



Ageing well

This information sheet provides general guidance to older people aged 65 and over, and for First Nations people 55 and over.

This document does not offer guidance on icare funding. Please speak with your icare contact for funding advice.

What do we know about getting older with a severe injury?

As we age, we are at risk of health issues and diseases that can reduce our independence or shorten our lives¹. Medical research shows that many conditions associated with ageing are preventable for those with good lifestyle habits and who get support from a General Practitioner (GP)² to manage their health through regular checkups and proactive screening.

There is no typical older person. People of all ages live in varied circumstances with a wide range of abilities.^{3,4} The way certain systems have worked in the past means that some groups of people find it harder to get services that meet their needs. People with severe injuries, First Nations people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ people have found that their needs are often not properly met by health and aged care services.⁵ Service providers now understand that they must design their services to meet the needs of all people. That means everyone has the right to ask for their specific needs to be met by the services they work with.

Ageing, severe injury, and icare

As the population of NSW is living longer, more and more people supported by Lifetime Care and Workers Care are also getting older.³ Additionally, with an older population, there is an increased chance of older people being injured and requiring the support of Lifetime Care and Workers Care.

When someone has had a severe injury, they often spend a lot of time with medical and health professionals to manage the impacts of their injury. However, general health needs are separate from injury-related health needs. People with severe injuries are more likely than others to need complex health management and may be at greater risk of certain health conditions or diseases of ageing.³

Key Takeaways

- Older adults are a very diverse group with individual needs
- Our health needs change as we get older
- General health needs are separate from injury-related health needs
- One of the best ways to meet health needs is through an ongoing relationship with a trusted GP
- Most of the chronic illnesses that come with older age are preventable
- There are a lot of opportunities to take control of our health through creating good habits with eating, sleeping, exercise, social connection, and mental wellness



icare has a role in helping participants and workers access appropriate injury-related supports that promote health and wellbeing as they age. icare's goal is for participants and workers to be able to manage their health needs independently and have a good quality of life, no matter what life stage they are at. icare is continuously investigating how to support participants and workers better as they age.

Understanding my health status

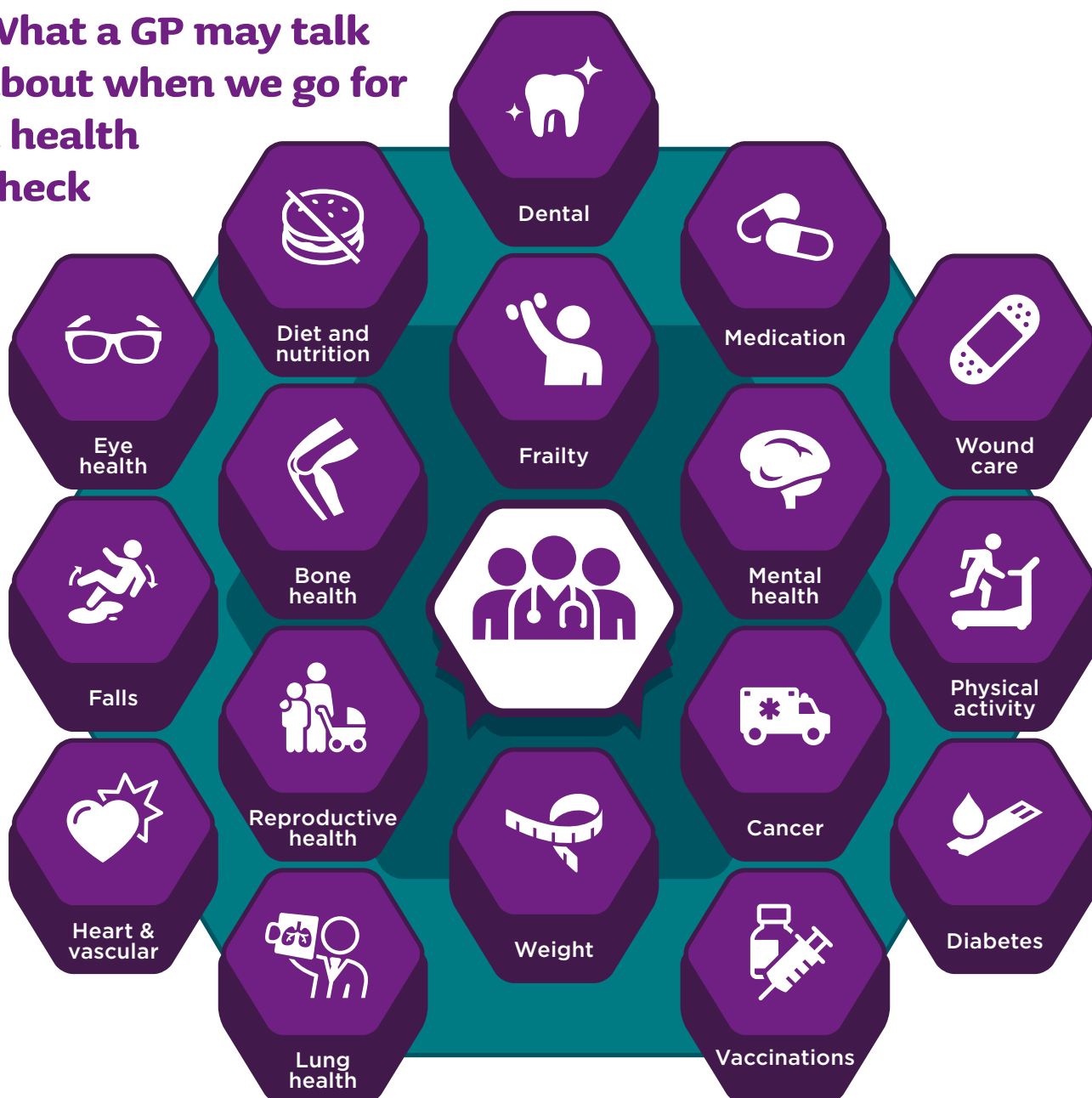
Everyone's health is complex. Trustworthy advice and support can help with staying healthy and independent. GPs are responsible for being that trusted support in the community and for

deciding which health tests are most suitable based on age, gender, genetic background, past injuries, and lifestyle.² Many regular health checks are available under Medicare for free or minimal cost. They can be as simple as a conversation, blood pressure check, or blood test.⁶⁻¹⁰ GPs can also help with making the changes needed to maintain good health.

First Nations people can access a free annual health check through an Aboriginal Health Service or bulk-billing medical clinic.¹¹

The image below shows some things a GP may talk about to ensure someone has the information and skills needed to remain healthy.⁶⁻¹⁰

What a GP may talk about when we go for a health check





One of the most effective ways to have reliable ongoing health support is to develop a relationship of trust with a GP of choice. It might take visits to more than one GP to find a good fit. A relationship of trust with a GP can provide the safe space to talk about sensitive topics and to listen to necessary advice. The Health Direct website suggests thinking about the following questions when choosing a GP.²



- Can I talk honestly to them? Do they listen to me?
- Do I prefer a male or female doctor? Someone older or younger?
- Does the practice have opening hours that suit me? Is it easy to travel to the practice?
- Does the practice bulk bill or will I have to pay a fee? If so, how much?
- Do they do home visits or offer after-hours services? How easy is it to get an appointment?
- Is the GP recommended by other people in my community? Do they speak my language?
- Is the practice accredited — does it meet quality standards?

More information about what a GP does is available at The role of a GP | healthdirect ([healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au)).²

Staying healthy as I age

The World Health Organisation reports that healthy ageing is a concern for health systems all over the world.¹² This means there is good research on what is needed to remain healthy with age. The research shows that, along with having a relationship of trust with a GP, four important contributions to remaining healthy for as long as possible are:

- eating well¹³
- exercising regularly¹⁴
- sleeping well¹⁵
- looking after our mental health¹⁶

The good news about this is that these are all things over which most people have control. A trusted GP can provide advice on each of these and provide referrals to resources and specialist care if needed. There are also reliable sources of information on the internet. Some of these are provided in the Resources section at the end of this information sheet.

Eat well

In general terms, eating well means having a diet filled with fresh whole foods including fruit and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and legumes, dairy, and drinking plenty of water.¹³ Eating well also means limiting amounts of things like alcohol, snack food, sweets, fast food, and fatty foods. This and other information about healthy diets can be found at Australian guide to healthy eating | eatforhealth (eatforhealth.gov.au).¹³

People with chronic health conditions or disabilities may need professional advice on what diet is suitable for them. A GP can provide a referral to a dietician for that purpose if needed.

Getting active and sedentary behaviour

Physical activity reduces the onset of chronic health conditions and contributes to remaining independent and living longer.^{14,17} It can also help with

- mental health
- sleep
- maintaining a healthy weight
- preventing falls and
- improving bone strength

The [World Health Organisation](https://www.who.int) recommends that most people need aerobic physical activity that raises their heart and breathing rate for at least 2.5 to 5 hours a week in order to maintain their health.¹⁴ Extra health benefits come from doing more physical activity or adding muscle strengthening activities.



People with severe injuries, disability, or other medical conditions may need a more tailored approach to physical activity. A GP, specialist, or allied health provider can give advice on what activities are suitable.

Sedentary behaviour is time spent sitting. Spending lots of time sitting is damaging to health. Any kind of physical activity at all, including a gentle stroll, is better than sitting for long periods. It is important to break up long periods of time sitting with active time. The more physical activity, the better.

Good sleep

Sleep is thought to help restore physical function, sorting through the memories of the day, keeping the immune system strong, and keeping the heart and blood vessels healthy.¹⁵ Most people need about 8 hours sleep a night to maintain health. Poor sleep can hurt health by impacting mood and concentration, and increasing the chance of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. There are some simple routines that can help to improve sleep. There are some common sleep disorders that may impact your sleep, such as snoring and sleep apnoea. It is important to discuss sleep issues with your GP to understand whether further tests may be required. This and other information on good sleep is available at [Sleep | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/sleep).¹⁵

Mental health

Mental health is key to overall wellbeing. Without good mental health it can be hard to enjoy life or engage in other behaviours that support good health.¹⁶ If feelings like sadness or worry are getting in the way of enjoying life it could be useful to seek support from your GP. Building on good habits of diet, exercise, social connection, and sleep can help maintain or improve mental health.

A GP can help with information and connection with services that can assist in maintaining good mental health. This and other information is available at [Older people and mental health | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/older-people-and-mental-health).¹⁶

Getting connected

Having meaningful social connections is important to maintaining physical and mental health.^{12,18} This becomes more important as people get older because as health declines it can become harder to start new connections with others. Significant changes in people's lives, like the children leaving home, retirement, and moving house, can also change someone's interests and so change the people they are interested in spending time with.

Social connections with other people who have shared interests can provide health benefits such as:

- encouraging motivation to engage in activities that build physical ability. Physical activity leads to greater wellbeing and good mental health
- maintaining self-reliance and acting as a safeguard through trust and practical, social, and emotional support

Loneliness and social isolation are strongly linked with loss of health, independence, and quality of life.¹⁸ If you would like support to increase your social connection, consider speaking with your family or friends, community and support services, GP, case manager, social worker, icare contact or other community workers.¹⁹ Local councils are also a good source of information on what social activities are available in your local area. Each council website will have its own page listing services and activities.

What is frailty?

***“Becoming frail”* is an expression that is commonly heard when talking about getting older.**

Frailty is a condition that can get worse over time if steps are not made to address it. It means that many of the body's systems are getting less able to respond when there are times of physical or psychological stress. Frailty makes falls and other injuries more likely and increases the time it takes to get well again after an injury or sickness. Becoming frail is not a necessary part of getting older. Good habits of seeing a GP, eating, and sleeping well, exercising, social connection, and looking after our mental health can prevent frailty.^{4,20,21}

Resources

Further information and support can be found at:

General health

[Healthy living | NSW Health \(health.gov.au\)](#)

[The role of a GP | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)

[Healthdirect](#)

Ageing

[icare Ageing with a TBI](#)

[icare Ageing with a SCI resource](#)

[icare General Ageing information sheet for providers](#)

[Older Australians | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

[World report on Ageing and Health | World Health Organization \(who.int\)](#)

First Nations

[First Nations older people | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

[National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation \(naccho.org.au\)](#)

[National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program \(health.gov.au\)](#)

Culturally and linguistically diverse persons

[Culturally and linguistically diverse older Australians | Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia \(fecca.org.au\)](#)

Mental health

[Black Dog Institute](#)

[Beyond Blue](#)

[Older people and mental health](#)

LGBTIQ+

[LGBTIQ+ older people | LGBTIQ+ Health Australia \(lgbtiqhealth.org.au\)](#)

Specific aspects of health

[Loneliness and isolation | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)

[Immunisation for adults and seniors | Department of Health and Aged Care \(health.gov.au\)](#)

[Australian guide to healthy eating | eatforhealth \(eatforhealth.gov.au\)](#)

[Sleep | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)

[WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour | World Health Organization \(who.int\)](#)

[Connecting with your community. Australian Community Workers Association About community work | \(acwa.org.au\)](#)

References

The following are the academic references and websites used to develop our ageing resources:

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Older Australians [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021 [cited 2022 Oct. 5]. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians>
2. [The role of a GP | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)
3. Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2008.
4. Cameron ID, Kurrle SE. Review of Ageing and End of Life Issues for People with an Acquired Injury. icare Lifetime Care. Sydney 2021.
5. Department of Health & Human Services (Vic). Healthy ageing literature review. Victoria: Victorian Government; 2016
6. National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. National guide to a preventive health assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 3rd edn. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP, 2018
7. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Guidelines for preventive activities in general practice. 9th edn. East Melbourne, Vic: RACGP, 2016
8. Bowers, Barbara J. & Webber, Ruth P. & Nolet, Kimberly. & Stumm, Eleanore. & Bigby, Christine. & Czarny, Kristen & Australian Research Council. Supporting older people with an intellectual disability to age at home: a manual for support staff and carers. Queensland: Australian Research Council; 2014.
9. Department of Health and Aged Care. Immunisation for adults and seniors [Internet]. Canberra: Department of Health and Aged Care; 2022 [updated 2022 June; cited 2023 Feb]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/immunisation/when-to-get-vaccinated/immunisation-for-adults-and-seniors>
10. Department of Health and Aged Care. BreastScreen Australia Program [Internet]. Canberra: Department of Health and Aged Care; 2023 [updated 2023 Jan; cited 2023 Feb]. Available from: www.health.gov.au/our-work/breastscreen-australia-program
11. [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program \(NATSIFACP\)](#)
12. World report on Ageing and Health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565042>
13. Australian guide to healthy eating | eatforhealth (eatforhealth.gov.au)
14. WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020
15. [Sleep | healthdirect \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)
16. [Older people and mental health \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)
17. [Healthy living | NSW Health \(health.gov.au\)](#)
18. [Loneliness and isolation \(healthdirect.gov.au\)](#)
19. <https://www.acwa.org.au/students/about-community-work>
20. Reske-Nielsen C, Medzon R. Geriatric Trauma. Emerg Med Clin North Am. 2016 Aug;34(3):483-500 doi: 10.1016/j.emc.2016.04.004. PMID: 27475011.
21. Lang, P, Michel, P, Zekry, D. Frailty Syndrome: A Transitional State in a Dynamic Process. Gerontology. 2009. 55:539-549. doi: 10.1159/000211949

icare

GPO Box 4052, Sydney, NSW 2001

General Phone Enquiries: [1300 738 586](tel:1300738586)

Email: care-requests@icare.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.icare.nsw.gov.au