



# Looking after your mental health in later life



Connecting for Life

[yourmentalhealth.ie](https://yourmentalhealth.ie)

## About this leaflet

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This leaflet explains how you can look after your mental health as you grow older. It may also be helpful for your family members, caregivers and friends.

It has three parts:

1. Mental health in later life

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2. Mental health – how to look after it

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3. Mental health – what to watch out for

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# 1. Mental health in later life

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Mental health is about how you think and feel, and your ability to deal with ups and downs.

Good mental health means you can:

- **cope with the normal stresses of life**
- **get the most out of everyday life**
- **enjoy positive relationships with family and friends**

Your mental health does not always stay the same. Challenges can arise at any time in your life, but detecting and addressing a problem early can help.

Maintaining good mental health will also help you deal with problems as and when they arise, or during tough times.

Like all stages of life, older age brings its own challenges, and mental health problems in later life are often a normal consequence of growing older. Detecting and treating a problem early can lead to significant improvements in your mental health.

Some of the challenges you may face as you get older include:

- **Retirement**
- **Bereavement**
- **Changes in activity levels**
- **Moving from home to care**

## Retirement

People find that they have a lot more free time when they retire. Relationships with partners and children often change during retirement. Remember this means an adjustment for both you and your family.

Whatever you do, many older people find it is important to:

- **keep up or develop new interests**
- **stay active or become more active**
- **develop a regular structure to your day**

It is easy to underestimate the impact of retirement. It may be that your work was central to your life. It may have provided a structure and a sense of purpose to your day - and perhaps a social network. It is normal to experience mixed feelings about retirement.

It may be something you looked forward to, or you may feel rejected or sad that you are leaving an environment you have become used to.

For some people, retirement can affect their relationships. Many people worry about having enough money to live on and the financial challenges that retirement may bring.

## Bereavement

As you get older, you are likely to have experienced the loss of people close to you over the years – like friends, family, maybe even a partner.

Losing someone close to you is painful at any time in our lives, but, when you grow older, you are likely to feel more vulnerable and less able to cope and move on than if you were younger.

Grief affects us in many ways and it is a normal response when we lose someone close to us. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Remember:

- **there will be good days and some bad days – it's okay to enjoy the days that are good and to do things that you enjoy**
- **keep in touch with your family, friends and other social locations and activities that have been important to you**

The most important factor in healing from a loss is having the support of other people. It is always important to talk about your feelings when you are grieving.

Try:

- Talking to others who knew the person, as this can often help.
- Reaching out to others that understand your grieving – this can make you feel better, less alone with your pain and help you heal.
- Finding support from your community, family doctor or your local bereavement support services (see more at [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)).

## **Changes in activity levels**

As you grow older, you may see a change in your physical health and in your ability to take part in normal daily activities.

Some people may also develop a chronic health condition, such as diabetes or heart disease. They often manage these conditions by living a healthy lifestyle and or using medication, but it can be stressful and lonely.

If you feel like this, talk with your doctor or your public health nurse – they will have tips to increase your activity levels safely.

## **Moving from home to care**

While many people continue to live in their own homes when they grow older, the possibility of having to move into a family member's home or into increased care is something some people have to consider. Sometimes this can be very stressful. It can be difficult to know what your options are, where to find information and who to trust.

Anyone who uses health and social care services has the right to control their own lives and the right to make informed decisions on matters that relate to them. Therefore, make sure all of your options are fully explained to you in a way that is understandable for you.

It is important that you are supported in making any decisions about your own living arrangements and feel respected in the decision-making process throughout.



Before you move:

- be involved in the decision-making as much as possible
- visit the new place where you will be living
- meet the other residents and become familiar with the staff and the environment
- make a plan for your move
- make a list of who you should contact to tell them about your move, including the post office, utility services, and your friends and neighbours.

After you move:

- give yourself time to settle into a new environment, and surround yourself with your belongings, photos of family or favourite books
- keep in contact with your family and friends and remember to tell people how you are feeling at this time.

## 2. Mental health – how to look after it

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We all need to look after our mental health, and just like physical health, it needs to be maintained.

The following are some ways you can look after your mental health:

- **Keep active**

Regular exercise can really give your mental health a boost. For example, a walk every day can make a big difference. See more at [www.healthyireland.ie](http://www.healthyireland.ie).

- **Accept yourself**

Everyone is different and is entitled to respect. Many different things, including your background, race, religion and sexual identity, make you who you are.

- **Eat and sleep well**

Having a balanced diet and a good sleep pattern will not only help the way you feel, but it will also help the way you think. Good food and regular sleep are essential for your mind and body to work properly. See more at [www.healthyireland.ie](http://www.healthyireland.ie).

- **Drink less alcohol**

Avoiding too much alcohol is important, especially if you're feeling down or worried.

Drinking alcohol will not help you deal with problems in the long term. Alcohol is a depressant, and overdoing it can increase anxiety and lead to depression. See more at [www.askaboutalcohol.ie](http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie).

- **Do something you enjoy**

Setting aside some time to do something you enjoy, especially if you are not feeling great, will help you feel better. For example, doing creative activities can help when you are anxious or low.

- **Stay in touch**

Trusted friends and family are important, especially at difficult times. You do not have to face things on your own. It is good to keep in contact or reconnect with someone close.

- **Talk about it**

Problems feel smaller when they are shared with others. Talking about feelings is a good way to deal with a problem. It can help you feel less isolated or overwhelmed.

- **Ask for help**

Asking for help is not a weakness but a sign of personal strength. Everyone needs help from time to time and there's nothing wrong with asking for it. See more at [www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie).

### **3. Mental health – what to watch out for**

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Everyone can feel alone, angry, tired or withdrawn from time to time. These feelings are normal and usually pass. However, if they become overwhelming or don't go away they could be signs of a mental health problem.

Other signs of a mental health problem are:

- **Feelings of sadness or hopelessness**
- **Excessive and undue worry**
- **Significant mood changes**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Changes in appetite or eating habits**
- **Changes in sleeping patterns**
- **Feeling tired all the time**
- **Withdrawal from friends and family**
- **Not caring about other things that are normally important**
- **Problems functioning, paying attention or staying focused**

If you are experiencing some of these signs, it is important to get support. Support can range from informal support from friends or family to advice from your GP.

## **Self-harm and suicide**

Sometimes, more distressing problems can appear permanent and it can seem that things will never get better. Self-harm is used by some people as a way to try to escape from or deal with pain or stress that they cannot tolerate in their lives.

Some people also have thoughts of suicide. If you are having these thoughts, you need help and support to deal with whatever is causing you to feel this way. Most problems have a solution, but sometimes, because you are feeling so low, you can't see it.

You are not alone and there are people who can help you to work through your problems, no matter how difficult they appear to you.

## Who to contact if you need urgent help

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Contact your GP, or an 'out-of-hours' GP

see [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

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Contact Samaritans 24/7 on freephone 116 123 or email: [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)

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Contact Text50808, a free 24/7 crisis text service, by texting HELLO to 50808

see [www.text50808.ie](http://www.text50808.ie)

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Go to, or contact, the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital

see [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

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Call the emergency services on 112 or 999

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*If you are being supported by a mental health team, or have been in the past, contact the service for support in a crisis.*

For telephone support,  
contact **SeniorLine**  
(open from 10am to 10pm)  
on 1800 804 591  
**[www.thirdageireland.ie/  
seniorline](http://www.thirdageireland.ie/seniorline)**

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Get in touch with **Alone**  
on 0818 222 024 for a  
range of befriending  
and support services  
**[www.alone.ie](http://www.alone.ie)**

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Call the **Family Carers  
Ireland** Careline on  
1800 240 724 -  
confidential support  
for Carers  
**[www.familycarers.ie](http://www.familycarers.ie)**

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Information | Support | Services

**1800 111 888**

Visit **[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)** for information and support services for your mental health and wellbeing.

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This leaflet is available to order on **[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)** and has been produced by;

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