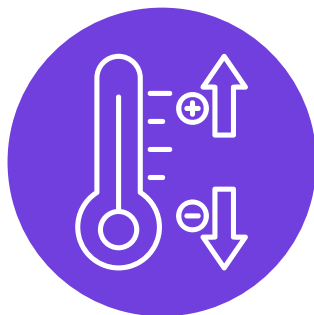
They can address any concerns you may have.

It's a good idea to keep your own vaccination record, listing the types and dates of your shots.

ageing well means...

temperature control





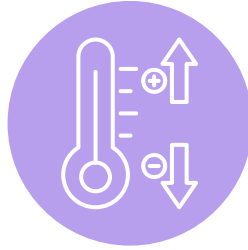
ageing well means... **temperature control**

Growing older brings with it changes in your ability to regulate your body temperature, which then increases the risk of hyperthermia or hypothermia.

Hyperthermia is when the body overheats, and can lead to heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

Tips for Preventing Hyperthermia:

- **Stay well-hydrated**, especially during hot weather.
- **Dress appropriately** - wear loose fitting, light-coloured and breathable clothing. Cotton and linen are good fabric choices because they allow for air circulation
- **Stay indoors** during the hottest part of the day (between 10AM and 4PM).
- **Exercise early in the day** to avoid the hottest part of the day.
- If going outside is necessary, use **sunblock** and wear **sunglasses** and a **wide-brimmed hat**.
- **Listen to advice from health authorities if there is a heatwave.**



Keep an eye out for the following symptoms in yourself or in those around you :

Excessive sweating
(in extreme cases, this might stop)

Feeling unusually tired or fatigued

Increased thirst and dry mouth

Muscle cramps, particularly in the legs or abdomen

A rapid pulse

Mild to moderate headaches

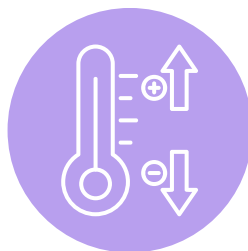
Nausea and vomiting

Dizziness, confusion and disorientation

What to do:

- Spray yourself with cool water and sit in front of a fan or under air conditioning
- Move into the shade or into air-conditioned spaces
- Take off extra clothing
- Take a cool shower or bath
- Drink more water - avoid alcohol or caffeine
- Try a cold pack or cool cloth on the neck, armpits or groin area
- Rest

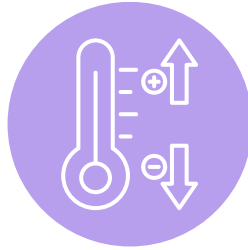
**If symptoms persist or worsen, seek medical attention.
Call 112.**



Hypothermia is when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it, and can lead to shivering, confusion, and unconsciousness in severe cases.

Tips for Preventing Hypothermia:

- **Layer up** – Layer your clothing, starting from a moisture-wicking base layer to keep sweat away from the skin, followed by insulating layers and finally a waterproof and windproof outer later.
- **Accessorise** – Wear insulated waterproof boots and warm gloves, and a hat to prevent heat loss from these areas.
- **Keep your surroundings warm** – Use air conditioning or heating and seal any drafts from the windows and doors. Remember to use blankets and warm bedding.
- **Keep homes warm** – Authorities recommend maintaining a warm indoor environment during the colder months.
- **Stay active** – Engage in indoor activities or exercises to keep warm. Keep moving and avoid sitting for long periods in a cold room.



Keep an eye out for the following symptoms in yourself or in those around you:

Mild to severe shivering

Stiff muscles

Fatigue, lethargy or weakness

**Cold and pale skin
(blue-ish in extreme cases)**

Shallow breathing

Weak pulse

Slow movements

Confusion

Slurred speech and communication issues

Clumsiness and coordination issues

Drowsiness

Becoming unconscious

What to do:

- Move to a warmer place or seek warmth
- Drink warm drinks
- Remove any wet clothing
- Wrap yourself in warm blankets
- Rest

If symptoms persist or worsen, seek medical attention. call 112.

ageing well means...
managing menopause





ageing well means... **managing menopause**

The symptoms of menopause vary and depend on a number of factors, the most common symptoms are:

**Hot
flashes**

Insomnia

**Vaginal
dryness**

**Urinary
Incontinence**

**Weight
gain**

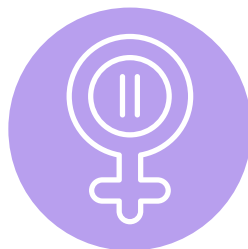
**Decreased
sex drive**

**Increased
stress**

**Mood
swings**

**Issues with
memory and
concentration**

**Changes in
self-identity
and sense
of femininity**



Some tips to help you manage your menopause:

1. Monitor yourself and your symptoms:

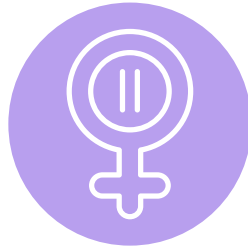
Hot flashes are one of the most common symptoms of menopause. Certain foods or drinks can trigger a hot flash. Caffeine, spicy food, smoking and alcohol, for example, are common ones. Every time you suffer from a hot flash, think about what you have eaten, or what activity you have just done, and make a note of it in a diary. Start looking for patterns and, if you find that something appears to be triggering your hot flashes, it is best to avoid it.

You might also find you suffer with more headaches than usual, or even migraines. Again, when this happens, make a note in your diary of what might have caused it and seek to avoid it in future.

2. Optimise your sleep:

Menopause can disturb sleep patterns through insomnia or hot flashes.

- **Keep a bed-time routine** and prepare for sleep. This can include bathing, self-care or mindfulness/meditation exercises.
- **Ensure your bedroom is cool and well-ventilated.**
- **Choose natural fibers like cotton** for your pajamas and bed linens to help air to circulate and prevent overheating or sweating during sleep.



- **Layer your bed with a thin sheet** so you can remove your duvet when you get a hot flash.
- Keep **wet wipes** and **water** handy.

3. Consider increasing your physical activity:

Exercising regularly releases endorphins which can help relieve menopausal symptoms and also makes irritability and mood swings easier to cope with. Go for short daily walks or do some yoga stretches. Exercise will also help to give a boost to your metabolism, supporting you to maintain a healthy weight.

4. Engage in calming exercises:

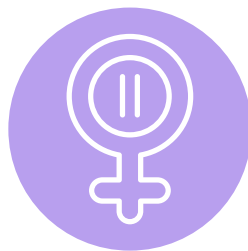
Find time in the day to practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness or meditation. These techniques help to reduce hot flashes and relieve other menopausal symptoms including anxiety and insomnia.

Engaging in movement activities like yoga or creative activities like painting or writing can further help to reduce overall stress.

5. Follow a healthy and well-balanced diet:

A shortage of important nutrients like magnesium, calcium, iron, zinc, essential fatty acids, Vitamin D and B could leave you feeling flat, tired and unmotivated. In order to avoid this:

- **Eat regular meals:** Irregular eating may make certain symptoms of menopause worse and make weight management more difficult.

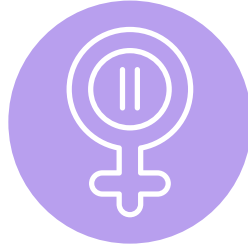


- **Increase calcium intake:** add more green leafy vegetables (like kale), beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, yoghurt, as well as fish (like sardines).
- **Increase Vitamin D intake:** sunlight is your main source of Vitamin D but as you get older, your skin becomes less efficient at producing Vitamin D. Food sources include oily fish, eggs, and cod liver oil.

Remember: if you suffer from osteoporosis, you also benefit from free-of-charge Vitamin D and Calcium.

- **Consuming essential fatty acids can also impact hormone health** as these can be found in vegetables and oily seafood like mackerel, and sardines. Omega-3-rich diets may help reduce mood swings and increase energy and libido.
- **Phytoestrogens** are naturally-occurring plant compounds that can mimic the effects of oestrogen in the body. They might help balance your hormones and can help with reducing hot flashes and night sweats. Your meal plans can benefit from including foods like barley, sesame, lentils, flaxseed, soybeans and soy products, and tofu or tempeh.
- **Drink enough water** to help with symptoms like increased dryness and bloating that comes with menopause.
- **Avoid or reduce alcohol, caffeine and spicy foods**, which can trigger and exacerbate hormonal symptoms, like hot flashes and night sweats.

Check with your GP if you require any supplements!



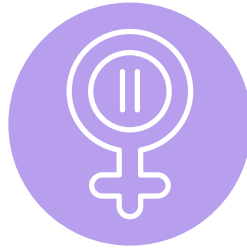
6. Make changes to your skincare routine:

During menopause, your skin may become more sensitive and prone to dryness. Apply sun protection factor before going outside and use oil-free lotions.

7. Talk about it!

You are not alone when going through the menopause, though it can often feel like it.

- **Let your loved ones know** when you are feeling more sensitive than usual because of menopause. Talk about how it is impacting you.
- **Do not be afraid to open up to your friends** about how you are feeling as they can provide support.
- **Consider sharing in support groups (face-to-face or online)**, which can also offer support.
- **Talk to your GP or gynaecologist** about symptoms you are having. Together you can decide on a suitable management plan.



Tackling Hot Flashes

First and foremost: accept that this experience is a natural result of ageing and menopause. A hot flash should not make you feel ashamed. At some point in their lives, most women encounter them.

When you feel a hot flash starting try the following tips to try to lessen how intense a hot flash gets:

- Try to stop whatever you are doing
- Breathe deeply and slowly a few times
- Try to practice a relaxation technique (such as deep breathing, visualisation, music and art, yoga, tai chi, and spending time in nature).
- If possible, sit quietly and drink a glass of water until it passes.

Other Considerations

- Keep your living and sleeping spaces cool
- Avoid hot places. Do not sunbathe or sit in a sauna if you are prone to hot flashes
- De-stress when possible by taking up a regular calming practice like meditation or restorative yoga, or a creative practice like painting or writing.

ageing well means...
**preventing (or managing)
falls**





ageing well means... **preventing (or managing) falls**

As you grow, you are at an increased risk for falls and associated complications.

In fact, falls are the leading cause of injury and death among older adults (65 years and older). These could be due to factors such as:

- tight, inflexible, or weak muscles
- poor posture, endurance, and balance
- the effects of medications
- vitamin D deficiency
- problems with vision
- a loss of sensation in feet
- wrong footwear
- osteoporosis (a bone disease involving a reduction in bone density and bone mass, or when the quality or structure of bone changes).
- a drop in blood pressure upon standing
- hazards in the home such as poor lighting, trip hazards like loose flooring or rugs and uneven surfaces, or a lack of secured handrails

Risk factors for falls and related injuries can be prevented by putting measures into place early and evaluating them often.



Specific actions to take to minimise your risk of falling:

- **Make exercise part of daily routine** – Regular, health professional-approved exercise can help counteract decreases in muscle strength and balance.
- **Drink enough water** – As we age, it is important to keep ourselves hydrated to prevent the dizziness, light-headedness, and reduction in muscle performance that comes with dehydration.
- **Stay mentally active** – Participating in mind-body exercises such as yoga or dance have been shown to be effective fall-prevention strategies for older adults.
- **Regular visual and hearing checks** – Wearing glasses and hearing aids if prescribed can reduce the likelihood of balance issues and falls.
- **Medication reviews** – Discussing medications with your doctor and following instructions, as well as being mindful of their potential side effects is crucial as these may affect balance.
- **Inquire about services such as telecare**, which can offer you and your family peace of mind when it comes to safety in your own home.
- **Conduct a home inventory** – to identify any hazards which could result in accidental falls.



Conducting a thorough home inventory is a critical step in preventing falls among older adults.

Below are some of the hazards, coupled with solutions to these hazards.

<u>Hazard</u>	<u>Solution</u>
Poor lighting can lead to tripping over objects or misjudging distances	Install brighter light bulbs, use specific lighting for specific areas, and ensure even lighting throughout the home
Objects in pathways can become obstacles	Keep pathways clear by removing unnecessary clutter, securing cords and cables and organizing belongings.
Uneven floors	Fix any uneven flooring or use transition strips to create smooth surfaces.
Slippery surfaces	Use non-slip mats and rugs, install grab bars in the bathroom, and consider slip-resistant flooring.
Lack of support from unstable furniture or a lack of handrails	Install handrails on staircases and in the bathroom, and secure furniture to walls to be used for support when needed.
Install a telecare service within your home	If you are eligible, Active Ageing and Community Care can supply a device that is linked to a contact centre and provides peace of mind for you and your relatives.

ageing well means...
**preventing (or managing)
dementia**





ageing well means... **preventing (or managing) dementia**

Dementia affects memory, cognitive abilities, and behaviour, that can significantly hinder daily activities. This condition is not limited to older age groups, since early-onset dementia can impact those below the age of 65.

Indeed, 'dementia' is an umbrella term for a number of diseases. There are various types of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia being the most common.

It can be caused by a variety of issues that, over time, destroy nerve cells and damage the brain. Apart from ageing and genetic factors, risk factors for developing dementia include:

- sitting for most of the day
- obesity
- unbalanced diets
- cigarette use
- misuse of alcohol
- poor educational achievement or cognitive inactivity
- social isolation
- conditions like diabetes mellitus and mid-life hypertension
- hearing loss
- depression

A healthy lifestyle can help reduce your risk of developing dementia.



Dementia manifests uniquely in each individual, but there is a common progress from when it begins to when it concludes. Understanding these stages can help you or loved ones manage it better.

- **Early-stage dementia** is frequently overlooked or misdiagnosed due to a lack of awareness, with signs including short-term memory issues, communication challenges, decision-making difficulties, and mood changes.
- **Moderate-stage dementia** is marked by intensified forgetfulness and more challenging communication that compromise basic daily activities. Inappropriate behaviours may emerge.
- **Late-stage dementia** is marked by total dependence, difficulty recognizing faces or objects, and increased care needs. Individuals may become immobile, face challenges with swallowing and incontinence, and also show non-verbal aggression.

Previous sections provided practical tips on how you can reduce the risk of dementia, including physical activity, mental and cognitive stimulation, following a balanced diet, managing stress, and staying connected with others.



Specific actions to take to manage earlier stages of dementia:

Remember:

Checking your memory and thinking abilities with the right experts and tools can give you helpful information and support. It can also help you use your skills better and slow down any decline. Plus, it lets you tell your loved ones what's going on and get the assistance you need.



Build and follow a routine - It helps if you do things at the same time every day to stimulate your memory and provide some reassurance.



Do things one at a time - This will reduce the load on your thinking and also has benefits for managing stress.



Take notes - keep important details in a notebook, your phone, or on sticky notes around the house. These could be contact numbers, things you need to do and, if necessary, how you need to do them.



Stay organised - keep your living and work areas tidy, and only keep the things you really need. Organise and label your drawers, cupboards and storage areas. Keep important items in the same place so you can easily find them when you need them.



Find out how technology can help you - using smart devices in your home can be helpful. Consider investing in an easy-to-use phone or tablet to stay connected with others and access important services. You can also use these devices to take notes, store important information and set reminders for yourself.



Make your home dementia-friendly by having good lighting, trying not to move furniture around very often, keeping doors to different rooms open, keeping things you use every day accessible and visible, and switching off appliances that you are not using.



Seek advice - Don't hesitate to seek advice when you need it. Whether it's about your health, finances, work or anything else. Professionals are there to help you navigate through these matters and provide you with the support you need.



Dealing with others - Dementia brings with it changes to relationships. In order to reduce this problem:

- **Share your diagnosis and experience** openly with friends, family and colleagues to manage expectations and receive support.
- **Don't hesitate to ask questions during conversations** if you are unsure or forgetful.
- **Don't let others take over.** They might be doing their best to make life easier for you, but try to do what you can for as long as you can.
- **... But ask for help when you need it** with tasks like finding lost items or accessing information and services.

ageing well means...
**preventing (or managing)
strokes**





ageing well means... preventing(or managing)strokes

A stroke occurs when there is an interruption of the normal blood flow to the brain due to a blockage (ischemic stroke) or a rupture of a blood vessel (haemorrhagic stroke). Without the normal flow of oxygen-rich blood, brain cells can be damaged causing death or disability.

It is vital to be aware of the risk factors for strokes. Some of these risk factors cannot be changed, such as age and having a family history of stroke. Strokes can happen at any time but there is a significantly higher risk as we age.

We can reduce the risk of strokes by:

- **Making sure our blood pressure is within normal limits.**
- **Eating a healthy diet** based on more fresh produce and minimally processed foods and avoiding or limiting highly processed foods with added sugars, salt and fats
- **Exercising regularly**
- **Avoiding tobacco and nicotine**
- **Avoiding or limiting alcohol consumption**
- **Managing our stress**



Signs of Stroke:



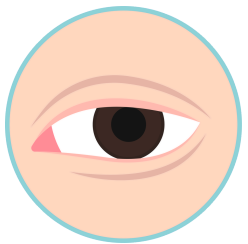
One side of the face droops



Sudden weakness on one side of the body



Slurred speech, even when saying simple sentences



Sudden problems with seeing or blurry vision



Sudden confusion, headache, or loss of balance

Act FAST at the first sign - call 112 immediately!

ageing well means...
seeking the right services





Active Ageing and Community Care Community Clinical Services

A variety of community care services are available to meet your specific needs. If you are over 60 years of age, you may be eligible for the below:



Community Geriatrician Services

If you are homebound due to physical or mental health problems, you can receive a comprehensive medical assessment tailored to your needs.



Community Psychogeriatric Consultation Service

A psychiatric evaluation service that can help you if you are homebound due to physical or mental health limitations.



Dementia Activity Centres

Situated in different localities and aim to provide day care tailored to the needs of those living with dementia, thus relieving stress if you are an informal caregiver.



Dementia Intervention Team

A holistic, community-based support service for persons living with dementia and their caregivers, provided within the home and involving a tailored care plan.



Domiciliary Caring

A personalised caring service provided within the home, and through a case management approach.



Domiciliary Dietician

An assessment, diagnosis, and treatment service for diet and nutrition problems provided if you are housebound.



Domiciliary Nursing

A personalised nursing service provided within the home.



Occupational Therapy Service

A holistic and tailored service to help you participate in activities of everyday life through working on your physical, psychological and social well-being.



Physiotherapy Service

Provides therapy and rehabilitation advice or training that addresses any problems related to your mobility.



Phlebotomy Service

Withdrawal and transportation of blood for blood tests provided within your own home if you are housebound or have a disability.



Podiatry Service

Designed to assess, diagnose and treat conditions related to the foot and the lower limb. A comprehensive range of footcare services are available.



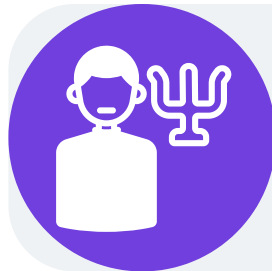
Respite at Home

If you are an informal caregiver taking care of an older person at home, this service will provide temporary relief through companionship and help with care in the home.



Residential Respite

If you are an informal caregiver of a dependent older person, this service can provide a planned short-term break of a maximum of 3 weeks up to 3 times a year.



Psychotherapy

A service to help with emotional and behavioural difficulties, including individual or group sessions to improve quality of life.

To find out if you or a family member might be eligible for any of these services, visit aacc.gov.mt.



Active Ageing and Community Care Other Community Services

A variety of other services are available to meet any specific needs you may have. These are subject to eligibility if you are over 60 years of age:



Active Ageing Centres

Each hub offers a varied programme of activities including talks, outings and cultural activities, games, and lifelong learning programmes that will help to stay physically, mentally, and socially active.



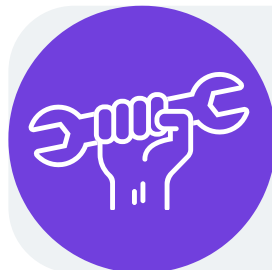
Carer at Home Scheme

Financial support to those who wish to employ a carer of their choice to assist in daily needs.



Home Help Service

Supporting beneficiaries and informal carers through the provision of light domestic chores and shopping.



Handyman Service

Offering a range of maintenance jobs in your own home, including carpentry, plumbing, electricity, painting, installation of railings, and moving of items between rooms.



Meals on Wheels

One meal per day delivered to your home, served chilled to be consumed at your convenience. Each meal consists of a starter, main course and desert, with various choices available for 7 days.



Silver T Service

Free transport that will help you conduct your daily errands within the community.



Continence Service

A partial or full subsidy of continence products for bladder or bowel problems related to incontinence.



Telecare+

Installation of a pendant to provide peace of mind to yourself, any carers, and other relatives when assistance is needed in your home.



Telecare on the Move

Providing those with dementia a device connected to relatives or a 24-hour call centre. This will detect any falls or wandering behaviour in Malta and Gozo.



Telephone Rent Rebate

A bi-monthly discounted rental charge on your residence direct telephone line.



Night Shelter

Offering secure and protective shelters in Malta and Gozo if you live alone and feel insecure in your home.

To further help you with your quality of life as you age, **discounts** are also available for persons in your age group from a variety of outlets related to transport , supermarkets, sports goods, and many more!

To find out if you or a family member might be eligible for any of these services or discounts, visit aacc.gov.mt.



Simplify your healthcare journey with myHealth.

Explore **myHealth** – your gateway to streamlined online healthcare interactions. This comprehensive portal offers Maltese residents and doctors a platform for effortless health data sharing.

This portal allows you to view a selection of your medical records online, retrieved from a number of Health IT systems across Government. This also allows you to connect with one or more doctors and enables quick data sharing through quick access to your records.

For doctors, this platform allows for the effortless management of patient data with sorting and filtering options, and also allows them to order tests for their patients online.

In fact, a Maltese e-ID grants you access to:

- Health case summaries from government hospitals for inpatients
- Information on upcoming clinic appointments and past episodes at Government hospitals and health centres
- Pharmacy of Your Choice (POYC) entitlement, prescription and dispensing records
- Vaccination records
- Laboratory results and medical imaging reports (visible when released by a linked doctor or after automatic release)
- Forms that doctors submit through myHealth (notifications of vaccinations given or infectious diseases notifications)



MyHealth also provides a Health Site Finder Map, Mater Dei referral forms, links to European Health Insurance Card Application forms, fast-track cancer referrals and various forms for efficient healthcare interactions.

NEW

Although the myHealth portal is always accessible, a new feature called **Live Chat** is now offered **Monday through Sunday from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM.**

This enables you to speak to Primary Healthcare Client Support Centre agents who can assist with your health service queries. This will provide you the opportunity to ask questions about health services offered, business hours of operation, your appointments, and general health concerns.

Prior to initiating a chat session, you have the option to choose the topic. The system will then pair you with a Primary Healthcare agent.

**For further support with your healthcare,
visit www.myhealth.gov.mt.**



National Mental Health Helpline 1579

This helpline operates 24/7 offering immediate and free emotional support, advice, and practical guidance that caters to diverse needs.

The helpline is staffed by trained psychology professionals within Mental Health Services.

Call 1579 if you:

- Need immediate emotional support for feelings of sadness, worry, or anger.
- Seek information on available services and their accessibility
- Have concerns about family or friends and wish to discuss the situation with a mental health professional
- Are in the midst of a crisis and require practical advice on managing the situation.

Since its launch in 2022, the helpline has received appreciation for its support, including instances where callers express gratitude for aiding family members in psychological distress. Callers themselves have reported improved well-being after contacting the helpline, thanking call handlers for ongoing support and introducing valuable coping strategies during times of psychological distress.

ageing well means...
**keeping helpful contacts
in one place**





useful contacts

HEALTH SERVICES	
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate	2326 6000
Nutrition Helpline	8007 3307
Smoking Quitline	8007 3333
Ambulance / Emergency	112
Primary Health Care / Telemedicine	21 231231
National Mental Health Helpline	1579
Wellbeing Services (GU Clinic)	2545 7491/4 guclinic@gov.mt
Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy	2545 6600/1 physiotherapyservices@gov.mt
Dementia Helpline	1771
OTHER SERVICES	
Government Information Service	153
Support Line	179
Active Ageing and Community Care	22788800 aacc-services@gov.mt
Police	21224001-7
Crime Stop	119



**WRITE DOWN YOUR PERSONAL LIST
OF IMPORTANT NUMBERS BELOW:**

<u>Service Provider</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>
Doctor 1		
Doctor 2		
Pharmacist		
Dentist		
Local Clinic		
Vet		

**WRITE DOWN YOUR LIST OF PERSONAL EMERGENCY
CONTACTS BELOW**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>



notes



notes
