

Health & Well-being

A GUIDE FOR
OLDER PEOPLE



THE
HEALTH
OF THE NATION



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Personal Record

Fill in your personal details and keep handy for immediate reference.

Doctor

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel:

Dentist

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel:

Optician

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel:

Chiropodist

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel:

Pharmacist

Name

Address

.....

.....

Tel:

Details of medicines prescribed by your doctor

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Local Authority –
Social Services
Department**

Tel:

Housing Department

Tel:

Local Social Security Office

..... Tel:

District Health Authority

..... Tel:

**Emergency Services –
Police Station**

Tel:

Gas

Tel:

Electricity

Tel:

Water

Tel:

Citizens Advice Bureau

Tel:

Person to be contacted in an emergency

Name

Address

.....

.....

.....

.....

Tel:



INTRODUCTION

Today, people live longer than ever before and look forward to enjoying many years of active life.

Changes happen to us all as we grow older – hair can lose colour, names can slip the mind, staircases seem to get steeper. But there is much we can do to improve the quality of our lives and maintain good health in later life.

Growing old is not a disease. But don't dismiss physical or mental problems as "just old age". Many conditions can be treated very easily and successfully; there are many professional people who may be able to help you and there is a lot you can do to help yourself.

There have been many improvements in recent years in the quality and range of available care, many of which are of particular importance to older people.

All doctors are required to offer an annual health check to their patients aged 75 and over. Local pharmacists (chemists) can advise you on minor health problems, including when you should see the doctor. Men over 65 years and women over 60 get prescriptions free of charge. Depending on income, you may also be able to get help with the cost of dental care, sight tests and glasses.

Your local authority Social Services Department can help you and can advise you what services



are available in your area. If it appears to them that you are in need of services, they will assess with you what your needs are and then, according to their eligibility criteria, arrange for appropriate services to be provided to meet your needs. To find their address and telephone number and other useful services mentioned in this booklet check in the telephone directory or ask at your local library, Community Health Council or Citizens Advice Bureau. When you have looked them up, you may find it useful to enter them in the personal record at the front of this booklet.

Good health is not just about good quality services. In many ways it is a partnership between you and the health care professionals who can help you. The Government published *The Health of the Nation* in July 1992 to help forge this partnership and promote better health for everyone. This sets out, for the first time, a strategy to reduce illness and premature death.



Health of the Nation identifies five Key Areas for action:

- ***Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke***
- ***Cancers***
- ***HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health***
- ***Mental Illness***
- ***Accidents***

This booklet gives you practical advice and information on how you can stay healthy and avoid illness or injury including advice and information relating to these five Key Areas. The first part of the booklet, HEALTHY LIVING, gives you information to help keep you in good health. Other sections contain advice on what to do about particular problems, and where to find help.

HEALTHY LIVING – SELF-CARE FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

It is never too late to change your lifestyle and habits in order to lead a healthier and happier life. Although, ideally, healthy living should start in infancy and continue throughout life.

Smoking

It is a myth that smoking doesn't matter if you've smoked all your life without apparent ill effects. It is never too late to feel the benefits of stopping. In fact, **giving up smoking is the single most effective action you can take to improve your health.**

All forms of smoking are bad for you: cigarettes, cigars and pipes. Smoking increases your risk of heart disease, lung disease (especially bronchitis and lung cancer), and osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). It also reduces your chances of survival after a heart attack.

Many people successfully give up smoking every year and there is plenty of help available.

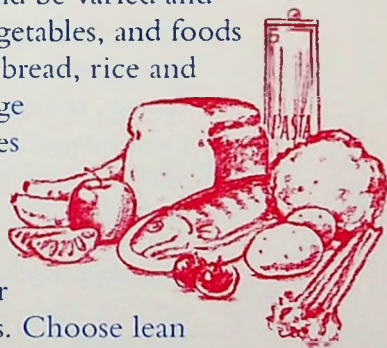
Doctors are only too happy to help and useful leaflets can be obtained from ASH, QUIT, and the Health Education Authority. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** pages 61, 67 and 68.)

Or you could phone **QUITLINE** on 0171-487 3000 for a free **QUITPACK** which explains how to stop smoking.

Diet

It is the food we eat that gives us the energy and nourishment to live and enjoy life. If you don't vary your diet or eat enough, you are more liable to illness. On the other hand, eating too much can also cause health problems.

A well-balanced diet should be varied and include plenty of fruit, vegetables, and foods rich in starches (potatoes, bread, rice and pasta) and fibre or roughage (wholemeal bread, potatoes with their skins left on and bran). Fish, especially oily fish like mackerel, sardines, tuna or pink salmon are nutritious. Choose lean cuts of red meat and poultry, if possible and avoid eating too many salty and sugary foods. Saturated fat, which is found in butter, some cooking fats and full cream milk should be taken in moderation. Make sure you drink plenty of



non-alcoholic fluids, including tea, fruit juice, water and milky drinks. Taste may diminish with age, so the addition of herbs and spices (rather than salt) is a good way to stimulate the appetite.

Vitamin D is very important to keep bones healthy, and it can be found in oily fish, margarine and breakfast cereals. Your skin also makes vitamin D when it is exposed to sunlight, so try to sit out in the summer – even if you only uncover your hands, face and neck. Even short but regular exposure can help. However, in sunlight it is advisable to use a sunscreen cream, to keep your skin from becoming burned. If you dislike direct sunlight, sitting in light shade will help your skin to make vitamin D without you getting burnt.

Alcohol

In moderation, alcohol is unlikely to cause you harm, but too much can seriously damage your health. It slows down the brain and affects concentration, memory, and reactions and in the long term, it can also lead to stomach disorders, high blood pressure, and brain damage.

Sensible levels are 14 units a week for women, and 21 units a week for men, spread throughout the week, with two drink-free days. One unit of alcohol is found in half a pint of ordinary beer, a single measure of spirits, a small glass of sherry or a glass of wine. Since alcohol is more likely to stay in the body for longer as you get older,



you may find that you are affected by a very small amount of alcohol, and it may be wise to drink below these amounts.

Weight

It isn't healthy to be either over or under weight:

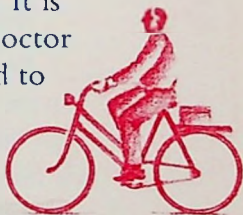
- *if you are overweight, you will be less mobile and at greater risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. If you suffer from arthritis, it is likely to get worse. The best way to lose weight is through diet and exercise;*
- *if you are underweight, you will have greater risk of fractures and osteoporosis.*

See your doctor if your weight changes suddenly and you have not altered either your diet or how much you exercise.

Exercise

This is good for you at any age and whether you are physically disabled or able-bodied. It is never too late to start. Consult your doctor first if you have been ill, or are unused to any physical activity.

Exercise will improve your strength, suppleness and stamina and memory, and help protect against heart disease, osteoporosis and many chronic conditions.



It helps maintain mobility and prolong independence. It also fosters a positive mental attitude and contributes to a sense of well-being. Activities like gardening, bowls, dancing, cycling and walking are all excellent forms of exercise. Swimming is particularly good if you are overweight or have any backache, stiffness or disability, because your body is supported in the water. Aim to become gradually more active more often. If you can manage 30 minutes of activity (in one or more sessions) on most days of the week. This will be good for your heart as well as your joints and bones. Many local authorities offer older people reduced rates of entry to sports centres and special exercise facilities.

Sexuality

Older people can enjoy sexual relations just as much as younger people; indeed, changes in your body can enhance your own or your partner's pleasure. Of course, there still remains the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases in unprotected sex with a new partner, as with other age groups. Other bodily changes can cause difficulties. After the menopause women may experience physical changes, for example, vaginal dryness; there are creams and lubricants to help to ease this. Some older men suffer from impotence, through an illness (such as diabetes) or certain medicine they are taking. Don't be embarrassed to get help with this or any other sexual difficulty from your doctor.

Keeping Mentally Active

Keeping mentally alert is just as important as keeping physically active. Spend time on your hobbies, join a club or start a course. The University of the Third Age (U3A) (see USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 71) can help you here. It organises classes and activities and has over 200 groups around the country.

The governing bodies of sport are always glad to accept volunteers to assist in running local sports clubs or act as coaches or referees. The Sports Council (see USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 70) can provide names and addresses of the governing bodies.

Your local College of Further Education, Institute of Adult Education or Community College will have a list of the various courses on offer, both in the evening and the daytime.

Many local authorities also run recreation classes during the day and some voluntary bodies welcome older people who would like to use their skills to help others. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 61-71.)

Reminiscence is a valuable activity as people age and can improve the quality of your life by helping you relive your past and focus on the personal way you remember life experiences. It is enjoyable and stimulating and highlights your assets rather than your disabilities, and is a good way of meeting people.

Age Exchange, for example, (see USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 61) runs a professional theatre company which presents plays and song and dance productions based on older people's memories in residential care settings all over Britain. Its base is the Reminiscence Centre in Blackheath, South East London, a unique community centre for older people where there are a variety of reminiscence activities. For more information, contact Age Exchange. Your local Social Services Department can also provide information about reminiscence activities in your local area.

Keeping Warm in Winter



This is a vital part of keeping well. At home, you should aim to keep living and sleeping areas comfortably warm. You should have at least one proper meal a day (see the section on diet on page 7) and if possible, this should be hot food. Plenty of hot drinks will help you to feel warmer inside.



Try to avoid moving from a warm room into a very cold one if you can. In cold weather, it's best to warm your bedroom before going to bed, and keep the window closed at night.

When you go out, the best way to keep warm is by wearing several layers of clothing. It is important to make sure your head, hands and feet are well covered, especially if you know you may have to wait around in the cold.

Flu is more common in the winter months, and can pose a threat to your health if you suffer from conditions like chronic heart and respiratory disease or diabetes. If you do, you should ask your GP about immunisation (see the section on flu on page 35).

For more information about coping with cold weather, phone the Winter Warmth line free on 0800 289 404.

Getting Out and About –

Driving

Driving licences are valid until the age of 70. Renewals are applied for using a Form D100 available at Post Offices and details of how to apply are given on the form. Depending on the applicant's medical condition a new driving licence can be issued for a further one, two or three years after which another renewal application can take place.

You may find driving more of a strain as you get older. Arthritic fingers, stiffness in the hips, knees, neck and shoulders and a loss of strength in the arms are all familiar problems to many thousands of older drivers. Many people either put up with the pain and discomfort, or if it becomes too much, give up driving altogether and consequently face the loss of their independence. However, you may be able to get help with

these problems by simple, low cost adaptations to your car. The Department of Transport's Mobility Advice and Vehicle Information Service (MAVIS) offers free advice by letter or phone to any older driver worried about continuing to drive. MAVIS can be contacted at TRL, Old Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berkshire, RG11 6 AU, tel: 01344 770456.

Public transport concessions

All local authorities have legal powers to operate concessionary fares on local public transport and most have schemes for people over state pension age. However, there is no standard scheme and as the benefits vary from place to place, it is advisable to check. In addition, as a commercial venture, the railway and long-distance coach operators offer reduced fares for older people.

Several holiday companies offer special concessions to older people who can take a break at off-peak times. Some companies specialise in holidays for older people, making sure their hotels have lifts and that there is someone to help with luggage.

Wheelchairs

Your local health authority will provide a wheelchair service. If you need one, for indoor or outdoor use, ask your GP where the service is based. Alternatively, voluntary organisations,

such as the Red Cross, may have wheelchairs to loan for occasional use.

Dial-a-Ride Services

In most large urban areas and many small towns door to door transport services are now available for people who are unable to use public transport. The services which are known by a variety of names, including Dial-a-Ride and Dial-a-Journey, provide wheelchair accessible transport to enable people to visit friends, go shopping, and attend social events, etc. Fares are usually based on local bus fares, but concessionary passes are sometimes accepted. Generally the services can only be used by local residents, who have to register, but some schemes will assist visitors if possible. The services cannot be used for trips to hospital for medical treatment or for any other journeys where health authority transport is available. To find out whether there is a Dial-a-Ride service in your area you should contact your County Council's Public Transport Information Officer or your local Social Services Department.



The Orange Badge Scheme

If you are unable to walk or cannot walk more than a short distance, and you either drive a car or are driven by someone else, ask your local

Social Services Department about the Orange Badge Scheme. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 70). Many places have parking spaces specially reserved for cars displaying an Orange Badge on the windscreen, and you may also stop for a limited time in places where parking is not normally allowed.

YOU AND YOUR BODY

Many changes occur in the body with age, but you may never suffer from the conditions outlined either in this section or the next. By taking the advice in the **HEALTHY LIVING** section of this booklet, you will give yourself the best chance to maintain good health.

This section sets out common changes which can occur with age, many of which can be helped or prevented.

Eyes



It is not unusual for a person's eyesight to change with age. You may find as you get older that you have to hold a book at arm's length to read or that things are beginning to look blurred. It is a good idea to have a sight test regularly. Eye tests can show whether you need to have glasses or to change them, and how healthy your eyes are. Sometimes underlying medical conditions can be detected by examining the eyes.

When you go to the optician, always ask whether you are entitled to a free NHS sight test. Free NHS sight tests are available to certain groups of people. If you have to pay for your eye test, you will find it best to shop around as the cost may vary from one optician to another. You can ask to take away your lens prescription and use it to buy your glasses elsewhere. If you are on a low income or need complex lenses, you may be entitled to an NHS Spectacles Voucher.

A good overall level of lighting at home is important. Place lights near to where you need them, especially when doing close work. You need adequate lighting on staircases especially at the top and bottom of flights of stairs and at back and front doors where steps may be more dangerous in the dark. If your eyesight is such that you need further advice and guidance, you will find that there are local and national voluntary organisations that can give you more information and help.

Hearing

Many people lose the ability to hear high-pitched sounds as they grow older.

Consult your doctor if you find it hard to follow a conversation, hear the telephone or doorbell, or if you need to turn the radio or TV up very loud. There may be a simple cause such as wax in your ears, which can be easily removed (don't

try to do it yourself and NEVER poke anything in your ears).

The doctor may send you to a hospital for a hearing test. Hearing aids are free through the NHS to everyone who needs them, as are the batteries and any repairs. It is possible to get a hearing aid from a private dispenser, but this is often very expensive and you will not get free repairs or batteries. Be very wary of advertisements for hearing aids and salesmen who offer to call at your home.



It takes time to get used to a hearing aid and to learn how to get the best from it. The person who fits it will explain this. Be patient, but do go back if you have any problems. (If the hearing aid stops working, make sure you try changing the battery before you take it back!)

Above all, don't be shy to tell people you are hard of hearing and to ask them to speak more clearly. You will find it much easier to hear if you stand or sit where you can see people's faces clearly. If you can, make sure the room is well lit. You may also like to join a class where you can learn to lip-read. Lip-reading is not just for people who are completely deaf – it can be very useful for anyone who is hard of hearing.

If you have difficulty hearing the telephone, doorbell or television you can also get special equipment. Ask your local Social Services Department or contact one of the voluntary organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

Teeth

You can keep your teeth all your life with proper care. Looking after your teeth is not difficult. Brush your teeth and gums every day with a fluoride toothpaste and avoid eating sugary foods. Some toothbrushes have been specially designed for older people.

It is as important to take as much care of false teeth as of natural teeth. If you have false teeth you should wear them, except when you go to sleep. Take them out at night and leave them in water. Clean them carefully with soap and water or a proprietary denture cleaner and go to a dentist regularly. Whether you have your own teeth or not, your dentist should examine your mouth from time to time. Your dentist may be able to visit you at home if you are housebound.



NHS dental treatment is free for those who receive Income Support (and for those with partners receiving Income Support). People on a low income may get help with the cost of dental treatment. Leaflet D11 explains how to get help, and is obtainable from your dentist or local Benefits Agency office.

Feet

Looking after your feet is very important, whatever your age, particularly since minor

problems can easily lead to major ones. Whatever you wear on your feet, make sure it fits well and is comfortable from the start. Don't wear slippers all day.

Feet should be washed regularly and toenails trimmed. (GPs can provide advice on where this service can be obtained.) It is important to dry feet properly, especially in-between toes. Hosiery should be washed frequently. Any cuts or sores on the feet should be looked at by a health professional. This is particularly important if you have diabetes or peripheral vascular diseases. If you suffer from diabetes you should be especially vigilant.

If you have a problem with your feet, your doctor will be able to put you in touch with an NHS chiropodist. Practice nurses and chiropodists attached to the surgery can also provide very useful assistance and advice to help you look after your feet and can treat painful conditions such as bunions.

Skin

Changes in skin colour as you age are quite normal and these can include brown "liver" spots. Dry skin can be helped with use of a moisturiser. In strong sunlight, it is advisable to use a sunscreen cream to keep your skin from becoming burned.

Although skin cancers are becoming more common, they can be treated successfully if they

are detected early enough. Warning signs are if a patch on your skin itches, feels abnormal, becomes inflamed, bleeding or crusty. If you are at all worried, see your doctor.

Giddiness

Giddiness can become more common when you get older and can be caused by sleeping tablets or tranquillizers like valium. Other drugs or medicines that may make you giddy are blood pressure tablets and anti-depressants. You should consult your doctor before stopping them. Giddiness is often made worse by sudden movements and you can help yourself by trying to avoid these. Don't get up or turn suddenly, particularly if you have been in one position for a long time. Try to avoid being immobile for long periods. If you do become giddy, sit down or lie down or at least hold on to something secure until you feel steady. If your symptoms persist despite these simple measures, consult your doctor. One of the after-effects of a stroke is a feeling of unsteadiness. Abnormalities of heart rhythm or a drop in blood pressure can make you feel giddy when you stand up.

Indigestion

Indigestion can have a variety of causes and symptoms, including a peptic ulcer. It can be made worse by eating unwisely, by lying down,

bending, or sitting in a slouched position, or by anxiety and also by taking aspirin in large doses and by certain treatments for arthritis.

It can sometimes help to sleep with your head higher than your stomach and your pharmacist may be able to suggest a medicine to ease the symptoms. But if the indigestion persists for longer than a few days, or the pain gets worse, or you are sick, you should consult your doctor.

Constipation

Constipation can be a problem, especially if you have been ill. You can prevent or relieve it by eating a high-fibre diet with plenty of fluids and taking daily exercise. But remember that people differ. For some, a daily bowel movement is normal; for others, a movement every two or three days is normal.

Your pharmacist will be able to advise you if you need a laxative. You should consult your doctor if your constipation is sudden, or if you have stomach pains, are sick, pass blood or if your bowel habits alter.

MEDICINES

As you get older, you may need a prescribed medicine to maintain your health (to regulate high blood pressure, for example) or to treat a current ailment. Men over 65 years, and women

over 60 years get prescriptions free of charge. You must fill in the back of the prescription form before giving it to the pharmacist.

To use medicines safely:

- *take them exactly as prescribed; you should ask your GP about the effect of drinking alcohol;*
- *follow the instructions on the label; if you do not understand them or if you want more information, ask the pharmacist;*
- *do not mix medicines prescribed by the doctor with those bought from the pharmacy, without checking with either the doctor or pharmacist first;*
- *do not remove medicines from their original containers as storage in unsuitable containers may alter their effect;*
- *if you do buy medicines, read the packaging carefully and follow the printed instructions; if you need further information ask the pharmacist;*
- *do not share prescription medicines with other people – they may look or sound the same but they may not be suitable and they could be harmful;*
- *if you wish to ask a question about your medicines, but you cannot get to the*



pharmacy, or someone collects your medicines on your behalf, telephone the pharmacist for advice – you will find their number on the medicine label;

- *get rid of medicines you no longer need. Take them to your pharmacist. Most pharmacists are now involved with local schemes to collect and dispose of unwanted medicines safely.*

Most medicines come in child-resistant containers, which can sometimes prove resistant to adults too. If you find it difficult to open these containers, ask the pharmacist to supply them in a container with an ordinary cap.

Keep Medicines Out of the Reach of Children

Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies such as osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture and aromatherapy are not commonly available on the NHS and are primarily provided through the private sector. If you are seeking such treatment from a private practitioner you should:

- *check with your GP before embarking on a course of complementary therapy treatment;*
- *satisfy yourself that the treatment is likely to be effective or at least not to cause harm;*

- *check that the practitioner is a reputable member of an established profession and carries proper insurance.*

COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS

This section lists some illnesses which may affect some older people. These conditions do need medical help. But many people stay healthy for most of their lives. Many practices now provide a wide range of services from the whole health care team, such as health promotion programmes for the prevention of coronary heart disease and stroke. Almost all will help in the treatment and management of asthma and diabetes. They can refer you to an occupational therapist to help you carry out daily living tasks, or a physiotherapist to help with mobility, a speech and language therapist, a range of community nursing staff, for example, a district nurse, or a specialist consultant at the hospital. All surgeries must now provide a leaflet explaining the range of services on offer.



Alzheimer's Disease *(see Dementia page 38)*

Pernicious Anaemia

This is a condition which is commoner in older people, particularly in their 60s. It often presents as anaemia, a decreased number of red blood cells leading to tiredness and shortness of breath and may worsen the symptoms in those suffering from angina (see Heart Disease).

If you or an elderly relative or friend seem to suffer regularly from these symptoms, you should consult your GP.

Pernicious anaemia is caused by a lack of vitamin B12, which requires the production of a particular factor by the stomach. In patients with pernicious anaemia, this factor is not produced, due to the body destroying this by an immune mechanism. Some people with this condition may also have other disorders such as thyroid disease and vitiligo.

When the diagnosis has been confirmed, treatment is given with B12 injections since B12 cannot be absorbed orally. It is often possible to have this done by a district nurse or at a GP surgery, rather than needing to attend hospital.

Arthritis and Rheumatism

Arthritis is an inflammation of the joints. It can come in the form of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Osteoarthritis is much more common in older people than rheumatoid arthritis and can be aggravated by obesity. Aches and pains in the bones and muscles are generally called rheumatism. To relieve both, your doctor may prescribe pain-killers or other medicines or may ask a surgeon or other specialist to help you. If you develop new persistent pains in your bones or muscles, you should see your doctor as some conditions may require special treatment.

But you can also help yourself. Your joints will be less vulnerable to further damage if you keep your weight down and stay mobile. Exercise as much as you can without straining a painful joint. Swimming is particularly good for this. If a joint is painful, rest it for a few hours and then start gently moving it again, perhaps in the bath as warm water can help. Acute loss of physical function and mobility could be due to a number of diseases or conditions. If you or someone you are caring for develops this, see the GP as soon as possible.



Asthma

Asthma can cause wheezing and difficulty in breathing. It can occur even in older people

who have never suffered from it before. Your doctor will be able to help you with a variety of treatments. Ninety per cent of GPs run organised programmes for the management of patients with asthma.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Coughing and phlegm may occur with both bronchitis and emphysema (over-expansion and thinning of lung tissue). These conditions cause breathlessness and interfere with the amount of oxygen which gets into the blood; sometimes the lungs do not get rid of carbon dioxide. This can cause excessive sleepiness or mental confusion and extra treatment is required. Some people are supplied with oxygen which may be ordered for 15 hours daily. People sleep with a tube in the nostrils delivering oxygen from a machine. In addition to the medicines prescribed by your doctor you can help yourself. If you smoke, stop immediately; it is never too late to benefit. Regular exercise keeps the muscles strong and improves the distance you can walk.

Cancer

Although people talk about cancer as if it were one disease, there are in fact many different types, each with its own symptoms and treatment.

Symptoms

Although there will often be a simple explanation, there are some symptoms that you should report to your doctor as soon as possible, because they could indicate a cancer:

- *Coughing up blood;*
- *Bleeding from the vagina;*
- *Bleeding from your bowel or bladder, usually noticed when going to the toilet;*
- *Unexplained loss of weight;*
- *Persistent hoarseness;*
- *Persistent lumps that you have not previously noticed, especially in the breast in women;*
- *Any sores or ulcers on your skin, including your lips and tongue, that do not heal or are getting bigger.*

Most cancers develop slowly over a period of months or years. The success of treatment is dependent upon the stage at which it is detected. The earlier the better. Older people tend to be slower than younger people in reporting symptoms to their doctor, but it is equally important for them to be seen and treated as soon as possible.

Screening

There are national screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer because there are



reliable tests available for diagnosing these types of cancer before symptoms develop. This is not the case for other cancers.

Breast Cancer

The National Breast Cancer Screening programme is free and offers mammography (breast x-rays) every three years to all women between the ages of 50 and 64 at screening centres throughout England. If you are in that age group and registered with a doctor, you should automatically get an invitation. Older women can be screened three yearly on request.

Cervical Cancer

To detect cervical cancer (cancer of the neck of the womb) all women under 65 should be invited to have a free smear test every 5 years. If you are over 65 you will still be invited for screening if you have not had 2 clear smears within the previous 10 years. If you have not been invited to have a smear test and you think you should have been, consult your doctor. The test can be done in your own doctor's surgery or at a well woman clinic or family planning clinic.

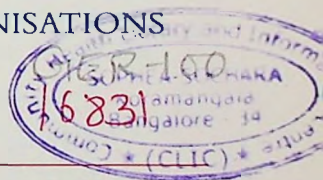
It is of course worrying to be told that you or one of your relatives or friends has cancer, but many cancers, particularly if diagnosed early, can be cured. Even if they cannot be cured, progression of the disease may be very slow and there are many treatments available to relieve the pain and other symptoms of more advanced disease.

Diabetes mellitus

Diabetes mellitus can affect people in all age groups, but it is far more common in the elderly population, especially in people who are overweight. It is also more prevalent in the elderly Asian and Afro-Caribbean populations. It is thought to affect 6 out of 100 people in this age group. The symptoms include tiredness, thirst, passing water more frequently and weight changes. These symptoms can occur in other illnesses but if in doubt you should consult your doctor who can do an on-the-spot test. Ninety per cent of GPs run organised programmes for the management of patients with diabetes. Diabetes in older people can be treated by diet alone, diet plus tablets and sometimes with insulin injections. It is very important to seek advice if in doubt as diabetes can cause serious side effects including blindness, angina and stroke. It has to be taken seriously. The British Diabetic Association has published a pamphlet *Diabetes and You – a Guide for the Older Person* price £1 (see USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 63.)

Incontinence

This should not be accepted as “just a part of getting old”. It is a very common problem affecting all age groups and both sexes, and can often be dealt with by very simple measures,



like treating an infection or learning some simple exercises. If treated properly, incontinence can in many cases be cured and in others improved.

Since incontinence can happen to anyone, don't be embarrassed to ask for help. Your doctor will be able to advise you and perhaps refer you to a continence adviser or physiotherapist for treatment. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 65.)

Heart Disease

Heart Disease, together with stroke, is a key area for action. There is great scope for preventing illness and death from these conditions. This is because both are associated with risk factors that are themselves preventable, for example, an unbalanced diet, smoking, raised blood pressure, alcohol misuse and lack of physical activity.

Heart disease of one sort or another gets more common with increasing age. The main problems are coronary heart disease, an irregular heart beat and heart failure.

Coronary heart disease is caused by gradual furring up of the heart's own blood vessels by fatty deposits. As the blood flowing to the heart decreases people may suffer from **ANGINA** or, if there is a sudden blockage, a **HEART ATTACK**.

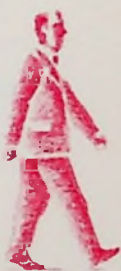
Angina is a tight chest pain that comes on during exercise or excitement and fades quickly with rest. This can cause faintness, giddiness, and a feeling of sickness, as well as extreme pain, or persistent pain lasting more than half an hour.

If you get chest pain accompanied by breathlessness, sweating, and a feeling of faintness, you should get medical help immediately. See your doctor if your ankles swell, you have palpitations, if you get breathless at night or suffer from angina.

A **heart attack** also starts with a severe tight pain in the chest which may go down one arm and is accompanied by sweating, faintness and possibly feeling sick.

An **irregular heartbeat** is felt as palpitations in your chest and may be accompanied by faintness or breathlessness. **Heart failure** also causes breathlessness, sometimes in bed at night and your ankles may swell during the day.

All these heart conditions can be treated and you may be able to **prevent** coronary heart disease by living a healthy lifestyle. Smoking increases your risk of a heart attack. You should also keep your weight under control, eat a healthy diet, avoiding saturated fats and take regular exercise. It is also important to drink alcohol sensibly.



If you have sudden severe chest pain and think you may be having a **heart attack** you or someone with you should call for medical help immediately by ringing 999 if necessary. Do not wait, rapid treatment can be lifesaving.

If you suffer from breathlessness, palpitations or angina you should see your own doctor as soon as possible. He or she may be able to treat you or may want to send you to hospital to see a specialist for tests. Most heart conditions can be treated by drugs but for palpitations you may need a small operation to fit a heart pacemaker which can transform your life.



If you suffer from **angina** or have a **heart attack** you may need an operation to unblock your heart blood vessels. These operations are now routine and are very successful, enabling you to return to a normal life. A healthy lifestyle will then be important to prevent the heart vessels from furring up again.

Information, advice, leaflets and videos on heart and health matters are available from the British Heart Foundation (see **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 63.)

A lot can now be done to treat heart disease – through medicine or through routine, safe operations. Cardiac pacemakers, which help people with irregular slow heart beats are painless and can transform people's lives.

The best way to prevent coronary heart disease, or stop it getting worse, is by following a healthy lifestyle. If you smoke cigarettes, you are more likely to have a heart attack than a non-smoker. Keep your weight under control, eat a healthy diet avoiding saturated fats, and take regular exercise like walking or swimming. It is also important to drink alcohol only in moderation.

Flu (Influenza)

Although flu is a common ailment which attacks people of any age, some are more at risk than others and may be more prone to complications following a bout of flu. If you think you have flu, go to bed and drink plenty of fluids (not alcohol).

If you live alone, make sure that friends and neighbours know you're ill, so they can check on your progress. If your symptoms don't improve after 24 hours, call your doctor.

Immunisation

The chances of catching flu can be reduced by immunisation which is available from your doctor from October onwards each year. The flu vaccine is recommended if you have diabetes, or a lung, heart or kidney disorder, or if you are in a residential home, where flu can spread rapidly. Discuss with your doctor or

nurse whether you are in one of the groups recommended for vaccine. If you have not had a tetanus injection, you may also want to discuss immunisation against this as well.

High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the pressure the heart applies to pump the blood round the body. At times of stress, anger, fear or activity, the flow of blood is increased. This is normal. If, however, the level is constantly high, even at times of relaxation, this is known as **hypertension** (high blood pressure) which puts a strain on the heart and increases the risk of a stroke. Your doctor can advise on ways of controlling high blood pressure.



You can help yourself to keep your blood pressure at a normal level. Watch your weight, stop smoking, don't drink too much alcohol, be more physically active, eat less salt, relax, and have your blood pressure checked.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health problems can occur at all ages. The problems described here are ones which can particularly affect older people, although they may never be a problem for you.

Forgetfulness

It is quite normal to forget things from time to time. Someone who is occasionally forgetful or who sometimes cannot remember the names of acquaintances or items on a shopping list does not necessarily suffer from a medical problem. However, if you are looking after someone who is seriously and persistently forgetful, consult a doctor.

Confusion

There are two common types. One comes on quickly – within a few days or weeks – and is likely to be connected with an illness, such as a chest infection or poorly controlled diabetes, or as a side effect from a medicine. If this is the case, the problem can often be easily cured with medical help. Eyesight and hearing need to be checked, as problems with either can contribute to confusion.

If you have to deal with someone who is confused, it is important to appear calm and friendly. Remember that the symptoms are the result of an illness and that the person is not seeking attention or “being difficult”. Keep reminding them who you are and what you are doing. And repeatedly give the reassurance that things will get better.

The other type of confusion develops slowly over years, and is likely to result from dementia.

Dementia (including Alzheimer's Disease)

Dementia is the name for a group of diseases that affect the normal working functions of the brain. It is the fourth most common cause of death after heart disease, cancer and stroke.

There are more than half a million people in the UK who suffer from some form of dementia, with 20 per cent over the age of 80 affected and 6 per cent over 65 affected.

But there are far more older people with all their faculties intact than there are sufferers from dementia.



One of the most common types is Alzheimer's Disease. Changes take place in the structure of the brain leading to cell death at a much higher rate than in normal ageing. The disease is progressive leading to a steady decline. Vascular (or multi-infarct) dementia is the next most common type. A series of small strokes creates obstructions in the arteries to the brain resulting in the loss of small areas of cells each time this happens. Each stroke may be so small the sufferer is unaware of it. There is a gradual deterioration although the condition may remain static for some time. There is currently no known cure for Alzheimer's Disease. For vascular dementia,

the best means of prevention and treatment is the control of high blood pressure.

Because dementia usually interferes with memory and the ability to think and reason, people who suffer from the illness become increasingly unable to look after themselves and can be rather unreasonable in their relationships. The first sign is usually an inability to remember people's names and recent events. The dementia sufferer can become disoriented about time and place and forget the names of friends and family. The sufferer with severe dementia can lose their way around and become prone to wandering away from home. An inability to remember everyday things, such as whether they have eaten, and constant repetition of one or more phrases are also signs of severe dementia.

If you are looking after someone with dementia you should seek medical help. But you can also encourage them to take an interest in day-to-day events and to use memory aids such as making lists.



Once the diagnosis has been made, it is impossible to predict exactly how people will respond to treatment. With adequate support, individuals and their carers can still have a good quality of life. Older people with varying degrees of dementia can all benefit from a consultation with a general practitioner, and when necessary, a specialist.

People looking after a relative or friend with dementia need a great deal of support and guidance about the services available and how to get a break. If you are having problems in coping, see your doctor, community psychiatric nurse, district nurse, health visitor, or Social Services Department or contact the Alzheimer's Disease Society, who can provide personal and practical advice and support for carers. (See the section on CARING FOR SOMEONE ELSE page 45 and USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 61-71.)

Depression

Depression is a common experience for people of all ages. At times we all feel low-spirited or fed up. However, in the medical sense, depression means much more than just being "down in the dumps"; it describes a real illness which affects every part of a person's thinking, behaviour and health. Older people may be especially liable to depression after bereavement or when physically ill.

Depression is treatable, so it is extremely important to get help when you or a relative or friend are depressed. Early signs may include loss of interest and enjoyment, loss of appetite and weight, insomnia, and withdrawal from social activity.

See your doctor. Sometimes it is just enough to talk to someone trained to listen. Antidepressant tablets may lift the depression and they are not habit-forming. Since their full benefit may not be felt for three or four weeks, it is very important to continue the treatment.

Anxiety

Too many old people are housebound by the fear of falling or being attacked. If you know of someone like this, try to encourage and help them to get out and about a bit. The doctor may also be able to arrange help. Some people suffer from what are called "panic attacks". They can make you feel shaky, breathless, etc and are very frightening. Often relaxation helps to relieve these attacks. Your doctor will advise you perhaps by introducing you to a local relaxation class, or you can borrow a tape from the local library.



A booklet entitled *Mental Illness: mental health and older people* has been produced by the Department of Health to inform older people and their friends and relatives about some mental health problems that can occur in old age. It is available from libraries, Citizens Advice Bureaux and GPs' surgeries. The Alzheimer's Disease Society have produced a booklet, *Safe as Houses*, which provides vital information for carers who are responsible for supporting someone with dementia who lives alone in the community. The booklet gives advice on

personal care, finance, safety, medication, wandering and security. It is available from the Alzheimer's Disease Society. Their address is on page 62.

Osteoporosis (brittle bones)

Osteoporosis is a condition which mainly affects women after the menopause, but can also affect men. Bones may become fragile and break more easily, leading to fractures of wrists, hips and bones in the spine. It can also lead to backache and loss of height. Osteoporosis of the knee can contribute to instability.



A healthy lifestyle, including taking exercise and avoiding smoking and heavy drinking, will reduce the possibility of developing osteoporosis. Your doctor will advise you whether any other action is necessary. If you have already developed osteoporosis, or a serious fracture as a consequence, such as a fractured femur (thigh bone), your doctor may be able to treat it or refer you to a specialist. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 67.)

Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's Disease affects movement and balance. Common symptoms are shaking, particularly in the hands when they are relaxed, and a stiffness and slowness of movement. Depression is also common. Your doctor will be

able to help with medicines, and possibly refer you to a physiotherapist or a specialist. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS page 68.)

Pressure Sores (“bed sores”)

Pressure sores (sometimes called “bed sores”) are areas of damaged skin and flesh which are usually caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long without moving. They can develop within a few hours. People most likely to get pressure sores include those in a wheelchair or who have to stay in bed or spend long periods in an armchair, people who have difficulty moving about, are elderly or weak or have a serious illness, people who are incontinent or whose body is not very sensitive, for example because they are diabetic or have had a stroke, people who have a bad heart or poor circulation and people who are not eating a balanced diet or getting enough to drink. The Department of Health has produced a leaflet to help people avoid getting pressure sores. It is called *Relieving the Pressure – Your Guide to Pressure Sores*. You can obtain a free copy of the leaflet by phoning the Health Literature Line on 0800 555 777. If you do get a pressure sore, try not to worry – they can be treated – get advice quickly – talk to your doctor or nurse. Don’t be afraid to be a nuisance – always ask for help if you think you need it.

Shingles (post-herpetic neuralgia)

Shingles occurs in someone who has had chicken pox in the past and is caused by the reawakening of the chicken pox virus in nerves supplying a well-circumscribed patch of skin. The blisters contain the chicken pox virus, so someone who has not had chicken pox could catch chicken pox from a person with shingles. It can be brought on by stress. You feel severe pain over a small area of the face, limbs or body and after a day or two you notice a blistering rash. You may notice that the area is numb. Some people unfortunately get prolonged pain after an attack and it is wise to see your doctor immediately at the beginning of an attack as early treatment may help to prevent prolonged pain. If your pain is particularly persistent your doctor may be able to refer you to a specialist pain clinic.

Stroke (see also “High Blood Pressure” page 36)

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to the brain is interrupted. Its impact depends on which part of the brain has been affected. There are a number of professional people who can help stroke patients regain their mobility, speech and independence.

Some strokes can be prevented by detecting and treating high blood pressure early. If you are being treated for high blood pressure, you should continue with the treatment as prescribed by your doctor.

Ask your doctor about medicines that may help prevent a further stroke. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 71.)

CARING FOR SOMEONE ELSE

Many older people are **carers**, looking after a spouse or other relative, or looking after a disabled or sick son or daughter.

Looking after people can be very tiring, no matter how much you love them. Stress and strain can affect the health of those who constantly have to care for someone else, especially if they struggle too long on their own. Talk to your doctor, district nurse or health visitor and contact the Social Services Department who may be able to organise other services to help. These could include a Home Care Assistant or sitting service to enable you to get out or to have some time to yourself. Perhaps there may be an adaptation for your home that would make caring easier. (See **HOUSING** page 47.)



The Social Services Department may arrange day care for the person you are looking after, or for a short break in a residential or nursing

home. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 64: Carers' National Association.)

BEREAVEMENT

Loss and grief are very stressful experiences. Someone who has been bereaved may be physically unwell for many months. There are several phases of grief, and people go through them at their own pace. The loss of a loved one often brings out feelings of guilt or anger, but these are natural feelings and are part of grieving.

It can help to talk to someone outside the immediate family circle. Organisations like Cruse may be able to help with this. (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 65.)

MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

Many areas with large minority ethnic communities have special link workers in clinics and surgeries to help overcome any problems of language, religion and culture between the doctor or nurse and the patient. Ask at your doctor's if you think a link worker might be able to help you.

Your neighbourhood may also have a Community Centre where you can meet others from your local community. Some people get a lot of support from being able to talk to others with the same language, religion and culture,

and who face the same difficulties. Religious meeting places such as churches, mosques, temples and gurudwaras often provide the opportunity for groups to meet and discuss various problems including health. Community Centres sometimes also provide advice on health matters, or can arrange for an interpreter if one is not available at the clinic or surgery.

There is a wide range of booklets, videos and audio tapes available in different languages covering particular health issues. Ask your doctor, health visitor or your local District Health Authority's health promotion unit to tell you what is available and how to get it. (The address of the District Health Authority is in your local telephone book.) (See **USEFUL ORGANISATIONS** page 65.)

HOUSING

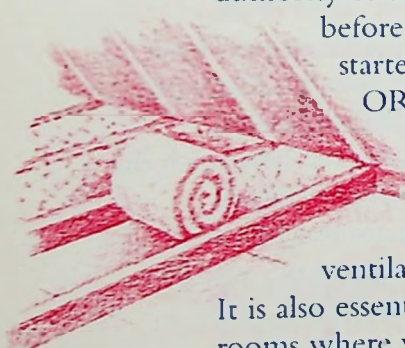
As you get older, it sometimes becomes more difficult to get around the house. For example, you may find the stairs too steep to climb. There are a number of schemes to help with this sort of problem, including Minor Works Assistance, Renovation Grants and Disabled Facilities Grants. Your local authority can give you further information on all these.

HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCIES provide independent advice and practical help to assist people living in properties in a poor

state of repair to undertake repairs, improvements and adaptations. The service includes advice on getting help with the costs, and ensuring that the work is completed satisfactorily. For further information contact your local authority. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 64 and 70.)

Insulating Your Home

A well insulated and draught-proofed home will stop the waste of money on fuel. If you receive Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Disability Living Allowance or you are aged 60 or over, you may be able to get a grant for insulating your loft and draught-proofing your windows and doors. If you think you might be eligible, contact your local authority or the Energy Action Grants Agency before you arrange for the work to be started. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 66 and 70.)



If you want to do the job yourself, remember that gas, oil or solid fuel appliances all need ventilation to work properly and safely. It is also essential that there is ventilation in the rooms where you have gas, oil or solid fuel appliances.

SAFETY IN YOUR HOME

Peace of mind is an important factor in staying in good health. It is therefore wise to make your home safe from accidents and secure from unwanted callers.

Most accidents take place in the home. Many can easily be prevented.

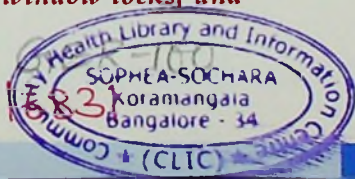
- *Be alert to what might make you trip or skid. Don't leave electrical wires trailing or slippery objects like magazines on the floor; make sure that mats are not placed on highly polished floors, and that no loose mats are left where anyone can trip on them.*
- *Get a smoke alarm. For about £5, it can give you those few minutes' warning of a fire. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you could get a flashing alarm or a vibrating one that goes under your pillow. Ask your local Social Services Department about these.*
- *Try to store things which you need everyday at a convenient height to avoid reaching and bending. Reaching aids, and handle extensions (on a milk bottle holder, for instance) are useful. If you must reach up, perhaps to change a light bulb, make sure you use a strong step stool with a hand rail, or a step ladder.*

- *Make sure your stairways and steps at doorways are well lit. Have a torch ready in case the power fails. Don't use candles.*
- *Put a rubber mat in the bath or shower as it is very easy to slip on a wet surface. Rubber mats do perish and will require replacing regularly. Have grab rails fitted to the side of the bath to assist with getting in and out. Never run the water while in the bath and check the temperature before you get in it. People have got stuck and suffered very nasty burns. Keep a hand bell close by to call for help if you have a problem, as well as some towels to keep you warm after letting the water out.*
- *If you find going downstairs difficult, it can help to go down backwards with one hand on the banister and one resting on the stairs.*
- *Use a one-handle tray, especially when wearing a long dressing gown or nightdress which may need to be held up to move safely. Trays are available that are specially designed and balanced for older people.*

SECURITY IN YOUR HOME

While most people are helpful and well-intentioned, there are unfortunately always some who try to take advantage of their fellow citizens. Make it hard for them by improving your security at home.

- *Never let anyone in, unless you are absolutely sure who they are. Fit a spyhole or viewer and a security chain to your door, and use them – don't open the door fully until you know the identity of a caller. If he or she claims to be from the police, electricity board, etc, always ask to see their identity card. Check it by ringing the local office of the organisation they claim to be from. Look up the number in your directory. Don't rely on a number given on the card or mentioned by the caller. A genuine caller won't mind waiting outside with the door closed while you ring.*
- *You may want to arrange with companies for meter readers to call by appointment, giving their name, or a previously agreed password.*
- *Be wary of confidence tricksters. If an investment seems too good to be true, then it probably is! Always seek advice, and never sign anything on the spot.*
- *Be wary of tradesmen who arrive unannounced. Before having any work done, ask two or three companies for written quotations: they are binding but estimates are not.*
- *Fit good door and window locks, and always use them.*



- *You may be able to get help to improve the security of your home if you are on a low income – ask the crime prevention officer at your local police station or the housing department of your local authority.*
- *Protect your possessions by marking them, and don't keep a lot of money at home.*
- *If you go away, don't forget to cancel the milk and newspapers. Ask a neighbour to keep an eye on your home while you are away.*
- *If you see anything that worries you, don't hesitate to call the police.*
- *Join the local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, or talk to your local crime prevention officer about setting one up.*

SOCIAL SERVICES

Access to services purchased or provided by the local authority Social Services Department is subject to an assessment of individual need. Local authority Social Services Departments are able to purchase or provide a wide range of services for people living at home including meals-on-wheels, home care help, day centres, lunch clubs, help for people looking after a spouse, other relatives or friends, and the loan of aids and equipment which may be useful to older people or their carers, such as toileting or lifting equipment. Services provided vary from

area to area. For more information you should contact your local Social Services Department or Citizens Advice Bureau, or a voluntary agency such as Age Concern. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 61, 64 and 70.)

If you think you may need one of these services you should ask your local Social Services Department for an assessment. They will not usually provide a service unless they have assessed your needs.

If you are suffering from **abuse**, or you know of an elderly friend or relative who is being abused, you should contact social services and Action on Elder Abuse. (See USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 61 and 70.)

Sheltered Housing

Many local authorities and Housing Associations provide sheltered housing which offers the chance to live in self-contained accommodation, with a warden on call to help.

Residential and Nursing Home Care

Given the choice, most people would prefer to remain in their own homes for as long as this can be managed. But if you reach the stage when you feel it is no longer possible, you should contact your doctor, local Social Services

Department or a voluntary organisation (USEFUL ORGANISATIONS pages 61-71) to discuss possible alternatives. The Social Services Department will arrange for a needs assessment and may be able to help you if you think you may need to move into a care home and will need help paying the fees. They will assess your needs and may be able to provide care that allows you to remain in your own home.

MONEY MATTERS

Help for People with Disabilities and their Carers

In addition to Retirement Pensions there are a number of other benefits which are available for help with particular problems.

These include benefits for disabled people and those looking after disabled people. Disability Living Allowance is available to people disabled before reaching the age of 65, and who claim before the age of 66, who need help with getting around and/or with personal care needs. Attendance Allowance is available for people disabled after the age of 65 with personal care needs. Both benefits are intended to help with some of the extra costs incurred due to disability. The emphasis is placed on an individual's own assessment of how the illness or disability affects everyday living. For more



information, contact your local Social Security Office or Citizens Advice Bureau, or telephone free on **0800 666 555**.

There is also a Benefit Enquiry Line to give advice to disabled people. Telephone free on **0800 88 22 00**. Trained operators can also complete claim forms over the telephone, which are sent to you to check the accuracy of completion.

Help with Housing Costs

You should apply to the housing benefit office of your local authority if you are living on a low income. Housing Benefit may be available to help with the cost of rent and Council Tax Benefit to help with the cost of your Council Tax. Council Tax discounts and exemptions are also available in certain circumstances, and if you have a disability you may be entitled to a band reduction on the valuation of your property. For more information, contact your local authority.

Help with Fuel Bills

It is important to budget for gas and electricity bills. British Gas and Electricity Companies operate a number of schemes to help you spread the cost of bills throughout the year. It is much better to do this than wait until you can't pay your bill. Ask your gas or electricity company about these schemes.

The fuel companies have promised that any all-pensioner households will not have their supplies disconnected between October 1 and March 31 each year.

Gas and electricity companies have special telephone lines providing advice on the efficient use of gas and electricity, and gas and electricity appliances. Local Energy Advice Centres exist in some areas of the country. They offer free, impartial and independent advice on energy saving measures in homes designed to help reduce fuel bills. You can call the Energy Saving Trust on 0171 931 8401 to find out whether there is a centre near you.

HOW TO COMPLAIN

Doctors, Dentists, Opticians and Pharmacists

Before making any complaint, talk to the person concerned first of all because misunderstandings can happen. Then, if you are unable to resolve matters, you can take things further by contacting the Family Health Services Authority (FHSA), previously the Family Practitioner Committee. Their address can be found on the front of your medical card, or in the local telephone book and local library, or you can get it from the Citizens Advice Bureau or Community Health Council.



In the case of your doctor, if you are still unhappy, you can change practices and you don't need to tell the doctor why. Lists of doctors are available from the FHSA or from the local library. If necessary, FHSAs can assign patients to a GP.

A doctor can refuse to take any individual on his or her list. Although some older patients may require expensive medicines, this does not mean that doctors should refuse to accept or retain such patients on their lists, or refuse necessary drugs. In case of difficulty, contact the FHSA.

Hospital Services

If you are unhappy about the services you or a relative receive in hospital or as an outpatient, after talking it over with the nurses on the ward or the doctor concerned, you can make a formal complaint.

Any member of staff can help you make your complaint and if necessary a senior member of staff will look into the matter and give you an answer. Often there is a leaflet which will guide you in making a complaint. Just ask a member of staff for a copy.

If you are not happy with the way an NHS authority handles your complaint, or with the conclusion they reach, you can ask the Health Service Commissioner or Ombudsman if he will look into their actions. The Ombudsman

can be contacted at Church House,
Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BW.

Subject to certain safeguards, you have a right
to see your own medical records. This is
highlighted in the Patient's Charter.

The Patient's Charter



The Charter sets out your basic rights to treatment in all parts of the National Health Service, including your family doctor services. It also sets out the standards of service you can expect to receive. These rights and standards apply to everyone, no matter where they live.

Family Health Services Authorities have published their own local patient's charters, setting out the standards of the local service you can expect to receive from them.

Copies of the Charter are available from your local District Health Authority or Family Health Services Authority, or by writing to: The Patient's Charter and You, FREEPOST, London, SE99 7XU.

Health Information Service

The National Health Information Service is a freephone service on **0800 66 55 44**. It offers information on a wide range of health-related subjects, including:-

- *local NHS Services;*
- *local and national Charter Standards;*
- *common diseases and conditions;*
- *local and national self-help groups;*
- *how to complain about the NHS;*
- *how to maintain and improve your own health.*

Social Services

If you have a problem with the social services provided by your local authority and you see one of their staff regularly, ask them to help sort it out. If this is not possible or doesn't work, you can ask for the matter to be dealt with under a formal complaints procedure, which all authorities operate. Your local authority's Social Services Department will be able to advise about their complaints procedures, and will usually be able to give you a leaflet about them.





FURTHER READING

Advice to Older Drivers

Department of Transport
Information Division
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 3EB

Diabetes and You – A guide for the older person

British Diabetic Association
10 Queen Anne Street
London W1M 0BD

Keep Warm Keep Well

Department of Health
also available from libraries,
Citizens Advice Bureaux,
GPs' surgeries or
Freephone 0800 289 404

Mental Illness – Mental health and older people

Relieving the Pressure – Your Guide to Pressure Sores

Both publications
available from:
Department of Health
P.O. Box 410
Wetherby LS23 7LN

Safe as houses – Living alone with dementia

Alzheimer's Disease Society
Gordon House
10 Greencoat Place
London SW1P 1PH

The Driving Manual

HMSO PO Box 276
London SW8 5DT

The Health of the Nation – A Summary of the Strategy for Health in England

HMSO PO Box 276
London SW8 5DT

The Older Road User

Department of Transport,
Information Division
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 3EB

The Patient's Charter and You

The Patient's Charter and
You, FREEPOST
London, SE99 7XU

Your Home in Retirement

Department of the
Environment Distribution
Centre, PO Box 135,
Bradford, West Yorkshire
BD9 4HU

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS



Action on Elder Abuse

Astral House

1268 London Road
London SW16 4ER

Tel: 0181 679 2648

Aims to prevent abuse of older people by raising awareness and education and promoting research. Also collects and disseminates information on services for abused older people around the country.

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)

109 Gloucester Place
London W1H 3PH

Tel: 0171 935 3519

Provides helpful information and advice on giving up smoking.

Age Concern England

Astral House

1268 London Road
London SW16 4ER

Tel: 0181 679 8000

Offers support for older people and those who care for them. Local groups

provide services such as day centres, lunch clubs and transport/visiting schemes. Runs the "Ageing Well" health promotion programmes. Also produces information on a wide range of topics affecting older people.

Age Exchange Theatre Trust

The Reminiscence Centre
11 Blackheath Village
London SE3 9LA

Tel: 0181 318 9105 /
318 3504

Promotes educational drama, mime, literature, dance, singing and music to improve the quality of life of older people through emphasising the value of their reminiscences.

Age Resource

1268 London Road
London SW16 4ER

Tel: 0181 679 2201

Aims to promote the active

contribution of older people to society through an annual award scheme and other initiatives.

Alzheimer's Disease Society

Gordon House
10 Greencoat Place
London SW1P 1PH
Tel: 0171 306 0606

Gives support to families of Alzheimer's Disease sufferers; provides literature; has a network of local branches and support groups.

Arthritis Care

18 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2HD
Tel and Minicom:
0171 916 1500

Freephone helpline:
0800 289 170

Monday to Friday

12 noon to 4.00pm

A wide range of helpful advice and information for people with arthritis and rheumatism. There are also many local Arthritis Care groups around the country.

Association for Continence Advice

380-384 Harrow Road
London W9 2HU

The national organisation of continence advisers – contact them to find the address of your local adviser.

Association of Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes

10 Regent Place
Rugby
Warwickshire CV21 2PN
Tel: 01788 573653

Local schemes provide care attendants so that carers can be relieved of caring for periods of time. Head Office can advise on whether there is a Crossroads scheme in your area.

Association of Retired Persons (ARP Over 50)

Greencoat House
Francis Street
London SW1P 1DZ
Tel: 0171 828 0500

Runs friendship centres

and arranges events and activities for the over 50s. Publishes quarterly magazine.

British Association of Cancer United Patients (BACUP)

3 Bath Place
Rivington Street
London EC2A 3JR
Tel: 0171 613 2121
Provides an information service and details of developments in cancer treatment.

British Association for Service to the Elderly (BASE)

119 Hassell Street
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire ST5 1AX
Tel: 01782 661033
Provides a substantial national programme of courses and summer schools in the field of care for elderly people. BASE is a valuable contributor to the dissemination of good practice and innovative thinking.

British Dental Health Foundation

Eastlands Court
St Peter's Road
Rugby
Warwickshire CV21 3QP
Tel: 01788 546365
Provides a leaflet on oral health for older people. Promotes the benefits of achieving and maintaining the highest standards of dental care to the public.

British Diabetic Association

10 Queen Anne Street
London W1M 0BD
Tel: 0171 323 1531
Provides a support and information service for people with diabetes and for those who care for them. Has many local branches throughout the UK.

**British Heart
Foundation**

14 Fitzhardinge Street
London W1H 4DH

Tel: 0171 935 0185

Finances and encourages research into the causes, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease, promotes emergency life support training, initiates self-help support groups for cardiac patients and provides advice and information on heart and health matters.

Cancerlink

17 Britannia Street
London WC1X 9JN

Tel: 0171 833 2451

Provides emotional support and information for cancer patients and their families in response to telephone and written enquiries.

**Cancer Relief
Macmillan Fund**

Anchor House
15-19 Britten Street
London SW3 3TZ

Tel: 0171 351 7811

Provides an information

exchange and link for those working in hospices, or with terminally ill patients and members of the public.

**Carers National
Association**

20-25 Glasshouse Yard
London EC1A 4JS

Tel: 0171 490 8818

Provides advice to carers about what support is available and how to get it, puts carers in touch with local self-help groups.

Care and Repair

Castle House
Kirtley Drive
Nottingham NG7 1LD

Tel: 01602 799091

The national co-ordinating body for Home Improvement Agencies; will advise if there is one in your area.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

(Look in your local telephone directory under Citizens Advice Bureau).

Gives advice and information on a wide range of issues.

Community Health Councils

(Look in your local telephone directory under the name of the COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL for where you live). Gives advice and information about local health services.

Contact the Elderly

15 Henrietta Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 8HQ
Tel: 0171 240 0630

Provides companionship for elderly isolated people who live alone with limited, inadequate or no family support.

Continence Foundation Helpline

You can ring the helpline to obtain confidential advice on bladder or bowel problems.
Tel 0191 213 0050

Counsel and Care

Twyman House
16 Bonny Street
London NW1 9PG
Tel: 0171 485 1566

Advice line open
10.30am to 4.00pm
Monday to Friday.

Provides a free comprehensive advisory and information service to elderly people and their carers on issues such as accommodation, benefits and respite care.

Cruse Bereavement Care

126 Sheen Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 1UR
Tel: 0181 940 4818

Provides the following services: bereavement counselling, practical advice, social contact and publications.

Dark Horse Venture

Kelton
Woodlands Road
Liverpool L17 0AN
Tel: 0151 729 0092
Aims to discover the hidden talents of older people through new activities.

Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road

London W9 2HU

Tel: 0171 289 6111

Provides information and advice about all aspects of daily living for people with a disability. Has comprehensive information on disability equipment and can put you in touch with a Disabled Living Centre in your area.

District Health Authorities

(Look in your local telephone directory under the name of the HEALTH AUTHORITY where you live.)

Responsible for local hospital and community health services.

Drinkline

Weddell House

7th Floor

13-14 West Smithfield

London EC1A 9DL

Tel 0171 332 0202

National alcohol helpline which provides confidential information, help and advice about drinking. Anyone who needs information is welcome to contact the helpline including people worried about someone else's drinking.

Elderly Accommodation Counsel

46A Chiswick High Road
London W3 1SZ

Tel: 0181 995 8320

Has a database of all forms of private and voluntary accommodation for older people. There is a small charge for those who can afford it.

Energy Action Grants Agency

PO Box 1NG

Newcastle Upon Tyne

NE99 1NG

FREE PHONE

0800 181 667

Administers the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

which provides grants towards basic insulation measures for low income households.

Extend

22 Maltings Drive
Wheathampstead
Herts AL4 8QJ
Tel: 0158283 2760

Aims to enhance the quality of life for older people and people with disabilities by providing scientifically structured recreational movement sessions to music.

Family Health Services Authorities

(Look in your local telephone directory under the name of the FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY or FAMILY PRACTITIONER COMMITTEE where you live).

Gives information about general practitioners, dentists, pharmacists and opticians.

Health Education Authority

Hamilton House
Mabledon Place
London WC1H 9TX
Tel: 0171 383 3833
Provides health education books and leaflets on a wide range of topics.

Hearing Concern

7/11 Armstrong Road
London W3 7JL
Tel: 0181 743 1110
Provides information and advice. There are local clubs.

Help the Aged

St James' Walk
London EC1R 0BE
Tel: (free) 0800 289 404
Provides a telephone enquiry line dealing with winter warmth issues, social security and welfare benefits, and health and community care topics appropriate to older people. Literature and fact sheets on various subjects available.

**National Association of
Bereavement Services**

20 Norton Folgate
London E1 6DB
Tel 0171 247 1080

**National Osteoporosis
Society**

PO Box 10
Radstock
Bath BA3 3YB
Tel: 01761 432472
Provides help and support
for sufferers of
osteoporosis. Provides
information on the disease,
its prevention and
treatment.

**Neighbourhood Energy
Action**

2-4 Bigg Market
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 1UW
Tel: 0191 261 5677
Helps to develop and
promote energy efficiency
services for low-income
households.

New Horizons Trust
Paramount House
290-292 Brighton Road
South Croydon

Surrey CR2 6AG
Tel: 0181 666 0201
Makes use of retired
people's skills and interests
in order to benefit both
themselves and their
communities.

**Parkinson's Disease
Society of the UK**

22 Upper Woburn Place
London WC1H 0RA
Tel: 0171 383 3513
Self-help groups,
information and advice.

**Partially Sighted
Society**

62 Salusbury Road
London NW6 6NS
Tel: 0171 372 1551
Gives general advice and
information. Provides
assessment or training with
low vision aids and
counselling.

**Pre-Retirement
Association (PRA)**

26 Frederick Sanger Road
Surrey Research Park
Guildford
Surrey GU2 5YD
Tel: 01483 301170

Provides training for retirement preparation trainers and also offers courses direct to the business community and the general public. PRA are also developing a role in health promotion through links with Age Concern's 'Ageing Well' programme.

Quit

Victory House
170 Tottenham Court Road
London W1P 3PH
Gives help and information to people trying to give up smoking. You can phone QUITLINE on 0171-487 3000 for a free QUITPACK.

Reach

Bear Wharf
27 Bankside
London SE1 9DP
Tel: 0171 928 0452
Finds part-time "expenses only" jobs for retired business and professional people who want to use

their skills to help voluntary organisations. The service is free and is available throughout the country.

Relatives Association

5 Tavistock Place
London WC1H 9SS
Tel: 0171 916 6055
Provides advice and support services for relatives of older people in residential accommodation.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP)

237 Pentonville Road
London N1 9NJ
Tel: 0171 278 6601
Involves older people in using their skills and experience for the benefit of their local community.

Royal National Institute for the Blind

224 Great Portland Street
London W1N 6AA

Tel: 0171 388 1266

Provides general advice
and information on talking
books and Braille service;
low vision services;
walking canes, special
equipment and residential
care. Provides residential
care services for elderly
blind people.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

105 Gower Street
London WC1E 6AH

Tel: 0171 387 8033

Minicom: 0171 383 3154

Gives general advice and
information. Can also
advise on special
equipment such as text
telephones, fire alarms and
listening devices. Provides
residential care services for
older deaf people.

Sense

National Association for
Deafblind People

11-13 Clifton Terrace

London N4 3SR

Tel: 0171 272 7774

Social Security, Department of

(Look in your local
telephone directory for
the address and telephone
number of your local
office.) Provides advice and
information on retirement
pensions and benefits for
older people.

Social Services Departments

(Look in your local
telephone directory under
SOCIAL SERVICES
for your local council
or borough.)

Responsible for social
workers, care assessment,
residential care, meals-on-
wheels, home care help,
day centres, equipment
loans and other services
depending on the area.

SPOD (The Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal Relationships of People with a Disability)

286 Camden Road

London N7 0BJ

Tel: 0171 607 8851

Provides leaflets on various aspects of sexuality and personal relationships in relation to disability, including those that can be associated with old age. A counselling service is available.

Sports Council

16 Upper Woburn Place

London WC1H 0QP

Tel: 0171 388 1277

Promotes sport and active recreation. Has a network of regional offices which can provide advice on sports provision in the local area.

Standing Conference of Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens

5 Westminster Bridge Road

London SE1 7XW

Tel: 0171 928 0095

A London-based organisation bringing together minority ethnic groups across London. Works for and with the community to promote the care of ethnic minority elders in the community, and to improve services for ethnic elders nationwide.

Stroke Association

CHSA House

Whitecross Street

London EC1Y 8JJ

Tel: 0171 490 7999

Provides literature and advice. Has a network of local clubs.



The Beth Johnson Foundation

Parkfield House
64 Princes Road
Hartshill

Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7JL

Tel: 01782 44036

Has an established Senior Health Shop offering advice and information for people over 50 on diet, exercise etc, combined with a healthy eating cafeteria. Actively promotes healthy exercise groups for older people and has a thriving Leisure Association offering rambling, swimming, etc.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

14 Bedford Row,
London WC1 4ED

Tel: 0171 242 1941

The Society has a number of free leaflets which cover back problems, falls, arthritis and exercise, including gardening.

University of the Third Age (U3A)

1 Stockwell Green
London SW9 9JF

A self-help mutual aid teaching/learning organisation for older people who are not in full-time work and who wish to keep their minds active. U3As throughout the UK run study, cultural and recreational programmes. Send SAE for local details.

For further copies of this
publication write to:
Department of Health
P O Box 410
Wetherby
LS23 7LN