

The 14 Step Wellbeing Guide

How to live a happy and
healthy life as you age

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The quest for wellbeing

*“Wellbeing: A state of being comfortable,
happy and healthy.”*

– Oxford Dictionary

As we get older, chasing after this elusive state becomes a big priority. Things that used to be a breeze tend to get a little harder, so it’s no wonder most of us want to optimise our comfort, happiness and health as much as we can.

But when it comes to your wellbeing, there are plenty of moving parts. Your resources, routine, relationships and reason for being all play a role in how well you feel, both inside and out.

Wellbeing is made up of a complex combination of intellectual, spiritual, social, emotional, environmental and physical factors, all of which interconnect and influence each other.

In this eBook, we’ll explore 14 ways you can boost both your mental and physical wellbeing as you age.

Your mental wellbeing

There's more to mental wellbeing than simply feeling positive. Your mental wellbeing is made up of four key components that work together:



Emotional wellbeing

How you feel and express your emotions



Intellectual wellbeing

How you keep your mind stimulated



Social wellbeing

How you connect with others and maintain relationships



Spiritual wellbeing

How you seek a sense of purpose and meaning in life

In the coming pages, we'll explore seven ways you can maximise your mental wellbeing. And the best part? Some of these tips are good for you physically, too!



Step 1

Boost your brain health

Wellbeing starts in the brain – because after all, it controls everything we think, feel and do. Here's how you can make a positive impact on all that grey matter:

Stimulate your mind



There's a reason crossword magazines keep lining the shelves of your local newsagency. Mentally stimulating activities help your brain build new cells and strengthen connections, and working on something particularly challenging can kick things up a notch – like puzzles, brain training apps or Ikea instructions!

Stay social



Connecting with your community and saying yes to social activities is associated with a lower risk of cognitive impairment. If you're more of a bookworm than a social butterfly, you could join a book club and get the best of both worlds. Or, you could go on a guided tour of your city, have a regular restaurant dinner with friends or simply enjoy an old-fashioned phone call.

Keep learning



Whoever said you can't teach old dogs new tricks was wrong! Just because you finished school ages ago, doesn't mean you can't keep learning. Everyday forms of learning set off neuron receptors that help keep your brain cells performing at their best, while learning-related brain rhythms play a vital role in encoding new memories.

Switch things up



The brain isn't too keen on routine. Surprise it every once in a while by turning off auto-pilot and taking a new route. If you have a monotonous task at hand, challenge yourself with something different in your down time. If you always drive, take the bike. Or if you're right handed, try writing or eating with your left hand and see how that goes!

bonus

Getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising regularly can all have a positive impact on your cognitive function, too.



Step 2

Spark your creative streak

Creative expression isn't just for kids or 'creative types'.
Some of the benefits of being creative include:

A better mood



When you finish a creative task, like writing in a journal, knitting a scarf or drawing a cute dog, your brain is filled with dopamine – an all-natural anti-depressant that motivates you and makes you feel good. Even something as simple as singing in the car is bound to make you smile more!

A confidence boost



There's nothing better than that moment of satisfaction when you finish a creative task – not to mention the sense of achievement you get from creating something out of nothing. Plus, if you keep on creating, you're probably going to get better at it. And as you start to notice your progress, you're bound to notice a confidence boost, too.

A busier brain



Parents encourage play and creativity because it's good for a child's brain development. That's because when we're creative, we use parts of the brain that aren't usually in action for everyday tasks. So step out of your comfort zone and try your hand at something new – like pottery or poetry!

A chance to connect



Creative activities like music groups, cooking lessons or photography workshops give you the chance to interact with others and make friends. If you ever feel a little lonely, creative activities are a great way to maintain social connection and be a part of it all.

A way to destress



Adult colouring books are a thing now. That's because they help you find your flow – the state where you're so absorbed in an activity that you forget all the worrying thoughts lingering in your mind. When you're completely and utterly in the moment – distracted by a captivating novel, cake recipe or art project – stress tends to take a back seat.



Step 2

explore your inner creative!

There are hundreds of ways you can express yourself, but here are just some of them.



Art



Baking



Carpentry



Calligraphy



Dance



Embroidery



Flower Arranging



Gardening



Illustration



Interior Design



Knitting



Music



Origami



Photography



Poetry



Singing



Storytelling



Scrapbooking



Upcycling



Videography



Step 3

Focus on friendship

A loyal circle of friends makes staying social a breeze. And since social connection is a key component of our mental wellbeing, it's a good idea to nurture your relationships with friends and family. Here are five ways you can form better friendships:

Be thoughtful



Send them a text before an important appointment. Surprise them with their favourite treat at your next catch-up. Remember their birthday. Little things go a long way in building meaningful friendships.

Really listen



Ask questions. Be a sounding board or a shoulder to cry on. Follow up on things they've shared with you before. Friendships are a two-way street, so make sure you practice the art of conversation.

Open up



Ask for their advice on something that's troubling you. Share your feelings. Tell them how much they mean to you. It's difficult to bond with a closed book, so let your friends know you trust them by letting them in.

Make time



Pick up the phone instead of the remote. Put a regular date on the calendar. Lend a hand if they need some help. We prioritise the things that are important to us, so show you care with the gift of time.

Make the effort



Make the first move, even if the ball's not in your court. Cook them dinner. Accompany them to that new yoga class, even if you're terrible at it. If you want a great friendship, be a great friend.



Step 4

Love to laugh

What is life without laughter?

Getting your giggle on has all sorts of mental benefits, including:

A feel-good frame of mind



Intuitively, you know you'll probably be in a better mood after watching something funny. That's because when we laugh, our brains release neurotransmitters called endorphins – natural, feel-good chemicals that promote a general sense of wellbeing. Laughter can also diffuse anger and shift perspectives, helping you turn a frown upside down.

A weight off your shoulders



There's no better way to lighten the load than a good ol' laugh. The simple act of laughing stimulates a reduction in cortisol and adrenaline, two of the hormones responsible for feelings of stress and anxiety. So if it's all a bit too much, stop what you're doing and make a healthy dose of humour your top priority.

A sign of good will



A smile often suggests that you're friendly and approachable. But while a smile is easy to fake, a laugh isn't. Laughter tells others they're safe with you, making it an accessible tool to help you form meaningful social connections.

A boost in brain function



Laughing gets the respiratory system going, and in turn increases the amount of oxygen flowing to the brain, thus promoting healthier brain function. And since laughter also increases the release of neurotransmitters, the brain can make connections quicker and comprehend situations at a higher rate.

A way to cope through it all



We all go through tough times. Humour helps us deal with distress, embarrassment, illness and even grief. At a time when we think we'll never smile again, laughing over funny memories can help us through.

bonus

Whoever said laughter is the best medicine was on to something. Laughing has been shown to help boost immunity, decrease blood pressure and even relieve pain.



Step 5

Make time for music

Most of us have loved music for as long as we can remember.

As babies, we bond with our mothers over lullabies. As kids, we bob up and down to Disney songs. As teens, we zone out in our rooms to the latest tunes. And as adults, we reminisce about the good ol' days whenever we hear the classics. Humans love music because it makes us feel good. But have you ever wondered why? Here are just some of the benefits of music, as backed by science:

A sense of reward



When we listen to music we enjoy, our bodies release dopamine – a neurotransmitter dispensed during pleasurable activities, like sex or when we're eating. Dopamine makes us feel rewarded and motivated – the perfect cocktail for a confidence boost.

A lower level of stress



Cortisol is the body's main stress hormone, and while essential, too much for too long is a no-no for wellbeing. Listening to music can help reduce our levels of cortisol, and in turn, help us feel a little less stressed out.

A rush of emotion



Ever listened to a song you hadn't heard in a while and found yourself transported to another time? This sort of music-induced déjà vu is unique for each of us – certain songs may have special associations, serving as fond reminders of times gone by. By involving the pre-frontal cortex – a part of our brain associated with memory – music can elicit all kinds of emotion.

A happier outlook



Music stimulates oxytocin – a hormone associated with positive, happy feelings. Simply singing for half an hour can significantly increase oxytocin levels, making you feel more elated and energetic.



Step 6

Be a proud pet owner

What better friend is there than a four-legged one?
Here are five reasons why pets are so good for your wellbeing:

Unconditional love



Pets are the perfect sidekick. They're consistent in a world where nothing else is, offering comfort and companionship through thick and thin. When you've had a dreadful day, it's easy to sweep away your sorrows with the warm embrace of a cuddly canine, faithful feline or rousing rabbit.

Enhanced happiness



While animals make most of us smile, they do much more for our emotional wellbeing. Interactions with animals increase our levels of oxytocin – a hormone that makes us feel positive and happy. For those that own a pet, these feelings are even more amplified.

Improved socialisation



Not only do pets provide one-on-one companionship – they encourage connection with others, too. A dog fervently sniffing another dog at the park naturally progresses into friendly banter between owners. Similar to the baby effect, it's a lot easier to strike up a random conversation when there's a doggo in tow!

A sense of purpose



Caring for a pet involves routine and structure – regular feeding times, daily walks and a lot of attention. Adopting a pet could give you a new-found sense of purpose, because after all – that living, breathing creature depends on you.

Less stress and anxiety



Everyone feels overwhelmed, under pressure or stressed out from time to time. While these feelings can be more frequent for some, research suggests they're often more manageable among people with pets. Being around animals sparks the release of calming chemicals in the body, helping us feel a lot more chill. Plus, pets are always down to cuddle – and they're wonderful distractions that don't talk back!



Step 7

Give to receive

With so many benefits for both you and your community, volunteering is a win-win situation. Here are five benefits of becoming a volunteer:

You'll make a social contribution



64% of people who volunteer do so to help others. Many not-for-profit organisations rely on volunteers to keep the wheels turning, bringing them one step closer to achieving their mission, which ultimately benefits the wellbeing of the community.

You'll make new friends



Whether you're volunteering at a care home, at an animal shelter, at a local community event or at a second-hand store, you'll meet and greet plenty of likeminded folk – giving you a good chance to connect over shared experiences.

You'll feel happier



In the pursuit of doing good for others, you can do a whole lot of good for yourself. According to Volunteering Australia, 95% of volunteers said that for them, volunteering was associated with feelings of personal wellbeing. In fact, they even said that just a few hours of volunteering made a difference to their happiness and mood.

You'll discover a new perspective



Depending on the cause you're supporting, you'll see circumstances and situations in a whole different light. As a volunteer, you'll meet people from all walks of life – all with different experiences, struggles and goals. Life looks different for all of us, and volunteering lets you step into someone else's shoes and share their perspective for a little while.

You'll have another purpose



If you're retired, not working or just looking for meaning, volunteering can enrich your life by giving you something to strive for – whether that's revamping your local green space, raising money for much-needed research, or simply brightening someone else's day.

At Brightwater, we provide not-for-profit care to seniors and younger people living with complex disabilities. We're always on the lookout for volunteers to spread smiles across our 22 homes.

For more information, visit brightwatergroup.com and click  **Support Us**

Your physical wellbeing

On the physical side of things, there's more to it than what you put in to and what you do with your body. Being in peak form is all about practicing healthy habits. That includes:



Your daily routines



Your living arrangements



How you manage illness or health conditions



Access to aids, equipment and assistive technology

In the coming pages, we'll explore seven ways you can reinforce your physical wellbeing. A lot of these tips will help you maximise your mental wellbeing, too!



Step 8

Sleep soundly

A good night's sleep affects your brain function, mood, immune system, heart health and more.

In essence, everything just works better when you're sleeping well.. but sometimes that's easier said than done. Here are some tips to help you sleep better:

Improve your sleep environment



You want your room to be dark, cool, quiet and comfortable. So eliminate noise as much as you can, aim for a temperature of around 18 degrees, shut out any lingering light and invest in bedding that is as firm or as soft as you need it to be.

Embrace the daylight



Fresh air and sunlight during the day helps you sleep better at night, thanks to its suppressing effect on your body's melatonin production – a hormone that influences sleeping patterns. A lack of exercise is often associated with poor sleep, so if you're struggling to catch some Z's, take a brisk morning walk or grab your gardening gloves and get to it!

Have a regular routine



Our internal body clocks – known as circadian rhythms – regulate our sleep patterns. Going to sleep and waking up at consistent times helps keep your clock ticking as it should, in turn optimising your sleep quality. So try to stay in sync with your natural cycle by avoiding too many sleep-ins or sporadic naps – and be rewarded with sweeter dreams!

Focus on relaxing habits



There's a reason lullabies and bedtime stories help put little ones to sleep. If you want to get some shut eye sooner, consider listening to soft music or reading a good book before you go to bed.

Avoid screens and caffeine



Mobile devices emit blue light – an artificial light that has a tendency to disrupt our sleep-wake cycles. Caffeine tends to keep us up too, so it's best to avoid your Facebook feed or that after-dinner cuppa if you're planning to hit the sack soon.



Step 9

Eat your way to wellness

As they say, you are what you eat.

By now, most of us are aware of the bountiful benefits of a healthy, wholesome diet. If you want to age well, you need to eat well – but tracking kilojoules, macronutrients, fibre and vitamins can be hard work. To make things simple, here are some key areas to focus on:

For a healthier heart:

Limit saturated fats: instead, choose healthy fats from fish or nuts

Limit white, refined flour: instead, choose wholegrain breads or pastas

Limit your salt and sodium intake: instead, use spices to add extra flavour

For a healthier gut:

Get enough fibre: eat more fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and nuts

Eat probiotic foods: like yoghurt, kimchi or fermented pickles

For healthier bones and muscles:

Get enough calcium: eat more leafy greens, dairy or soya

Get enough protein: eat more lean meat, dairy or legumes

REMEMBER: Women are more at risk of osteoporosis than men.

Women should aim for 1200mg of calcium each day – a glass of milk is about 10% of that.

For healthier brain function and vision:

Get enough Omega 3: your brain and eyes love seafood, nuts and chia seeds

Eat more fruit and vegetables: your brain and eyes love leafy greens and citrus fruits

For a healthier life:

Drink enough water: aim for at least 2 litres a day

Get your vitamins: aim for 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables

Limit alcohol: but a daily glass of red wine is fine!

Manage your portions: but get a good mix of protein, carbohydrates and fats on your plate



Step 10

Mingle with Mother Nature

Back in the day, most of our time was spent outside hunting and gathering. But alas, times have changed.

While most of us love the great outdoors, it's safe to say we could get a bit more of it. Some of the benefits of being outside include:

Stronger bones and teeth



Time spent outdoors helps you get your daily dose of Vitamin D – a hormone produced by the kidneys in response to sun exposure. The 'sunshine vitamin' helps maintain bone and teeth health by allowing the body to absorb calcium – so make sure you get enough of that, too!

A healthier immune system



According to research, spending time in nature enhances natural killer (NK) cell activity – a type of white blood cell that plays an important role in our immune system, alongside Vitamin D.

Lower stress levels



There's a reason we crave fresh air when we need to calm down. More time spent outdoors is linked to a reduced risk of stress and high blood pressure – so step outside next time you're feeling high-strung!

Reduced inflammation



Research suggests that both the causes and symptoms of inflammation can be reduced by spending more time in nature. Considering inflammation is linked to a higher risk of stroke, arthritis and other chronic conditions, a little extra sunshine might be worth your while.

Better sleep



Sunlight and sleep go hand in hand. The sun has a major influence on circadian rhythms, so if you're spending too much time indoors, you're bound to confuse your body clock.



Step 11

Embrace exercise

We all know we *should* exercise, but sometimes it's hard to find the time and motivation. Exercise doesn't have to be all dumbbells and treadmills – gardening, yoga and dancing are all great ways to work your muscles, too.

By learning to embrace exercise, you can:

Improve your heart health



Regularly getting your heart rate up can improve your cardiovascular health in the long run. A healthy exercise habit lowers your resting heart rate, helps reduce blood pressure, and lowers your risk of stroke, diabetes and heart disease. Plus, getting your blood moving is a simple and effective way to improve your circulation, keeping your organs and tissues pumped full of oxygenated blood and nutrients.

Sustain your strength



Regular weight-bearing exercise helps counteract age-related loss of bone mass, helping prevent arthritis and osteoporosis as well as reducing the risk of hip fractures. While many older people shy away from exercise due to pain, it's actually a good way to reduce it. Exercise keeps the knee and hip joints well lubricated, in turn strengthening the surrounding muscles. It's well-known that muscle mass declines with age, and as they say – use it or lose it!

Improve your mobility and balance



Simply going for a regular stroll helps build lower body strength by engaging your hips, abs and legs, which all collaborate to keep good balance. And since exercise improves your heart health, balance and coordination, staying active will help reduce your risk of disability in later life.

Enhance your independence



By keeping our bodies active, we maximise our ability to do everyday tasks, like grabbing the groceries, stepping into the shower and getting in and out of a car. So be active now so you can stay active later!

bonus

Staying active has been shown to improve your cognitive function too!



Step 12

Keep on walking

Back in the day, humans had to walk everywhere. But with everything more spread out these days, plus the added convenience of an always available and air-conditioned car, our lives are a lot more sedentary.

Pair that with working in a desk job or just not having an exercise routine, and we're really not walking much at all. But as we get older, an inability to walk unattended is often the catalyst for a loss of independence. Walking is a senior-friendly exercise that's completely free. All you need is a little motivation to get started and a reason to stick to it.

With all the benefits of regular exercise, walking to improve your wellbeing is a no-brainer. But it takes time to really cement a routine.

Here are five strategies to help you form a long-lasting habit:

Recruit a friend

Because everything's better with a buddy!



Join a mall walking group

Your local shopping centre might have one, and it's a great way to make new friends!



Use a pedometer

Track how much you walk with a nifty little gadget. Aim for the recommended 10,000 steps a day – or as close as you can get to it.



Be accountable

Tell someone you're going for a half hour walk every other day. Publicly vocalising your goal is a great psychological trick to help you stick to it!



Walk your dog – or someone else's!

Your dog needs the exercise too! If you haven't got a dog, you could ask a neighbour or friend to lend a pooch to help you reach your goals.





Step 13

Get in the garden

If you've got a green thumb, we won't need to tell you why gardening is good for your wellbeing. For the rest of you, here are a few benefits of getting your fingernails dirty:

Enjoyable exercise



Gardening is a great way to get your heart rate up – lugging potting mix to and fro, digging dirt, and planting pretty flowers is a completely legitimate form of exercise. Too much sitting is a serious health threat as we get older, so do all you can to maintain your gardening habit. If getting down on all fours is a little harder than it once was, think about installing raised garden beds to help keep your green thumb active.

Reduced stress



Compared to other relaxing activities like reading, gardening outside has greater impact on your levels of cortisol – the body's stress hormone. So if you need to take your stress levels down a peg, try giving your lawn some love.

Better hand strength



While reduced hand strength and dexterity is a normal part of ageing, a bit of elbow grease in the garden will help maintain your motor skills. But if you do suffer from reduced hand strength, don't push yourself – make sure you get in touch with a physiotherapist or occupational therapist to knuckle down some safe strategies and exercises.

Your own healthy produce



The most tangible benefit of gardening is the finished product itself. And if the fruits of your labour are literally fruits, you'll be doing even more good by filling your body with the vitamins and nutrients it needs – all home-grown by you.

bonus

It feels good to grow something out of nothing. Being imaginative in the garden can help boost your self-esteem, and being proud of your work is sure to improve your mood.



Step 14

Safeguard your space

Home is where the heart is, so it's no wonder most of us want to live independently for as long as we can.

Even if you're completely self-sufficient, some things just get a little harder as we get older. Around 30% of over 65s have experienced a fall in the last year, so anything you can do to reduce your risk of injury should be a top priority. Here are our top home safety tips for seniors:

Sort out the surfaces

- Remove area rugs or ensure they're firmly tacked down to flooring
- Check for loose or slippery tiles and replace them, especially in the kitchen bathroom and laundry
- Keep loose cords and cables secure with electrical tape to avoid trip hazards
- Install anti-slip surfaces in high traffic areas and stairways

Cut out the clutter

- Rearrange furniture to enable easy passage – especially if you're using a walking aid
- If it does nothing but collect dust – get rid of it!
- Once you've assessed what you do and don't need, store the things you use all the time within easy reach, keeping heavy objects at waist level

Let there be light

- Make sure entrances and outdoor areas are well illuminated to improve navigation
- Install motion sensor lights by stairs and outdoor areas
- Use bedside touch lamps so you're not fumbling for the switch
- Leave a light on in the bathroom at night or use night lights to help with navigation

Make some modifications

- Install ramps and consider widening doorways to allow for walker and wheelchair accessibility
- Add hand rails to stairs to help you maintain balance
- Add grab bars in the shower or next to the toilet to prevent slippery falls
- Add a non-slip mat or shower seat to improve safety
- Add padding to sharp corners, particularly on furniture

If you have any mobility challenges, it's a good idea to seek professional advice from an occupational therapist. They will assess your home for potential risks and suggest modifications and exercise strategies that can help you, based on your needs now and in the future.

Support for ageing well

An extra hand can really go a long way.

If you're over 65, you might be eligible for a government-funded Home Care Package – a wellbeing initiative that can help you maintain your independence at home and in the community.

A support worker can visit your home at a time that suits you, lending a hand with everyday tasks like cleaning, maintaining the garden, grabbing the groceries and even walking the dog.

Home Care Packages can also cover health services, like a physiotherapist designing an exercise plan to reduce your risk of falls, or an occupational therapist coming in to assess how safe your home is.

At Brightwater, our team of support workers and health professionals visit homes all over Perth, providing all sorts of services to keep your home, health and happiness in order.

Whatever your goals, we'll work with you to put a plan in action – so you can be your best at home. For more information, call 1300 223 968 or [click here](#) to get in touch.



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