

# Healthy Ageing Quiz:

Practical tips for ageing well

June 2010







Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing

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## FOREWORD

All of us want to age well. But what does ageing well mean? For most of us it means being able to do the things we need to do and the things we want to do.

So where do we go to get the right information on healthy ageing? We can go down to the bookshop or try the internet, but how accurate is the information?

We need to find a credible, research-based source of information on healthy ageing. Something that is easy to access, backed by science, and tailored to individual circumstances. Something that gives us options for positive action.

That's where the Healthy Ageing Quiz began.

There is a large and growing body of evidence related to healthy ageing. However, there is no one place that draws this information together for people wanting to maximise their current and future health. One solution to this problem was to develop a tool, based on scientific evidence, that enables people to assess their current lifestyle choices in light of what is known about healthy ageing.

In 2009 the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre funded the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) to develop a Healthy Ageing Quiz. What follows are some key findings from the development of the Healthy Ageing Quiz. Of course, the quiz is a key outcome of the project, and is included in this booklet.

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June 2010

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\*The original report is available in full at [www.productiveageing.com.au](http://www.productiveageing.com.au)

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# A quick and easy check-up to identify the areas of your health that need improving and provide you with practical tips for ageing

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to increase awareness of factors associated with healthy ageing through the development of a Healthy Ageing Quiz. The quiz aims to provide older adults with an opportunity to assess their current state of health using an evidence-based and user-friendly method. It is a quick and easy check-up to identify the areas of your health that need improving and provides specific recommendations for improvement.

The paper-based version of the quiz is included in this booklet. It includes links to evidence-based guidelines for healthy active ageing. A web-based version of the Healthy Ageing Quiz is available at [www.productiveageing.com.au](http://www.productiveageing.com.au) and [www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au)

You can read more about how the quiz was developed and the findings that informed its development on pages 25 – 28.

## WHY DO THIS QUIZ?

There is no shortage of quizzes in the world. Anyone idly flicking through magazines in a doctor's or dentist's waiting room can vouch for that. What makes this quiz different?

### **Perhaps the most important difference is the**

**pay-off.** While doing well on a standard quiz may offer rewards such as a warm inner glow, this quiz offers something more substantial. Namely, greater knowledge and awareness of factors linked to healthy ageing. To experience healthy ageing, we need to know what lifestyle changes are necessary as a starting point.

The quiz aims to provide older adults with an opportunity to assess their current state of health using an evidence-based and user-friendly method. It draws together the latest research findings regarding healthy and positive ageing strategies allowing older adults to:

- Learn more about healthy ageing and lifestyle choices with specific recommendations for improving health
- Assess areas of their health that are being promoted and/or neglected
- Decrease their chances of developing chronic diseases through effective diet, exercise and other lifestyle management
- Make informed decisions regarding lifestyle behaviours





# Healthy Ageing Quiz

Practical tips for ageing well

## WELCOME TO THE HEALTHY AGEING QUIZ

This quiz will help you determine whether your current lifestyle choices are helping you age well. If you are aged 50 years or over, male or female, this quiz is for you.

Take a moment to read the instructions, then complete the quiz.

### Instructions:

- The quiz will take about 10 minutes to complete.
- For each question, tick the most appropriate response based on your current circumstances (unless otherwise specified).
- Select the options that best describes your regular activities/behaviour in a typical week.
- If you cannot decide between two scoring options, tick the lower scored option.
- When you have answered all the questions, add up your score and refer to page 21 to see what your score tells you about your current lifestyle choices.

Regardless of your final score, if you score less than 2 points for any question (or 4 points for question two), check out the corresponding tips. A summary of tips to help you age well is provided also on page 22 of this booklet.

You can also take your completed quiz to your doctor to see what he/she recommends for improving your health, or use the action plan on page 23 to start planning new, healthy behaviours.

Good luck and healthy ageing!

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

1. In a typical week, do you do 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity a day?

*This means exercise or activity that causes the heart to beat faster and makes you breathe harder but during which you can still talk comfortably. For example, brisk walking, mowing the lawn, digging in the garden, or medium paced swimming or cycling, or heavy housework. The 30 minutes could be achieved in several 10-15 minute blocks.*

Yes, 5 days or more a week	2 points
3-4 days a week	1 points
0-2 days a week	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

2. Tick which of the following exercises you undertake regularly in a typical week. *Some activities may include several of the components below.*

Strength/power training	1 points
Balance and Mobility activities (e.g. walking, balance)	1 points
Cardiorespiratory activities (e.g. aerobics, swimming, cycling, brisk walk)	1 points
Flexibility (stretching, yoga)	1 points
None of the above	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on question one and less than 4 on question two? Try these tips to improve your level of physical activity.

- Physical activity is good for both your body and your mind.
- Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate activity each day. The 30 minutes can be done in 10-15 minute blocks and can include structured exercise or physical activity such as gardening or walking.
- Include a variety of exercises that help improve your function and independence: strength/power training, balance, mobility and cardiorespiratory activities and flexibility.
- Exercise programs are available through local councils, gyms and community health centres, or a physiotherapist can develop an individually tailored program for you.
- See the new physical activity guidelines for older people on the National Ageing Research Institute's website ([www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au)) or call 03 8387 2305.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** \_\_\_\_\_

## BALANCE & FALLS

### 3. Do you feel unsteady or at risk of losing your balance when walking and turning?

	No unsteadiness	2 points
	Very little/minimal unsteadiness	1 points
	Moderate to severe unsteadiness	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

### 4. How many falls have you had in the last 12 months? *A fall is where you land on a lower surface, and includes trips and slips.*

	Nil in 12 months	2 points
	1 in the last 12 months (no medical treatment needed)	1 points
	2 in the last 12 months (no medical treatment needed)	0 points
	1 or more requiring medical treatment	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips to improve your balance and prevent falls.

- If you have concerns about your balance, or have fallen, investigate the cause. A number of factors could be contributing to the problem including vision, muscle weakness, balance problems, inactivity, medication, certain medical conditions, foot problems or inappropriate footwear.
- For further information about fall risk factors and strategies to prevent falls, talk to your doctor or visit the following websites: [www.nari.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.nari.unimelb.edu.au) or [www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)

**TOTAL SCORE FOR BALANCE & FALLS** \_\_\_\_\_

## SMOKING & ALCOHOL USE

### 5. Do you smoke or have you ever smoked?

Never smoked or stopped over 10 years ago	2 points
I was a smoker but stopped within the last 10 years	1 points
I do not smoke but others smoke around me	1 points
Yes, I currently smoke (this includes being an occasional smoker)	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

**6. Do you drink more than the recommended level? *The recommended level for low-risk drinking is two standard drinks a day or less for healthy men and women, and no more than four drinks on any one occasion. A standard drink contains 10g of alcohol. That is 100ml of (12%) wine; 285ml of full strength beer or 570ml of light (2.2%) beer; 60ml of (18%) sherry and 30ml of (40%) spirits.***

I never or rarely drink	2 points
No, I drink within the recommended level	2 points
Yes, I drink more than the recommended level	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips to stop smoking and reduce alcohol use.

- Quit smoking now! Speak to your doctor or ring the Quitline on 137 848.
- You can also visit the website [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au) for strategies to help you beat the habit.
- Although there are some health benefits associated with some moderate alcohol use (e.g. a glass of red wine), use alcohol wisely and drink within the recommended level for low risk drinking.
- For older people it may be preferable to drink less or no alcohol because the body's ability to process alcohol decreases with age and alcohol may interact with any medication.
- The alcohol guidelines (and precautions for older people and other subgroups) can be downloaded from [www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ds10syn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ds10syn.htm).

**TOTAL SCORE FOR SMOKING & ALCOHOL USE \_\_\_\_\_**

## WEIGHT

**7. Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. Is your BMI within the normal range, that is between 20 to 25? (Check the BMI table on the next page).**

	My BMI is between 20 to 25	2 points
	My BMI is between 26-27 but I am over 65 years of age	2 points
	My BMI is above 25	0 points
	My BMI is below 20	0 points
<b>My Score</b>		

**8. What is your waist circumference? Place the tape measure directly on your skin, roughly in line with your belly button, breathe out normally and measure. The tape should be snug but not squeezing the skin.**

<b>For Men:</b>		
	94cm or under (37")	2 points
	Below 102cm but over 94cm	1 points
	102cm and over (40.2")	0 points
<b>For Women:</b>		
	80cm or under (31.5")	2 points
	Below 90cm but over 80cm	1 points
	90cm and over (35.4")	0 points
<b>My Score</b>		

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips for reaching a healthy weight.

- Being, obese, overweight or underweight increases your risk of many chronic diseases.
- Ensure your weight is within the healthy range for your height.
- Your Body Mass Index should be between 20 and 25. If you are over 65 years of age a BMI of 26-27 is also acceptable.
- Your waist circumference should be 80cm or less for women and 94cm or less for men.
- To control your weight, eat healthy balanced meals and exercise regularly.
- Your doctor or a dietician can also provide other advice on ways to reduce your weight.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR WEIGHT \_\_\_\_\_**

## BODY MASS INDEX TABLE

### Table of Acceptable Weights for Height

**Instructions:** Find your height in the table (note 160cm is 1.6m). If your weight is in the range listed on that line (51-64 kg) in the first half of the table then your BMI is within the 20-25 range. If your weight is in the second half of the table (65 to 69) then your BMI is in the range of 26 to 27. If your weight is either below or over the weight range listed, then your BMI is below or over that BMI range (20-25 or 26-27).

Based on Body Mass Index (BMI) in the range of 20-25. Suitable for use with both men and women over 18 years of age.				Based on Body Mass Index (BMI) in the range of 26-27. Acceptable BMI if aged 65 & over.	
cm	feet, inches	kg	stone, pounds	kg	stone, pounds
140	4,7	39-49	6,2 – 7,10	50-53	7,12 – 8,5
142	4,8	40-50	6,4 – 7,12	51-54	8,0 – 8,7
144	4,9	41-52	6,6 – 8,3	53-56	8,5 – 8,11
146	4,9.5	43-53	6,11 – 8,5	54-57	8,7 – 8,14
148	4,10	44-55	6,13 – 8,9	56-59	8,11 – 9,4
150	4,11	45-56	7,1 – 8,11	57-60	8,14 – 9,6
152	5,0	46-58	7,3 – 9,2	58-62	9,2 – 9,11
154	5,0.5	47-59	7,6 – 9,4	59-64	9,4 – 10,1
156	5,1.5	49-61	7,10 – 9,8	62-65	9,11 – 10,3
158	5,2	50-62	7,12 – 9,11	63-67	9,13 – 10,8
160	5,3	51-64	8,0 – 10,1	65-69	10,3 – 10,12
162	5,4	52-66	8,3 – 10,5.5	67-70	10,8 – 11,0
164	5,4.5	54-67	8,7 – 10,8	68-72	10,10 – 11,5
166	5,5	55-69	8,9 – 10,12	70-74	11,0 – 11,9
168	5,6	56-71	8,11 – 11,3	72-76	11,5 – 11,14
170	5,7	58-72	9,2 – 11,5	73-78	11,7 – 12,4
172	5,8	59-74	9,4 – 11,9	75-80	11,11 – 12,8
174	5,8.5	61-76	9,8 – 12,0	77-81	12,2 – 12,11
176	5,9	62-77	9,11 – 12,2	78-83	12,4 – 13,1
178	5,10	63-79	9,13 – 12,6	80-85	12,8 – 13,5
180	5,11	65-81	10,3 – 12,11	82-87	12,13 – 13,10
182	5,11.5	66-83	10,5.5 – 13,1	84-89	13,3 – 14,0
184	6,0.5	68-85	10,10 – 13,5	86-91	13,8 – 14,5
186	6,1	69-86	10,12 – 13,8	87-93	13,10 – 14,9
188	6,2	71-88	11,3 – 13,12	89-95	14,0 – 14,13
190	6,3	72-90	11,5 – 14,2	91-97	14,5 – 15,4
192	6,3.5	74-92	11,9 – 14,7	93-99	14,9 – 15,8
194	6,4	75-94	11,11 – 14,11	95-101	14,13 – 15,13
196	6,5	77-96	12,2 – 15,2	97-103	15,4 – 16,3
198	6,6	78-98	12,4 – 15,6	99-106	15,8 – 16,10
200	6,7	80-100	12,8 – 15,10.5	101-108	15,13 – 17,0

Modified from: Dietitians' Pocket Book November 2004 School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Science, Curtin University of Technology

**To calculate your specific BMI:** You will need to divide your weight in kilograms by your height squared:

$$\text{kg/m}^2 \quad \text{Example: } \frac{70 \text{ kg}}{1.6\text{m} \times 1.6\text{m}} = \frac{70}{2.56} = 27.3$$

# DIET

## 9. In a typical week, do you eat a well balanced diet?

The Australian Healthy Eating Guidelines recommend that your diet should include:

- 5 vegetables (including legumes) a day,
- 2 fruits a day,
- Cereals (breads, rice, pasta, noodles, preferably wholegrain),
- At least three servings of calcium rich foods (e.g. milk, yoghurt, cheese),
- Lean meat, fish, poultry and/or eggs, legumes and nuts,
- Plenty of water/fluids (approx. 6-8 glasses a day),  
and should be:
  - low in fat,
  - low in sugar (including food and drinks containing sugar), and
  - low in salt (including vegetable salts)

Ticking the boxes above will give you a better idea of whether your diet is well balanced, and will help you answer the options below:

	Mostly or always	2 points
	Sometimes	1 points
	Never or rarely	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

## 10. Do you eat three regular meals a day?

	Yes	2 points
	Mostly	1 points
	No	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

# TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips to improve your diet.

- Your body needs fuel for energy and vitamins and minerals to function efficiently and for this you need a healthy, balanced diet. Poor diet is associated with many preventable chronic diseases.
- Aim to eat three meals each day (or more frequent smaller meals).
- Ensure that your diet meets the guidelines for healthy eating outlined above. The guidelines can be downloaded from: [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/\\_files/n31.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/n31.pdf).
- A dietician can help you develop a healthy meal plan.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR DIET** \_\_\_\_\_

## CHRONIC CONDITIONS & MEDICAL CARE

**11. Do you have any of the following conditions: arthritis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, depression, bronchitis/emphysema, osteoporosis (low bone density) or other chronic condition?**

I have no chronic conditions	2 points
I have one or more chronic conditions but they are well managed	1 points
I have one or more chronic conditions that cause me some concern	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

**12. Have you visited a doctor (GP or other medical practitioner) in the last 12 months for an annual check up?**

Yes	2 points
No	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

### TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips for better care of chronic conditions.

- Learn all you can about your chronic condition – what helps the condition and what makes it worse. Talk to your doctor or contact a relevant chronic disease association (e.g. Arthritis Foundation, Diabetes Australia, Cancer Council of Australia, Kidney Health Australia, National Heart Foundation of Australia, National Stroke Foundation). These organisations can be found in the yellow pages under “Associations”.
- Understand the medication you take, their side effects and any contraindications. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Ask them about a Home Medicines Review.
- Have a general check up each year, as early detection of problems improves outcomes. If aged 75 and over (or 55 years and over if an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) ask your doctor about the Older Person’s Health Assessment.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR CHRONIC CONDITIONS & MEDICAL CARE \_\_\_\_\_**



## SLEEP & STIMULATING YOUR MIND

### 13. Do you have difficulty sleeping?

I generally sleep well	2 points
My sleep is interrupted but I usually go back to sleep without difficulty	1 points
I generally have difficulty sleeping	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

**14. In a typical week, do you engage in activities that challenge/stimulate your mind most days of the week? For example, reading, writing, playing a musical instrument, playing games (cards, checkers, doing crosswords), watching stimulating TV programs (such as documentaries) and learning new activities/skills.**

Yes, 5 days or more a week	2 points
3-4 days a week	1 points
0-2 days a week	0 points
<b>My Score</b>	

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on either of the last two questions? Try these tips to improve your sleep and stimulating your mind.

- Your body needs sleep to repair any cell damage and to refresh your immune system. A good night's sleep (generally 8 hours) helps your concentration and your memory function.
- Avoid smoking or consuming alcohol or caffeine before bedtime, avoid too much daytime napping, establish regular sleep hours and a routine, and keep active during the day. Exposure to sunlight (at least 2 hours a day) helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Limit the use of sleeping tablets; they are a short term solution and can cause long term health problems.
- Investigate the causes of sleep problems and address them. They may include pain, medication, lack of exercise, psychological stress or sleep disorders, such as sleep apnoea. Talk to your doctor.
- Just like your body, you need to keep your mind active.
- Learn a new skill or take up a new hobby (eg painting, carpentry), do a short course, read, write, do crosswords puzzles, learn to play a musical instrument or a foreign language.
- Keeping physically and socially active also helps.
- If you have concerns about your memory, see your doctor.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR SLEEP & STIMULATING YOUR MIND \_\_\_\_\_**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**15. In a typical week, do you have activities that keep you socially and productively engaged (ie that are worthwhile and satisfying)? For example church or volunteer work, paid work, taking care of your grandchildren, or creative or craft activities.**

	Yes, 5 days or more a week	2 points
	3-4 days a week	1 points
	0-2 days a week	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

**16. Are you involved in any group activities (formal or informal), community or religious organisations (in total at least once a week)? For example, lawn bowls, golf club, choir, reading group, church activities, National Seniors Australia branch activities, Probus etc.**

	At least once a week	2 points
	Once or twice a month (not weekly)	1 points
	Rarely	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

**17. How often do you see or hear from family and/or friends in a typical week?**

	Yes, 5 days or more a week	2 points
	3-4 days a week	1 points
	0-2 days a week	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

**18. Do you have people you feel you can depend on?**

	I definitely do	2 points
	I do to some degree	1 points
	I definitely do not	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT (continued)

### 19. Do you have people you feel very close to?

	I definitely do	2 points
	I do to some degree	1 points
	I definitely do not	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

### TIPS

Score less than 2 on any of the last five questions? Try these tips to improve your social connections.

- Do things that make you happy and that are worthwhile to you – this may include working, looking after grandchildren, volunteering, and doing creative arts and crafts.
- Take time to develop and nurture your relationships with family and friends; not only are they people you can turn to in need, but they provide a social outlet and companionship.
- Group activities and volunteering give you an opportunity to meet new people.
- If you feel lonely and isolated, speak to someone – a family member or friend, your doctor, a social worker or a psychologist.
- If you have persistent symptoms of low mood, see your doctor.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT** \_\_\_\_\_

## OPTIMISM & ADAPTABILITY

### 20. Are you generally an optimistic person?

	Yes	2 points
	To some degree	1 points
	No	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

### 21. Do you always look for opportunities that maximise what you can still do or find new activities to meet your current abilities or circumstances?

	Often or always	2 points
	Sometimes	1 points
	Never or rarely	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

### 22. Are there things that you look forward to each day?

	Often or always	2 points
	Sometimes	1 points
	Never or rarely	0 points
	<b>My Score</b>	

## TIPS

Score less than 2 on any of the last three questions? Try these tips to improve your optimism and adaptability.

- It is important to have something to look forward to each day, no matter how big or small.
- Keep a positive attitude and an open mind to opportunities that come your way.
- Plan your retirement, including what you will do to keep mentally and physically active.
- If your health changes, look at what you can do and not what you can no longer do.

**TOTAL SCORE FOR OPTIMISM & ADAPTABILITY** \_\_\_\_\_

## YOUR FINAL SCORE

Add up your total scores for each sub section and write them in the score column.

<b>Physical Activity</b> (Questions 1 & 2)	
<b>Balance &amp; Falls</b> (Questions 3 & 4)	
<b>Smoking &amp; Alcohol Use</b> (Questions 5 & 6)	
<b>Weight</b> (Questions 7 & 8)	
<b>Diet</b> (Questions 9 & 10)	
<b>Chronic Conditions &amp; Medical Care</b> (Question 11 & 12)	
<b>Sleep &amp; Stimulating Your Mind</b> (Question 13 & 14)	
<b>Social Connections &amp; Productive Engagement</b> (Questions 15 to 19)	
<b>Optimism &amp; Adaptability</b> (Questions 20 to 22)	
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	

## HOW DID YOU RATE?

### **POOR (a score of 0-15)**

There are many areas in your lifestyle that could be negatively impacting on your chances of ageing well. Go through the quiz and highlight each question where you have scored less than 2 points (or 4 points for question two). Then check the tips in each section to see what you can do to improve each lifestyle factor.

### **FAIR (a score of 16-30)**

Although there are some areas in your lifestyle that are helping you age well, there are other areas that are letting you down. Go through the quiz and highlight each question where you have scored less than 2 points (or 4 points for question two). Then check the tips in each section to see what you can do to improve each lifestyle factor.

### **GOOD (a score of 31-46)**

You have adopted many positive lifestyle choices that are maximising your chances of ageing well. Go through the quiz and highlight each question where you have scored less than 2 points (or 4 points for question two). Then check the tips in each section to see what you can do to improve each lifestyle factor.

## SUMMARY TIPS

**Here is a summary of some actions you can take to help you age well:**

### **Physical Activity**

Do at least 30 minutes of moderate activity each day, include various types of exercise (strength/power training, balance, mobility and cardiorespiratory activities and flexibility).

### **Balance & Falls**

If you have concerns about your balance or have fallen, investigate the cause; talk to your doctor.

### **Smoking & Alcohol Use**

Quit smoking now and use alcohol wisely (no more than two standard drinks), for older people it may be preferable to drink less or no alcohol

### **Weight**

Keep your weight within the healthy range for your height; know your Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist measurement; exercise and a healthy diet are important.

### **Diet**

Aim to eat three meals each day (or more frequent smaller meals); ensure your diet meets the guidelines for healthy eating and drink enough water to keep you hydrated.

### **Chronic Conditions & Medical Care**

Learn all you can about your chronic condition - what helps the condition and what makes it worse - and your medication; have a general check up each year.

### **Sleep**

Investigate the causes of sleep problems and address them; limit the use of sleeping tablets; establish regular sleep hours and a routine.

### **Stimulating Your Mind**

Keep your mind active (e.g. learn a new skill, take up a new hobby, do a short course, read, write, do crossword puzzles, learn to play a musical instrument or a foreign language); see a doctor if you have concerns about your memory.

### **Social Connections & Productive Engagement**

Do things that make you happy and are worthwhile to you; develop and nurture your relationships with family and friends; get involved in group activities and volunteering; if lonely, isolated or have persistent symptoms of low moods talk to someone (e.g. family, friend, doctor, social worker, psychologist).

### **Optimism and Adaptability**

Keep a positive attitude and an open mind to opportunities that come your way; plan your retirement activities as well as your finances; look at what you can do and not what you can no longer do.

## ACTION PLAN

Life style risk factor	Action to address risk factor
	<p>Actions:</p> <p>People/groups to contact:</p> <p>Date to be completed:</p>
	<p>Actions:</p> <p>People/groups to contact:</p> <p>Date to be completed:</p>
	<p>Actions:</p> <p>People/groups to contact:</p> <p>Date to be completed:</p>
	<p>Actions:</p> <p>People/groups to contact:</p> <p>Date to be completed:</p>
<p>Additional Notes:</p>	



# KEEP ACTIVE, EAT WELL, STAY CONNECTED

Developed by



NATIONAL  
AGEING  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE

for



NationalSeniorsAustralia  
Productive Ageing Centre



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUIZ

**The way the quiz was developed means the information and recommendations can be relied upon.**

The development of the quiz involved four phases. During Phase 1, an extensive literature review was conducted. Earlier research was examined to identify the lifestyle factors associated with healthy ageing, and this helped in drafting a first quiz. During Phase 2, three focus groups were conducted with older adults to obtain feedback on the initial draft quiz (which was based on the literature findings) and to find out the health and lifestyle factors that are most important to them.

**The focus group participation means the final quiz has been road-tested for user friendliness and relevance by older Australians.**

**An expert advisory panel was convened, including people with expertise in the main health risk areas associated with ageing.** These areas included falls and balance, physical activity, nutrition, healthy ageing, chronic illness, cultural diversity in ageing, dementia and depression, psycho-social ageing and risk factors linked with hospital and residential care admission in older people. The panel provided advice on the main areas identified through the literature review and helped modify the quiz questions. Panel members also suggested useful links to resources and guidelines for older people wishing to know more about a particular area.

In Phase 3, the modified quiz was piloted with many seniors, the results were statistically analysed to establish reliability and validity, and more adjustments were made to the quiz following the piloting process. Phase 4 saw the development of the final versions of the quiz, including a web-based version.

## WHY HEALTHY AGEING IS IMPORTANT

Australia has a rapidly ageing population. The proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years and older is expected to increase from approximately 13% in 2007 to 25% by 2101 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). More people are living into their

80s and 90s. However, for many older people, adding years to their life may mean more chronic disease and poor quality of life. So understanding the factors underpinning healthy ageing will help governments, researchers and health professionals to develop strategies to maximise the quality of life of older people. Further, older people themselves need to understand and practice the behaviours that will add years to their life. Some researchers recommend that programs to promote successful ageing should target middle-aged people (Bowling and Dieppe 2005).

## WHAT IS HEALTHY AGEING?

The literature review found many definitions of healthy ageing, which can also be called successful ageing, active ageing and productive ageing. Although there is no universal definition, there is general acceptance that healthy ageing involves more than just physical or functional health. Some lifestyle factors, which can be influenced by individuals, were identified as being an important part of healthy ageing. They included:

- being physically active;
- not smoking;
- maintaining a healthy weight;
- having a healthy diet;
- moderate consumption of alcohol; and
- engaging in cognitively stimulating activities.

Being independent (autonomy and control/self efficacy), having social relationships and doing productive work, including volunteering (continuing engagement with life, social inclusion), were beneficial. Having emotional and practical support and being able to reciprocate that support (it may be providing wisdom or affection) was part of healthy ageing, as was being an optimist, being able to cope with difficulties (having effective/adaptive coping skills or resilience), finding life meaningful and having self worth.

Some chronic conditions, such as hypertension, depression, and the absence of protective factors were associated with poorer health as was the ineffective use of health services.

## WHAT THE FOCUS GROUPS THOUGHT ABOUT HEALTHY AGEING

Three focus groups were conducted; two in metropolitan Melbourne and one in rural Victoria (Portarlington). There were 33 participants (9 males and 24 females) ranging in age from 54 to 97 years (mean 72.0±10.2 years).

Participants were asked what healthy ageing meant to them and to identify the various components of healthy ageing. The focus group findings confirmed the literature review findings. All three groups indicated that although physical health impacted on healthy ageing, people could have health problems but still feel that they are ageing well. Keeping active both physically and mentally, being independent (physically and financially; making your own decisions) and being able to enjoy life were important factors associated with healthy ageing.

Being productively (meaningfully) and socially engaged, having a purpose (a passion, making a difference, having someone or something that depends on you), being valued and respected were also mentioned by participants. Having a positive attitude and a sense of humour, seizing opportunities that come your way, accepting limitations and making the most of what you have, were key personality traits associated with healthy ageing.

Volunteering, learning new skills, and adapting your activities to meet your current circumstances or limitations were given as examples of accepting and adapting to change. Participants emphasised that planning life after retirement and replacing work (and work contacts) with other critical activities or contacts was vital. The rural group also highlighted the importance of pursuing practical support to help maintain independence.

Relationships with family, friends and community were seen as key factors associated with healthy ageing. Participants mentioned developing and maintaining good relationships, making new friends, joining groups and embracing in-laws. All three groups highlighted the importance of intergenerational contact.

Other factors identified included spiritual health, diet and nutrition, knowing your medication and having regular check-ups to treat health issues early. The importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle when young was also highlighted, although participants agreed that it was never too late to make changes. The groups also pointed out the multiple benefits of physical activity in working the mind, the body and providing social contact. Group activities were seen as important for socialising, and ageist stereotypes, whether internalised or held by the community, needed to be fought against.

The focus groups commented on the draft quiz, and their responses helped in shaping the next version.

## FEEDBACK ON THE QUIZ

The new version of the quiz was mailed to more than 400 people ranging in age from 49 to 100 years, with a 70% response rate. Most participants had healthy lifestyles. They were active, ate a balanced diet, maintained a healthy body weight, kept mentally and socially active and were generally positive. However, nearly two thirds of participants were in the high to very high risk categories for waist circumference.

The overall response to the Healthy Ageing Quiz was very positive. It was seen to be comprehensive, with 90% of participants thinking the questions in the quiz were relevant to healthy ageing and most saying that the questions were easy to understand.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to review their own health. As one person stated, it “helped to make me think about [my] lifestyle”. Another said, “It is a good ‘wake up’ call re my health in specific areas. Hopefully the information will be of benefit to all”. Another participant noted that “it was thought provoking and useful to do. I would like to send it to a number of my ageing relatives!”

Many liked the layout of the quiz, and found it clear and easy to follow. One participant “liked [the] idea of [the] evaluation questions leading to scoring, leading to actions to help you age well”.

Some people queried whether the questionnaire was suitable for all older age groups (aged 50 years to those aged over 85 years). Questions were also raised about how appropriate the quiz was for people from migrant backgrounds, country people and those isolated from health services or support. Comments included:

“The quiz seems to suit city people but ignores the much more active lifestyle of country people. I spend half of each week on a farm and this involves much physical activity obviating the need for gym clubs etc. It also affects social contacts.”

“All clear and sensible but what about the isolated, unwell, housebound, NESB [non-English speaking background] who would have difficulty with a lot of these suggestions?”

These limitations are acknowledged. People who are from migrant backgrounds, those on fixed incomes and people less educated may have a very different perspective on healthy ageing. Although a rural focus group was conducted (in Portarlington, Victoria) to gauge rural attitudes and beliefs about healthy ageing, the focus group attendees may not have been representative of the general rural population.

Some suggestions were made to improve the Healthy Ageing Quiz.

## **COMMENTS REGARDING THE “TIPS TO HELP YOU AGE WELL”**

The Healthy Ageing Quiz includes tips to help you age well and these are summarised on page 22. Most of the respondents felt that this information was very good, sensible, relevant, constructive, well written and easy to understand. They liked this information and suggestions, as these comments show:

“Very clear and helpful if one needed any more encouragement.”

“Challenges someone, like myself, to make sure I keep doing what is useful and to recommit to the areas where I am falling short.”

“Helpful to keep, I have circled areas where I hope to improve.”

“It’s helpful to have the examples complementing the statements and advice. Also having website links to refer to is very useful.”

Some people mentioned that the actions “highlighted things I already knew” and that the suggested actions “didn’t tell me anything I didn’t know”.

However, many more felt that it was good to have this information reinforced, and that some people may not be aware of these issues:

“All things that we know already, but need to be reminded about!”

“This all is grist for the mill – I have learned a lot along the way. It is healthy to keep the issues to the front of consciousness.”

The issue of the difference between knowing and acting on information was also raised.

“Sometimes taking action alone is difficult – you need support and encouragement and the will not to give in to the ageing process.”

“Good ideas thank you. It is one thing to KNOW what to do – it is another to actually DO IT!”

A suggestion made by two participants involved an action plan. Although this does not in itself guarantee action, it may serve as a good starting point for those who are contemplating making a behaviour change. An action plan was developed and included in the modified Healthy Ageing Quiz.

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## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SENIORS PRODUCTIVE AGEING CENTRE

The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre is an initiative of National Seniors Australia and the Department of Health and Ageing. The Centre's aim is to advance knowledge and understanding of all aspects of productive ageing to improve the quality of life of people aged 50 and over.

The Centre's key objectives are to:

- Support quality consumer oriented research informed by the experience of people aged 50 years and over;
- Inform Government, business and the community on productive ageing across the life-course;
- Raise awareness of research findings which are useful for older people; and
- Be a leading centre for research, education and information on productive ageing in Australia.

For more information about the Productive Ageing Centre, visit [www.productiveageing.com.au](http://www.productiveageing.com.au) or call 02 6230 4588.





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