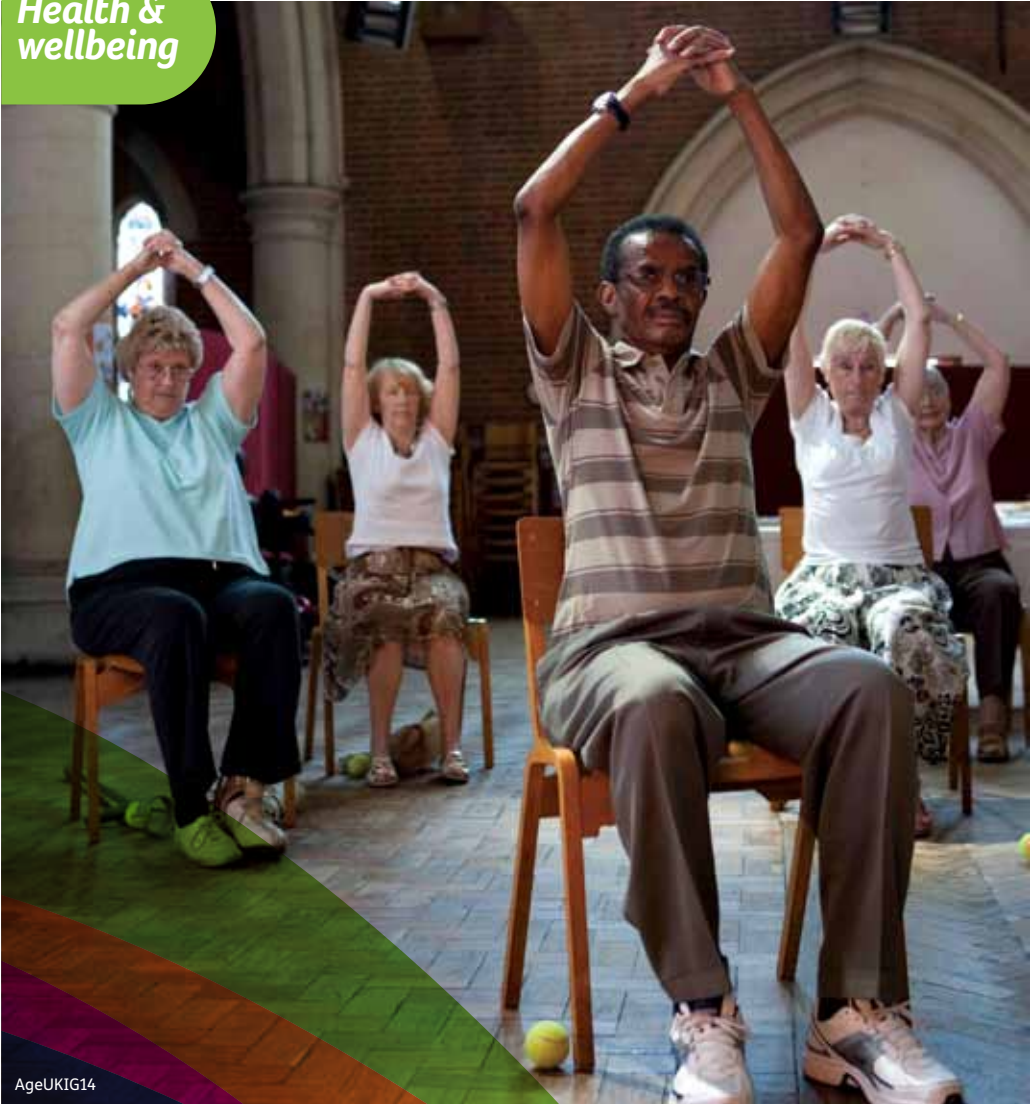


Staying steady

Improving your strength
and balance



*Health &
wellbeing*



Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged.

*With almost 120 years of combined
history to draw on, we are bringing
together our talents, services and
solutions to do more to enrich
the lives of people in later life.*

Age UK is the new force combining

AGE
Concern

and

HELPTHEAGED **WE WILL**

This information leaflet has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be useful. Nothing in this leaflet should be construed as specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and is in no way intended as a substitute for professional medical advice specific to any individual case. Age UK does not accept any liability from its use. We aim to ensure that this information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this information leaflet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK.

Please seek medical advice for guidance regarding appropriate exercise levels and precautions. It is particularly important to seek such advice if you suffer from an ongoing medical condition that may be affected by exercise. Always start any exercise programme slowly, never force or strain. If you feel any soreness, strain, discomfort, distress or other symptoms, stop the exercise and seek medical advice immediately.

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Introduction

There are lots of simple things you can do to help you stay steady on your feet. This guide has information for everyone, whether you're fit and active, have difficulty walking and getting around, or are worried about falling.

General health and wellbeing can make a big difference to your quality of life, whatever your age. Eating well and keeping fit are important. But there are also specific things that you can do to improve your strength and balance. This guide tells you about:

- exercises to improve your strength and balance
- things to watch for that could affect your balance
- help that's available if you need it.

You will also find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice. Their contact details can be found under 'Useful organisations' (see page 20). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in the local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK/Age Concern* should be able to help (see page 20).

As far as possible, the information in this guide is applicable across the UK.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK

Improving your strength and balance

There are lots of good ways to keep fit and healthy without even realising you're doing it: walking, gardening, dancing, even the odd aerobic class. But particular types of exercise can also improve your strength and balance.

These exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles of your legs and body and improve your co-ordination and balance. They're known as balance training and can be done while you're sitting or standing. As well as increasing general fitness, they are one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of falling.

Balance training is often suitable if you can't do more active things, like dancing or gardening. It's especially helpful if you have an illness that causes joint pain or makes you feel dizzy, as it helps overcome stiffness or unsteadiness. Best of all, balance training can make it easier for you to get out and about without support, or having someone with you all the time.

You can fit balance training into your day by doing simple exercises at home as and when it suits you. Or you may prefer to join a group at a local centre where you'll have a professional to advise and encourage you, plus the opportunity to meet other members of the group.

what next?

To find out about balance training classes in your area, ask at your local Age UK/Age Concern*, library, health centre, GP practice or leisure centre. See pages 20–21 for details of resources available from Age UK.

*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK

Getting started ... and keeping it up

If you're not used to exercising, or have a health condition and want to know what kind of exercise is right for you, discuss it with your GP before exercising on your own or joining a class.

Once you get the go-ahead, start gently and build up slowly. Most people find balance training easier than they expected – and more enjoyable. The more you enjoy an activity, the easier it is to keep it up and really reap the benefits. You may be surprised by how much you can achieve.

Of course, you will benefit most from an exercise programme specifically designed to meet your needs. This is particularly important if you have had a fall or are at all unsteady on your feet. Many care homes arrange exercise classes and activities tailored to meet the varied needs of their residents.

Don't give up on exercising just because you have had a fall or are afraid of falling. Speak to your GP, because reducing your physical activity can actually make you more prone to falling! See page 16, 'Help from the NHS'.

And remember, you should always begin any exercise with a warm-up to prepare your body and finish by warming-down. If you experience chest pain or feel faint you should stop exercising immediately and contact your doctor.

Eyesight, hearing and balance

Vision and hearing play a vital role in balance and movement.

Glasses fitted with bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are and so cause you to trip or lose your balance, particularly on stairs. If you have had problems with these glasses or are considering them, ask your optician for advice.

It's very important to have your eyes checked and your glasses prescription reviewed at least every two years, or every year if you're over 70. NHS eye tests are free once you reach the age of 60 and if you live in Scotland, they are free to everyone. If you receive certain benefits or are on a low income, you may also be entitled to help with the cost of new glasses through the NHS Low Income Scheme.



If you live in England and find it difficult to get to the opticians for health reasons, your Primary Care Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) will have a list of local opticians who offer home visits. Call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 for details of PCT PALS who can help. In Wales, health is organised through local health boards and similar information may be available by calling NHS Direct on 0845 4647. In Scotland, call NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24 for information on local services.



Hearing loss is more likely as you get older, but people often wait several years before raising hearing problems with their GP. If there is no medical reason, such as a build-up of wax, you can be referred for a hearing test and, if necessary, prescribed an NHS digital hearing aid in one or both ears.

what next?

Check when your next sight test is due. If hearing problems are affecting your day-to-day or social life, make an appointment to see your GP. Contact Age UK Advice to ask for a copy of our free factsheet, *Help with health costs*. See page 20.

Combined sight and hearing problems

Hearing loss can affect your balance and this can be even harder to manage if you have sight problems that can't be corrected by wearing glasses.

Your local authority will have a Sensory Team who can offer help and support if you have sight loss, hearing loss or both. Following an assessment, their specialist staff will explain the help available to make daily tasks easier. They can also offer mobility training, including advice on moving around at home and outdoors, and how to keep as fit and active as you can.

what next?



Contact your local social services department, known as social work department in Scotland, to explain how your vision or hearing difficulties or both are affecting your daily life and ask for an assessment.

You can also contact Sense for information and advice if you have problems with your sight and hearing. See page 26.

Looking after your feet

Looking after your feet is important, as certain problems can affect your balance and stop you getting out and about. Always report any problems with your feet to your GP or practice nurse.

Well-fitting shoes are important too. High-sided shoes with low heels and thin soles with a good grip can help if you feel unsteady.

If you have arthritis, you may find that trainers or similar, well-cushioned shoes are more comfortable and offer welcome support. But if the soles are too thick, you may not be able to feel contact with the floor as well and this could make you feel a little unsteady. So ask your GP or chiropodist for advice.

These footwear tips can help you feel more confident on your feet:

- Don't wear slippers without backs or that are loose and worn out.
- Avoid sandals and shoes with high heels.
- Make sure your trousers or skirts don't trail on the ground.
- Avoid walking on slippery floors in socks or tights.

‘My general fitness, strength and balance have all improved and I am less worried about falling over.’

Mary is 82 years old and lives in sheltered accommodation.

‘I got polio when I was a youngster and, because of this, my balance was never any good. It’s got worse as I’ve got older and then I had a bad fall in my flat – I tripped over my hearth rug and gashed my head on the fireplace. I needed stitches and looked a real picture with two black eyes. It knocked me sick. I became very wary about going out and doing jobs around the house.

‘Then Alison, the warden, asked me if I wanted to join the weekly seated exercise programme run by my local Age Concern in our communal lounge. I knew about it but thought I was too old for exercising and I like to keep myself

to myself. But Alison persuaded me. The first session was quite tiring but as we went along I began to feel better. My general fitness, strength and balance have all improved and I am less worried about falling over.

‘It’s really good fun, not what I expected. Everyone has a good natter afterwards and a cup of tea; it’s more of a club than exercising. I now speak to people I’ve seen around for years so it’s been good in lots of ways.

‘One special bonus is meeting Mary who has become a real friend. She drives and we go on outings. This has made a big difference to me. I look forward to things again and I haven’t done that for a while.’



Managing your medicines

Certain medicines can make you feel faint or affect your balance. Let your GP know if you ever feel like this after taking medication – they may want to change the dose or look at alternatives.

If you take several medicines, your GP should review them regularly, in case you no longer need them or the dose needs to be changed.

what next?

If you've not had a medicines review in the last 12 months, contact your GP.

Osteoporosis

If a minor bump or fall results in a broken bone, then it could be due to a condition called osteoporosis. This causes bones to become fragile and break more easily.

Your risk of osteoporosis is increased by:

- a history of osteoporosis in your close family
- heavy drinking, smoking and lack of exercise
- long-term use of corticosteroid medication
- in women: an early menopause or hysterectomy with removal of your ovaries
- in men: low levels of testosterone following surgery for some types of cancer.

The health of your bones makes a big difference to the effect of a fall. You can help keep your bones strong by eating a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D. Most of us living in the UK get the vitamin D we need from the action of sunlight on our skin. If you rarely get out in summer sunshine, or cover your skin for cultural reasons, ask your GP if you should take a vitamin D supplement.

Taking regular, weight-bearing exercise also helps. This is exercise where your feet and legs support your own weight and includes things like brisk walking, playing bowls or tennis and taking part in aerobics classes.

what next?

For more information about osteoporosis visit the [Age UK website](#) or contact the [National Osteoporosis Society](#). See page 24.

Speak to your GP if you think you could be at risk of osteoporosis, particularly if one of your parents has broken a hip.

Checking your home environment

Keeping an eye out for things that could cause you to slip, trip or fall can make your home a safer place to live.

Some of them might seem obvious, but it's amazing how often they can be overlooked – so it's worth checking them.

- Make sure you have good lighting, particularly on the stairs.
- Keep a nightlight on or a torch by the bed in case you need to get up in the night.
- Handrails on both sides of your stairs make them safer to climb.
- Keep your floor clear of trailing flexes, rucked-up or fraying carpets, or anything else you might trip or slip on.
- Pets are wonderful companions, but they can get under your feet! Be aware of where they are when you are moving about.
- Make sure your stairs and steps are free of clutter.
- Put a non-slip mat in the bath and a handrail to help you keep your balance when you are getting in and out.
- Put non-slip mats under rugs, in the kitchen, on stair landings and next to the bath.
- Always use a step-ladder to reach high places rather than standing on a chair. Or, if you can, ask someone to help you.
- Avoid tasks like cleaning windows or changing a light bulb if they make you feel dizzy or light-headed.
- If you have arthritis in your spine or neck, move your head slowly to avoid dizziness.

- In the garden, watch out for uneven paths and slippery surfaces and keep paths clear. Carefully placed handrails and posts can be helpful if you need them.
- Keep warm. Cold muscles work less well and may lead to accidents and injuries.
- Sitting or standing up too quickly can make you feel light-headed. Take your time getting up, move slowly and in stages. Tensing your arms and legs a few times before getting up from a chair or sitting on the side of the bed for a few minutes before standing up can be helpful.
- If you need to use furniture for support when moving around your home, you should discuss this with your GP – see page 16, ‘Help from the NHS’.

Making small adjustments in your daily life doesn’t mean that you have to limit your activities. In fact, it can give you greater freedom and confidence.

what next?

Contact your local authority or local Age UK/Age Concern* to find out if they offer home safety checks or a handy person scheme that undertakes minor jobs around the home.

For more information about aids and adaptations that can make your home safer, or on preventing accidents, contact Age UK Advice for a free copy of *Adapting Your Home* and our *Home Safety Checker*.

*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK

Community alarms

If you are worried about falling while you are alone at home, you might like to think about getting a community alarm.

Community alarms allow you to call for help even if you can't reach a telephone. You contact a 24-hour response centre by pressing a button on a pendant or wristband that you wear all the time. Staff at the centre will then call out the best person to help you – a neighbour, relative or friend, or the emergency services.

Many local councils run community alarm schemes and, in some areas, this service is free – contact your council for more information. Age UK also provides community alarms – for more information call 0800 77 22 66.

Many local councils run community alarm schemes and, in some areas, this service is free.



Dealing with anxiety about falling

We all stumble or trip at some point. But fear of falling can start to become a serious worry – and quite difficult to deal with if not addressed quickly.

This anxiety may stem from having had a fall already. But it can prey on your mind even if you haven't fallen before. This sometimes happens after a period of illness, which can leave you feeling weak and perhaps a bit unsure of yourself. Consequently you may become more cautious, limit what you are willing to do and lose confidence in carrying out daily tasks and activities. You may even stop wanting to go out on your own. Worrying in this way is not unusual and can make you anxious, isolated or depressed.

Fears about losing your independence can also make you reluctant to seek help. Will people think you're frail or can't look after yourself properly? Will they suggest that you consider moving to a care home?

It's important not to let such thoughts stop you from taking positive steps to get help. The purpose of falls prevention is to enable you to live as independent and enjoyable a life as possible. This is the case whether you have had a fall already, or are intent on preventing one.

what next?

Talk to your GP. With the help of your GP or local falls service, you can work out how to regain your balance and strength, reduce your risk of falling and get your confidence back.

Help from the NHS

You must tell your GP if you have a fall or start feeling unsteady, even if you feel fine otherwise. There could be many reasons and, equally, many different ways to help you feel confident again. Your GP will want to check your balance and walking to see if they can be improved.

With your agreement, your GP can also refer you for a falls risk assessment. You may be referred to the falls prevention service for your assessment, which will be carried out by healthcare professionals with specialist training and experience.

The purpose of the assessment is to:

- try to work out what is making you more likely to fall
- listen to what you think the problem could be
- agree an individual action plan with you to reduce your risk of falling.

This could include strength and balance exercises, having your home checked for hazards, investigating any continence problems you have, checking your eyesight and the medicines you take and showing you how to get up safely should you fall. The plan should be designed to suit your individual needs and way of life. Regular reviews are important, so staff can see how you are getting on.

what next?

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has a patient leaflet called *Falls: the assessment and prevention of falls in older people* (Smart number: NO761) It explains what you can expect from your falls risk assessment if you live in England or Wales. See page 23.

What to do if you fall

Here are some basic points to remember.

1. Try to stay calm and not panic.

2. Get help if you can.

- Don't move if you feel pain.
- Try to attract attention – bang on the floor or wall or use your community alarm if you have one.
- Call 999 if you can reach a phone.

3. If you can't get help, and you are not hurt, try to get up.

- First, check carefully that you are not hurt.
- Then roll on to your hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture – for example, a chair or bed.
- Put your hands on the chair or bed and bring one leg up, bending your knee and placing your foot flat on the floor.
- Lean forwards, pushing with your hands and foot and bring your other foot up so that it is also flat on the floor and you are crouching.
- Turn and sit on the furniture.
- Make sure you rest for a while before you try to stand up. (Once you know the technique it is a good idea to practise doing all this before it ever happens!)

4. If you are hurt or can't get up, keep yourself warm.

Cover yourself with a coat or anything else you can reach. Keep tensing your arm and leg muscles and roll from side to side if you can to keep moving. If you have fallen on a hard floor, try to crawl to a softer, carpeted area if possible.

Stan has been a farmer all his life, so when a combination of illness and arthritis affected his mobility, he found it difficult to cope.

‘Having been a farmer, I’ve always been a fit man and proud of it. Then I recently developed breathing difficulties and needed several spells in hospital. I’ve got the lung condition, COPD. Also arthritis in my knees has caused me to fall a few times.

‘My wife worries about me falling - I’m a fairly big man so she can’t pick me up. So she called the local Age Concern to see if they could help. A lady came round and asked us some questions, then she looked around and pointed out some hazards she had spotted straightaway.

‘I was a bit surprised, but she was right, these were places I’d fallen before. She’d noticed other hazards too, like folded rugs and trailing wires. She put us in touch with a handyperson scheme to get the hazards sorted and my son, who lives away, came and helped too.

‘She also told us about a COPD light exercise group. I wasn’t sure but my wife insisted I try it. I’m not good at mixing and don’t like crowds but now I look forward to going. My strength and balance have improved and I even met a friend there who I hadn’t seen for years.

‘I haven’t fallen again or been in hospital. I know my condition will not get better but I feel happier and more confident and so does my wife. And I’m five pounds lighter!’

***‘My strength and balance
have improved and I even
met a friend there who
I hadn’t seen for years.’***



Useful organisations

Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732

www.agescotland.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org.uk

Advice NI

Provides free advice about managing your money and bills for people in Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9064 5919 (national rate)

www.adviceni.net/Advice/freemoney.cfm

Age UK produces the following resources to help if you want to improve your strength and balance:

Strength and Balance Exercises

for Healthy Ageing (price £6)

An A4 ring-bound, table-top flip chart with simple illustrations and step-by-step instructions for chair and non-chair-based exercises.

Be Strong, Be Steady (price £12)

A strength and balance exercise DVD that includes chair-based and standing exercises, available in English.

Step to the Future (price £12)

A strength and stability exercise DVD that includes standing, chair-based and floor work suitable for active people in later life. It is available in English, with English subtitles or with a Hindi voiceover.

To order these titles, call Age UK Advice.

Prices do not include postage and packing.

'fit as a fiddle' is a nationwide programme of regional and national projects, supporting people aged over 50 with physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing. For more information, visit www.fitasafiddle.org.uk

Other useful free publications available from Age UK Advice include: *Adapting Your Home* and *Home Safety Checker*.

EXTEND

Arranges community-based exercise classes for older people and trains teachers to tutor exercise classes.

2 Place Farm
Wheathampstead
Herts AL4 8SB

Tel: 01582 832760
Email: admin@extend.org.uk
www.extend.org.uk

NAPA (National Association for Providers of Activities for older people)

Produces a range of resources to help care homes and other organisations offer stimulating activities for older people.

Bondway Commercial Centre
Unit 5.12
5th Floor
71 Bondway
London SW8 1SQ

Tel: 020 7078 9375
Email: info@napa-activities.co.uk
www.napa-activities.co.uk

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

Produces guidance on promoting good health and preventing and treating ill health in England and Wales.

MidCity Place
71 High Holborn
London WC1V 6NA

Tel: 020 7067 5800
NICE order line: 0845 003 7783
www.nice.org.uk

NHS Quality Improvement Scotland

Produces advice and guidance that aims to improve the quality and safety of healthcare in Scotland and the health of people in Scotland.

Elliott House
8–10 Hillside Crescent
Edinburgh EH7 5EA

Tel: 0131 623 4300
www.nhsquality.org/nhsqis

National Osteoporosis Society

Provides advice and information on all aspects of osteoporosis through its nurse helpline and information booklets, as well as offering people with osteoporosis support through its network of local groups.

Camerton
Bath BA2 0PJ

Tel: 01761 471771
Helpline: 0845 450 0230
Email: info@nos.org.uk
www.nos.org.uk

RNIB (Royal National Institute of the Blind)

Provides a range of services, advice and information, including leaflets and publications, many of which are available in large print, audio CD or tape and Braille. Can also give details of local sight loss support organisations.

105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999
Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk
www.rnib.org.uk

RNID

Provides advice and support for people who are deaf or hard of hearing through an information line, tinnitus helpline and range of factsheets.

19–23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 0808 808 9000

Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk

www.rnid.org.uk

The Royal Society of Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Promotes safety and prevention of accidents at work and in the home, and provides information on home safety.

Edgbaston House
353 Bristol House
Edgbaston
Birmingham B5 7ST

Tel: 0121 248 2000

Email: help@rospa.com

www.rospa.com

Sense

Supports and campaigns for people who are deafblind.

101 Pentonville Road
London N1 9LG

Tel: 0845 127 0060

Textphone: 0845 127 0062

Email: info@sense.org.uk

www.sense.org.uk

Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, FREEPOST LON13041, PO Box 203, London N1 9BR. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 80 80 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/donate. Thank you.

Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address:		
Postcode:		
Tel:	Email:	

By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick) MasterCard Visa CAF CharityCard
 Maestro American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature X
Expiry date	/	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		

Gift Aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: ___/___/___ (please complete). *Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you in line with Data Protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.

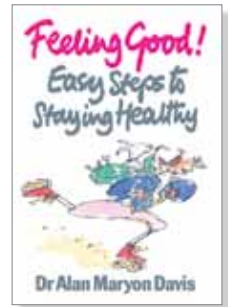
Age UK publishes a range of books on issues relevant to people as they get older. Browse our online bookshop at www.ageuk.org.uk/bookshop

Feeling good

Dr Alan Maryon Davis,
illustrated by Quentin Blake

Written by well-known media medic, Dr Alan Maryon Davis, and illustrated by Quentin Blake, this is a must-have self-help guide that provides a light-hearted yet serious approach to the secrets of keeping fit and healthy for longer.

Paperback £9.99



Your Rights to money benefits 2010/2011

Sally West

Updated each year after the Budget, this book contains comprehensive details on the benefits you may be entitled to in retirement, including:

- pensions and retirement
- financial help for those on low incomes
- benefits and financial support for disabled people and their carers
- other types of financial support.

Paperback £5.99



What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this leaflet, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Health services*
- *Going into hospital*
- *Your guide to healthy living*

Age UK offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK/Age Concern* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. Age Concern England (registered charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (registered charity number 272786), and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009. Together they have formed the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI and Age Cymru. ID8809 06/10