

# Ageing well:

## An expert's insight



In the modern age, many things are worth celebrating – one of them is that **we are all living longer lives**. However, with so many of us living longer, it **presents challenges** to us as individuals and to health systems worldwide – by 2030, one in six people will be aged 60 years or older.

Head of Physio at Teladoc Health UK, Will Kenton, uncovers the facts:

Ageing, as defined by the World Health Organisation, is:

*"At the biological level, ageing results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time. This leads to a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease and ultimately death."*

The prevalence of age-related disease and health conditions – including neurodegenerative diseases (think Alzheimer's or Parkinson's Disease), cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and metabolic diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity) – is only going to rise, putting strains on health care systems, and making life miserable for many.

To continue the happy news, as we age we're also more likely to have more than one of these issues, with many conditions leading to other risks, such as high blood pressure increasing the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

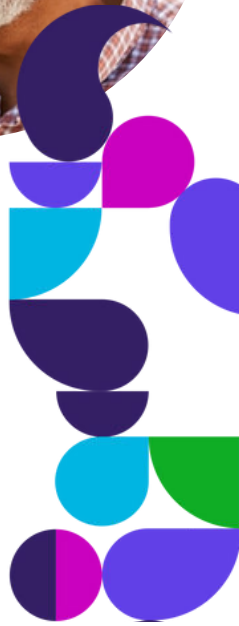
That all sounds a bit depressing. But it doesn't have to be...

## So why is it not all bad?

Ageing, once considered a natural and universal process, is now more widely viewed as a disease process. This implies an increasing awareness and understanding of lifestyle determinants of aging. As a collective, we know significantly more about how the impact of our lives will determine how we age.

It is recognised that there are aspects of ageing that are both within and outside an individual's control – for example, gender and genetics play a role in the ageing process. Additionally, although unfair and avoidable, various health inequalities persist in society, including low income, limited education, restricted access to green spaces, unhealthy food options, and inadequate housing. However, there is plenty we can control and influence to ensure we age well.

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# What can I do to support healthy ageing?

## 1. Get and stay active

Taking care of your physical health is a common-sense approach for most of us, however there are a few distinct aspects. Whether you love or loathe it, being active and exercising is the cornerstone of healthy ageing. Studies have demonstrated a reduction in the risk of disease and an increase in life expectancy with regular exercise. Not only this, but exercise also improves your stamina, balance, and strength, thereby reducing your risk of falls and allowing you to stay more active and engaged in society as you age.

## 2. Diet

Eating a healthy diet significantly contributes to physical health and ageing well.

Did you know that women in the Okinawa region of Japan have a life expectancy of 87.44 years? Japan also has a lower-than-average rate of cardiovascular disease, in part due to traditional diets consisting of healthy fish. Improved cardiac health has also been linked to the Mediterranean diet and is likely to contribute to healthy aging.

A poor diet, including convenience and processed foods, is linked to obesity and diabetes, alongside systemic inflammation, which can have widespread implications on general health.

## 3. Smoking and drinking

Smoking not only causes a risk for premature facial ageing but also increases your chances of early death. Smoking causes 7 out of every 10 cases of lung cancer. It also causes cancer in many other body parts, including the mouth and throat. Smoking also causes heart disease, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Drinking in moderation is fine, but drinking excessively can cause numerous health conditions and liver disease. Recent research has also suggested that drinking may play a role in accelerating the biological ageing process.

## 4. Leisure activities and hobbies

Hobbies and activities are not only fun but also help us avoid isolation. They are also beneficial for both mental and physical health and may lower your risk of certain health conditions. Several studies have linked regular hobbies and activities to a reduced risk of dementia.

## 5. Train and look after your cognitive health

Our ability to think, learn, and remember contributes to the quality of life as we age. This suggests that learning a new skill can enhance memory function.

## Healthy lifestyle behaviours can lower the risk of developing Alzheimer's

Research continues to investigate the lifestyle factors that impact cognitive health as we age. A [2020 study](#) demonstrated that individuals who followed at least four of the following health lifestyle behaviours had a 60% lower risk of developing Alzheimer's:

- At least 150 minutes per week of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity
- Not smoking
- Not drinking heavily
- A high-quality, Mediterranean-style diet
- Engagement in mentally stimulating activities, such as reading, writing letters, and playing games, also supports cognitive stimulation.

**A longer life brings with it opportunities, not only for older people and their families, but also for societies as a whole.**

World Health Organisation

**One significant aspect is to do good things consistently – making them fun, not too taxing, and rewarding often yields the best results today, tomorrow, and in the future, so you can still be doing cartwheels into your 90s!**