

What can you do to age well?



We know that ageing well is everyone's business and whilst we can ensure that formal services and community supports are available in the right place and at the right time, there are ways for each individual to support themselves to live well in later life too.

Our engagement over the last year has given us an insight into the ways people can and want to age well in South Ayrshire. As part of our Ageing Well process, we invited experts in the field of healthy ageing to provide online webinars so that we could better understand what supports people to stay well in their more mature years.

This short document summarises and sets out some of the key themes that were highlighted over the last year.

Individual

- Have purpose.
- Prepare.
- Be connected.
- Be active.
- Take notice.
- Give.
- Explore.
- Be kept informed.
- Eat well.
- Have fun.
- Embrace technology.

So, what does this mean?

What follows sets out how each of these aspects can be realised and can attribute to healthy ageing in later life.

Having Purpose

There is good evidence that shows that people who live with some kind of purpose have better wellbeing. The purpose can be linked to a range of things such as family, politics, religion, sport and hobbies.

We know that creating and maintaining a routine in our lives can greatly improve our sense of wellbeing.



Prepare

We know that getting older is something that will happen to us all, but we often don't prepare adequately for this.

We tend not to think about our future housing needs and respond to future proofing our homes before changes in our housing situation are decided for us. Retirement is a big life change, and we can at times not consider the impact our retirement will have on our financial circumstances or that it could change what our purpose is. We know that the routine of work helps to give a rhythm to our lives.

We often don't prepare for what potential declining health might mean for our future needs and consideration of a Power of Attorney until it's too late to have this in place. We often think there will be more time to organise our Power of Attorney and choose someone we trust to act on our behalf should we ever need them to. However, time and time again individuals and their families are in situations where they need a responsible attorney to act on behalf of their loved one, but they are unable to provide informed consent.



There is a misconception that responsibility of a Power of Attorney is the same as a Next of Kin, however in the situations where an individual is not able to make informed decisions over things such as their finances or welfare decision, a Next of Kin would not legally be able to act on their behalf. This is why it is important to prepare for the future and have things such as Power of Attorney in place, should it ever be needed.

Sometimes we don't prepare for the ending of our lives as this can be an emotive topic but it's important for us and our loved ones to think about what our later journey might look like. Advanced Statements are an option that can allow individuals to set out their wishes and preferences regarding care, treatment and medical interventions in the situations where an early dementia or mental health diagnosis has been given. Setting out funeral plans so our loved ones know our wishes will ensure that our wishes are respected and supports those who will be making arrangements on our behalf to know they are carrying out our final wishes.

Connect

We know that people who lack social connections are more likely to experience worse health with poorer outcomes. Whilst some might prefer to live a more solitary life, most people thrive when they have good social connections. In the modern world connections can take many forms and can involve online and phone-based chats as well as meeting people individually in small or larger groups depending on preference. We know this helps to combat the effects of social isolation and loneliness which can have a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing.



Connecting with nature and being aware of the natural beauties in our environment can have a positive impact too. This can be a free way of bringing joy into your life.

Maintaining connections with family members is vital if possible (even if they live further away) but connecting with other folk with the same interests and passions can be helpful and beneficial to mental health. So too is connecting with other generations, as they can learn from your life experience, and you might be able to learn from children and young people as well.



Be Active

It is no secret that having an active lifestyle has a multitude of benefits. There is a very significant body of evidence that shows the difference that even moderate regular exercise can have. Gentle activities such as going for a walk, doing the housework and the garden or shopping can be part of this.

Any activity is better than no activity, but some activities help maintain our body strength and flexibility more than others. Strength and balance exercises are particularly effective, for example, in keeping us safe from falls. There

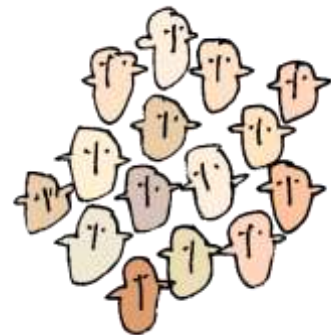
are wonderful programmes such as South Ayrshire Council's Invigor8 classes that are well placed to help you do this.

Activity is not just for those who are able, people that are more challenged with mobility issues can be supported to help their body become more active and there are great programmes including chair-based exercises that can help you to do this.

Within South Ayrshire there are great opportunities to explore the outdoors with walks at all levels in nearly all places. Some of these are more specifically targeted at people with specific health conditions or disabilities such as dementia, arthritis or frailty.

Take Notice

It may seem an obvious point, but if you take notice of things in your life including your family life, neighbourhood life, your places of interest or of worship and of the wider world and are grateful for these, it can be very helpful in improving your mental health and wellbeing.



Give

We know that older people in our communities already provide support to families in the way of unpaid activities often as carers or provide childcare for family members. Older people are also the most likely group to volunteer which can help to retain or build confidence and self-esteem.



Though 'giving something back' can of course help the recipients, it is also a fantastic way of maintaining your own sense of value and wellbeing.



Explore

As we age we might think that our learning days are over but learning new information and skills can be a vital way of keeping our mental and physical self up to speed – it's never too late to learn something new.

It is increasingly important to become more computer literate and we know of people nearing 90 years of age whose world has been enriched by learning basic technology skills.

Exploring can also just mean being a bit more curious about your local world and trying something new can be really helpful.

We have a host of wonderful opportunities on our doorstep to explore in South Ayrshire as well as further afield in Scotland.

The availability of a free bus pass in Scotland for older people is a great opportunity to travel and open up new experiences and connections.

Keep Informed

Another dimension to keeping connected is keeping informed, this can mean keeping up to date with events at a very local level or in relation to national and international events. This could be done by reading a daily newspaper, church magazine or on the internet.



Eat Well

We know that eating healthily can be a challenge for many people across their lifetime. Access to nutritious and affordable food can be difficult for some. For those living on their own, it can be hard to keep motivated to prepare and cook healthy, nutritious food for one person.

It is becoming increasingly clear how important eating a healthy balanced diet is in relation to how our ageing process works.

Most people know the kind of foods that constitute a balanced diet but there are lots of sources of information to point you in the right direction.

Embrace technology

We know many older people enjoy the benefits of technology in lots of ways, but we also know others who feel that it is not for them, or they have a fear of devices!

There is an increasing need to have access to the digital world and those that do not can experience challenges in relation to quite simple things like ordering shopping or theatre and sports tickets.

Many people who thought that they were too old to learn to use computers, tablets or smart phones have enjoyed huge benefit once they have embraced this.



Have fun!

It's ok just saying this and we know that getting older can present a range of challenges and we don't want to trivialise these but trying to incorporate some levity and fun into our lives can leave us feeling youthful in body and mind.