Living life to the full in West Kent
Introduction

Thank you for picking up this booklet. It contains information and contacts within West Kent to help you to enjoy living your life to the full as you get older. There's advice and contact details should you need further support.

Many people find that life gets better as they get older because they finally have the time to do things they have wanted to do in the past but were too busy.

A positive attitude to life means taking the time and effort to do the things you enjoy, keeping as healthy and active as possible and making the most of what's on offer.

Older people are staying healthier and more active now. Although for some this may not be possible, there are still things you can do to maintain your health and independence and this booklet gives you helpful ideas and suggestions.

You may want to make the most of leisure activities in your area, plan a new career, take up a new hobby or study. You could contribute to the work of the community via Kent Adult Social Services, West Kent NHS, your local Borough or District Council or voluntary organisations. All contact numbers are included in this booklet.

Whether you live in a town, village or a rural setting West Kent is enriched by a diverse cultural society. It does not need to cost you money to enjoy the many beautiful parks and gardens that the public can visit free of charge or places of interest or reference like your local library.

We hope that you enjoy reading this booklet and find it useful.

We welcome your views, comments and suggestions.

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• Make the most of the time retirement brings
• You’re entitled to have fun!
• Use the internet

What’s on offer
There are plenty of things to do that are free or cost very little. Your local library should have information about places of interest, events and groups you might like to join. There are websites aimed specifically at older people, such as age-net (see weblinks opposite).

KentARA is an association for any retired or semi-retired person that lives in Kent. A wide range of social activities are arranged by the local clubs across the County (visit www.kentara.co.uk).

Local services
Local organisations, including those which are culturally specific offer help and advice. If you find it hard to get out ... local organisations can help. If you’re active and keen to help others, volunteering can be stimulating and rewarding.

Join your local Older People’s Forum
There are Older People’s Forums in Dartford, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells and Neighbourhood Forums in Gravesend. There is also a Forum planned for Tonbridge. There are forums across the County (visit www.kentara.co.uk).

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Contacting local organisations
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• Kent Connects
• Voluntary Action West Kent
• Volunteering
• North West Kent Council for Voluntary Service
• The University of the Third Age (U3A)
• First Stop Advice Line
• Maidstone Gateway
• Tunbridge Wells Gateway
• Tonbridge Gateway
• Health Network

WEBLINKS
www.kentconnects.com  •  www.kentara.co.uk  •  www.age-net.co.uk  •  www.silversurfers.net  •  www.seniority.co.uk  •  www.u3a.org.uk  •  www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk

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Choosing retirement

doing what you want to do

- Discuss whether there's a mandatory retirement age at your workplace or options for flexible retirement
- Think about the benefits of retirement
- Retirement is a major life change - plan for it
- Consider finding a new job - working life doesn't stop at retirement - you may wish to seek a new direction to working life
- Volunteering - giving some time to help others

Planning

A sudden change to your pattern of life can be very daunting. Make sure you plan ahead, so that retirement is something you look forward to. If you have the choice to continue working or to retire, there are a few factors you may want to consider before deciding.

Retirement can be a time of fresh opportunities. You'll have more time to spend with your friends and family. You can pick up old hobbies or take up new interests. It's a time when you can finally relax and do what you really want to do. This can also be a time of major change in your life - your income is likely to drop; you and your spouse or partner may also have to adjust to having more free time together.

Continuing to work

If you are drawing a pension, you may not want to give up a job you enjoy. Many companies see the benefits of having an older workforce. You may wish to find another job with fewer hours and less responsibility. There are many organisations that can give you help and advice.

Voluntary work

If you devote a little time to helping the local community you'll be surprised at the rewards it can bring.

It doesn't matter what age you are or whether you are employed, unemployed, retired or at home. If you're currently out of work you can use volunteering as a stepping stone, gaining work experience, updating your CV and references.

Voluntary work is very flexible and can be tailored to suit the time you can give. Volunteers can claim out of pocket expenses that don't affect their benefits.

Your local Volunteer Centre will help you identify the type of volunteering that best suits you so that you make the most of your volunteering experience.

Alternatively visit www.do-it.org.uk where you can explore volunteering opportunities.

Money management

You may wish to seek financial advice about the options available to you and the implications of different retirement options.

Information on what's available to you from the State, and on financial choices you can make to prepare for retirement, is available from The Pension Service (see Contacts). A booklet 'Pensions: the basics - a guide from the Government' is also available from this source.

If you're a member of a company or private pension scheme then you can also seek information from your pension provider about your pension position when you retire. See Knowing what you're entitled to page for further information on benefits advice.
Awareness
Don’t let age be a barrier to learning something new, or taking up an old hobby. Most people find that the more their days are filled with doing things that interest them, the more they remain active.

Action
There are many ways to learn. Your local library will have information about local activities and courses. You can check the West Kent Community Information Service - either by asking for the hard copy at your local library or by looking on the website. You can also check local and national newspapers. Or log on to the learndirect or BBC websites for advice on online learning.

Talk to
Phone or visit your local adult education or community college for advice and information, or ask at your library or local Council office.

Prevention
Keeping your mind active can help reduce the risk of conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease and depression, as well as helping you to get out and about and make new friends.

WEBLINKS
- www.kentadulteducation.co.uk
- www.niace.org.uk
- www.kent.gov.uk/libs
- www.learndirect.co.uk
- www.wea.org.uk
- www.open.ac.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk

The computer course the library ran was excellent - now I feel confident e-mailing my grandchildren in Canada. Just being able to keep in touch more easily has made a big difference to me.

Contacts
• Kent Adult Education
  0845 606 5606
• Niace - Promoting Adult Learning
  0116 204 4200/4201
• Kent Innovation & Enterprise - University of Kent
  01227 827276 or 01634 888873
• Pennlight Kent - Regional Guide to Learning
  0800 100 900
• Library Information
  01622 696438
• Online Library Information
  01622 696438
• Learn Direct
  0800 101 901
• Basic Skills Agency
  0800 700 987
• The University of the Third Age (U3A)
  020 8466 6139

Lifelong learning
join the learning revolution

- Learning will keep you mentally active
- Gaining knowledge will keep you interested - and interesting!
- Learn at home, college, library or community centre
- Classes give you the opportunity to make new friends

Don’t let age be a barrier to getting as much as you can out of life. The old saying that ‘it’s never too late to learn’ is true - many people in their 60s, 70s and 80s are taking courses and gaining degrees. But remaining mentally active doesn’t mean having to sit exams. Taking up chess, doing the crossword puzzle or reading can be equally stimulating.

Choosing what to do
There are many activities and courses available, you have to choose what you would like to do. Take into account your interests, skills and budget and then find out what’s on offer.

Where to look
Your local library is a good source of information and will have leaflets and directories about local activities. Local newspapers will also list activities or events going on in your area. Contact your community or adult education college or the Open University for advice and information on what courses may suit you.

The Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in the UK are autonomous, self-help organisations run by the voluntary efforts of their members. U3A aims to encourage and enable older people, no longer in full-time paid employment, to help each other to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experiences. To find out more please call the national telephone number on the contacts page or details of your local U3A group will be available from your local library.

There’s a mobile library service across West Kent. A Home Library Service operates for people unable to visit a library due to frailty or disability. Care homes, day centres and other groups can borrow reminiscence material and books on activities. If you prefer audio there are audio books on tape or CD. Libraries are also a good source of information for people who want to find out more about local or family history. They also provide free access to computers.

You can access the library catalogue remotely from a computer - library staff will give you a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to do this. You can reserve and renew books online as well as look at online databases.

There’s a wide range of activities available through Kent Adult Education, call 0845 606 5606 for more information.

Exercising our minds as well as our bodies is important. By learning a language or playing bridge, you’re keeping mentally active. This can help keep you mentally healthy for longer. If you’re going out to a class or centre, you’ll also be meeting new people and making new friends, which is stimulating in itself. You’ll probably find you have lots in common with other people you’ll meet as your interests will be similar.
Awareness
Growing older doesn’t have to mean you become less able. The more aware you are of keeping physically and mentally active the more you can reduce the risk of health problems.

Action
Find a form of exercise that suits you - if you don’t want to exercise as part of a group, think about walking or swimming. Brighter Futures for Older People have exercise schemes in Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks and Maidstone. Please contact your local Council or sports centre for further information. Taking up activities that keep you mentally stimulated, such as chess or bingo, will not only keep your brain active, but will help you to meet new friends.

Talk to
Organisations in West Kent run a number of classes aimed at the 50+ age group. Your local Council will be able to... to talk to your doctor or practice nurse before you begin, or ask your doctor about local ‘exercise referral’ schemes.

Prevention
Enjoying mental and physical activities can help reduce the risk of many conditions, such as Alzheimer’s disease, osteoporosis and depression, as well as helping you to get out and about and make new friends.

WEBLINKS
• www.kent.gov.uk/socialcare
• www.thegrand.org.uk
• www.ageconcern.org.uk
• www.stedmundsdartford.org.uk
• www.age-net.co.uk
• www.seniority.co.uk
• www.taichifinder.co.uk/local/seach.html

Contacts
• Kent County Council
  Social Care & Health
  08458 247 100
• Kent Connects
  Information
  01622 694180
• The Gr@nd - Healthy
  Living in Gravesend
  01474 320123
• St Edmunds Church,
  Living Well Centre
  01322 311201
• British Heart
  Foundation Cardiac
  courses
  020 7554 0000
• Heart Helpline
  0300 330 3311
• Age Concern
  0800 09 99 66
• Your local library is a
  good place to find out
  about local courses
  08458 247202
• Kent Adult Education
  0845 606 5606

Research shows that many of us are too inactive to benefit our health, but age shouldn’t be a barrier to being physically and mentally healthy. There are many things you can do to exercise both your body and mind. Research also highlights the benefits of maintaining emotional well-being by being physically and mentally active.

The benefits of physical activity
Keeping physically active has a huge number of benefits. It helps to reduce the risk of diabetes, heart disease and strokes. It strengthens your muscles, aids mobility, encourages a healthy appetite, regular bowel movements and a good sleeping routine. It can reduce the risk of falls, osteoporosis, stress and depression. It stimulates the brain, keeping brain cells alert.

The recommended daily amount of physical exercise for adults is 30 minutes of activity that makes you breathe a little harder than normal. Remember this can be broken down into several 10 minute blocks throughout the day and it’s a good idea to build up gradually.

Organisations like Age Concern can tell you about planned healthy walks, Tai Chi courses, keep fit and seated exercise classes. Physical activity doesn’t mean having to join a gym. You could take up a dance class, walk to the shops instead of taking the bus, or tackle the garden, all of which will be keeping your muscles toned and your joints supple. Even if you’re not able to be active when standing up, there are lots of seated exercises you can do. Don’t forget lots of local leisure centres offer a range of activities like swimming, water-based exercises or dancing, with opportunities to keep fit and make new friends. Exercise also gives you the ‘feel-good factor’ – making you feel fitter, more energetic and more likely to get out and meet people.

Keeping mentally stimulated
We all forget things sometimes but age doesn’t have to mean sinking into mental decline - the more you use your brain, the more mentally active you’ll remain. There are many classes such as IT courses, heritage studies, singing or craft activities available locally. For instance, you could take a computer training course aimed at over 50s or a Keep Fit 50+ course for beginners.

Exercising our minds as well as our bodies is important. Many activities help keep your brain mentally agile for example: crossword puzzles, chess, bingo, learning a language or taking a cookery course. Your local library is a good source of information (see Lifelong learning pages 8 and 9). You can also train your memory to some degree, for instance by making lists, or using certain ‘trigger’ words to jog your memory.

Just turning up at a local community centre and meeting new people may be all the mental stimulation you need. Check your local newspapers, village hall or community centre notice boards to see what’s going on in your area. It may seem daunting at first to go somewhere, or try something new, but you’ll be made to feel welcome. If you’re worried about language problems or fitting in with people from a different ethnic background, staff and volunteers will help you to feel comfortable.

You’re never too old to start something new
Physical activity gives you more energy
Contact local organisations to find out what’s on offer in West Kent
Get help to get motivated

Keeping well
a healthy mind and a healthy body
Looking after your health
making you feel better

- It's never too late to improve your health
- Know what medicines you are taking and what they do for you
- Have regular check-ups including eye tests and dental appointments
- If you're a smoker, giving up is the best thing you can do to improve your health

As a society we are living longer and we now have far more time to enjoy our retirement. It is important to remember that it's never too late to start to make changes to your lifestyle and routines in order to improve your health and well-being and ensure that your later years are not hampered by ill health.

General health
In order to be seen by a local doctor you need to register with a practice near your home. Contact your local practice in the first instance or call the Primary Care Support Service Team for a list and information on how to register.

A library near you may also have this information available.

Other health professionals, such as pharmacists, dentists, opticians, podiatrists (chiropractors) are also able to provide you with information and advice on health matters.

In West Kent there's a scheme called West Kent Care Call which is a telephone support service run by nurses. If you have a long-term condition such as asthma, diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or Cardiovascular Disease - they are able to support and advise about best treatment options, act as a personal health coach to tailor a programme for you and help with managing your condition. It's simple to access, just call freephone 0800 169 1824 between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday and between 8am and 1pm Saturday.

Stroke prevention
According to the Stroke Association every five minutes one person in the UK has a stroke. A stroke is when the blood supply to the brain is cut off, and can leave people paralysed, feeling weak on one side of the face and unable to talk. Having a healthy lifestyle is the best thing you can do to reduce your chances of having a stroke. If you're Asian, Black African or Caribbean you have a higher risk of stroke and diabetes so it is important that you contact your local NHS services who can help you keep well.

How's your diet?
If you're overweight, you are more likely to get high blood pressure, heart disease or diabetes. These illnesses make your chances of having a stroke greater. It's important to have a good balanced diet even if you're a healthy weight. Try to eat less saturated fat and more fresh fruit and vegetables.

Are you active?
Taking regular exercise helps your body stay healthy and it'll also make you feel better in yourself. Anything that gets your heart beating faster and leaves you slightly out of breath is great. So climb the stairs instead of using a lift, get off the bus a stop earlier and do some gardening or housework.

Do you smoke?
If you do, stop! You'll cut your risk of a stroke in half! Smoking raises your blood pressure and makes your arteries fur up, so it can lead to a stroke.
How much do you drink?
Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure, so if you’re a woman don’t drink more than three units a day, and if you’re a man don’t drink more than four units a day. Your doctor’s surgery will have further information about units.

How’s your blood pressure?
You might not know if you have high blood pressure, so it’s a good idea to get it checked regularly by your doctor.

Are you stressed?
Stress can also raise your blood pressure, so try to find out what’s making you feel stressed and get some help.

What are the symptoms?
To help people recognise the symptoms of a stroke quickly, the Stroke Association has funded research into FAST — the Face Arm Speech Test. FAST requires an assessment of three specific symptoms of a stroke.

Facial weakness - can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye dropped?
Arm weakness - can the person raise both arms?
Speech problems - can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?

Time to call 999.
Signs of a stroke appear suddenly - a stroke is an emergency so if you see the signs of a stroke act FAST and call 999. Early treatment saves lives and increases the chance of a better recovery.

The benefits of quitting smoking
It’s never too late to stop smoking! Giving up smoking increases your chances of living a healthier and longer life. Once you’ve stopped, your body begins to repair the damage and you start to feel the benefits. Your health improves, you feel better and you have more money to spend on other things.

The local NHS Stop Smoking Service can help you. It offers group or individual support and advice on treatments such as nicotine patches, gum and other stop-smoking aids. You are four times more likely to quit smoking if you quit it regularly with the help of your doctor.

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Ageing feet
Footcare is one of the most important aspects of personal healthcare whatever your age. However, painful and uncomfortable feet needn’t simply be something to ‘put up with’ as we grow older.

If you experience any pain sometimes it is mostly likely to be from foot problems. It is important to seek prompt treatment, particularly if you have diabetes. People suffering from diabetes often suffer from poor circulation and loss of sensation in their feet, meaning the problems may go unnoticed until they examine their feet regularly. You may prefer to visit a private registered podiatrist (chiropractor) for information, advice and/or treatment. Contact the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists to find one near you (see Contexts).

Arthritis
Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Cartilage (connective tissue) between the bones gradually wastes away and this can lead to painful rubbing of bone on bone in joints, most commonly in the hands, spine, knees and hips.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a more severe but less common condition. The body’s immune system attacks and destroys the joint, causing pain and swelling. It can lead to reduction of movement and the breakdown of bone and cartilage.

Arthritis can be life changing but there are many ways that can help you manage your condition and lead a full and active life.

• Weight-bearing exercises such as walking will help to prevent osteoarthritis by increasing the strength of the muscles that support your joints.

• Good posture can strengthen healthy joint structures.

• If you’re overweight, try to control your weight to ease pressure on your joints.

• Physiotherapy and use of a walking stick or cane can help prevent worsening of existing conditions.

Medicines
Your high street pharmacist will be able to advise you on a range of medicines and remedies for everyday illnesses. You don’t need to make an appointment and advice and information will be provided free of charge.

Medicines reviews
Many of us rely on medicine to keep us fit and well. If you’re taking a number of different medicines it can be difficult to remember what each one is for and when to take them. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions or need help with your medicines.

If you’re taking regular prescription medicines or suffer from a long-term illness you should have a regular review of your medicines at least once a year.

The review may be carried out by a pharmacist, a doctor or a nurse. It will give you the opportunity to ask questions, talk about anything that is worrying you and explain how your medicines are working for you. Ask for a leaflet at your doctor’s surgery or the local pharmacy.

Repeat dispensing
Ask your doctor or pharmacist about ‘Repeat Dispensing’ if you are taking regular medicines. You may be able to collect monthly supplies of your medicine from your local pharmacy without needing to obtain a repeat prescription from your doctor each time.

Remember to only order the medicines you are taking and tell your doctor or pharmacist if you’ve stopped taking any of your medicines. Check the expiry dates on the medicines that you have in your cupboards. Just like foods, medicines should not be taken after the use-by date. Return any out-of-date or unused medicines to your pharmacist.

Repetition of medicines
Regular dental check-ups are very important, even if you have no natural teeth. Your dentist will tell you how often you should go, and this may be anywhere between six months and two years. If you’re on a low income or receiving certain benefits you may be entitled to free treatment. Always check the cost of treatment in advance, as it may be expensive. NHS Direct can provide details of dentists in your local area.

For urgent dental treatment call DentLine 01634 990300.

Hearing
Unfortunately a hearing loss at any age can have a huge impact on personal, social and working lives if it’s not dealt with. Research shows that people sometimes wait up to 15 years between the onset of hearing loss and seeking advice about it. However, it can be better to find out about hearing aids sooner rather than later as getting used to amplified sound is harder if you’ve already got used to a ‘quieter world’.

If you think you may have some hearing impairment you should visit your doctor as soon as possible. Your doctor may do some simple tests, such as asking you to cover one ear, then speaking at different levels or using a hand-held sound generator, to see how you respond to sounds at different volumes.

Your doctor may refer you to an Audiology (ENT) specialist or (particularly if you’re over 60) an Audiologist, who will test you further to determine the cause of your hearing loss and work with you to find the best possible treatment. You may have to wait a few weeks for your first appointment. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) hearing check line is a quick and easy way for people to take action to deal with a potential hearing problem.

Your hormones
One of the female hormones is oestrogen and in younger women production of this hormone plays an important role in maintaining bone strength.

Once women reach the menopause, oestrogen levels drop and this protective factor is lost. Although women are more likely to have osteoporosis, men can also have it, especially if they have low levels of the male hormone, testosterone. Bone mass also decreases as we get older and in some people it may be very low.

This can mean that they have osteoporosis and are at risk of fractured bones if they have a fall. Keeping physically active can help to maintain bone and muscle strength. Eating healthily is also important to include foods with calcium and vitamin D in your diet, such as dairy foods, sardines, soy products and green leafy vegetables. If you’ve had a fall or a bone fracture, speak to your doctor, who will advise if you need extra calcium and vitamin D.
Awareness

As you get older it becomes more important to know your limit and stick to it. Alcohol can help us ‘wind down’. However if it’s used as a remedy to mask an underlying problem then it’s likely that the frequency and amounts will increase.

If you take drugs - illegal or over the counter - you need to be aware that natural ageing processes can lead to additional risks, even from drugs you may have been taking for some time. There’s no shame in seeking help to address these problems.

Action

Follow the recommended guidelines for sensible drinking. For example, never drink alcohol on an empty stomach. The best option may be to stop drinking altogether. Illegal drugs are often highlighted as dangerous, but using prescribed drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and buying drugs over the internet, also carry risks.

Talk to

If you’re worried about your own, or someone else’s drinking or drug use, confidential advice and support is available (see Contacts). It’s usually a good idea to talk to your doctor first as they can refer you on to specialist services.

Prevention

Drinking sensibly will allow you to continue to enjoy alcohol but also to stay safe and healthy. Try to avoid using alcohol with any drugs - especially illegal drugs - or medicines. Always check with your doctor if it’s safe to drink alcohol with prescribed drugs.

Contacts

• Speak to your doctor or practice nurse
• Action for Change (for difficulties with alcohol, free & confidential) 01424 460066
• Drinkline 0800 917 8282
• Alcoholics Anonymous 0845 769 7535
• Al-Anon (for families & friends of alcoholics) 020 7470 0888
• ADFAM (helpline for families & friends of drug users) 020 7470 7553
• National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247
• Oasis (Domestic Violence Helpline - covers Kent) 01702 300006

WEBLINKS


Alcohol and drugs

useful things to know

• Follow the recommended guidelines for sensible drinking
• Talk to your doctor if you’re concerned about your own or someone else’s drinking
• Keep a note of all medicines or remedies you take regularly
• Avoid buying medicines, preparations or remedies over the internet

Reducing the risk of harm

Many people enjoy drinking alcohol and sensible moderate drinking will probably not harm you. One unit of alcohol is the equivalent of one pub measure of spirits, a half pint of lager, a small glass of wine or a small sherry. However, the measures that you pour at home are likely to be larger than pub measures, and therefore contain more units of alcohol.

It’s recommended that men should drink no more than four units a day and women no more than three. Try to have one alcohol-free day a week. Drinking more than this can lead to significant health problems.

As we get older we feel the effects of alcohol more quickly, and our ability to process alcohol decreases with age. One reason for this is that the water content of our body decreases, so any alcohol we drink will be more concentrated in our bodies. For example if you’re driving you may reach the legal limit more quickly as you get older.

Whenever a doctor, nurse or pharmacist recommends a medication you should tell them what you take already so they can explore the possibility of interactions. When taking any kind of drug or medicine check that it’s safe for you to drive or handle machinery.

What are the long-term effects of alcohol and drug taking?

As with alcohol, drugs can be misused when they are taken regularly without trying to address the underlying problem. Short-term effects of taking medicines or drugs without medical supervision can be falls, low mood, confusion, apathy and poor appetite. Long-term effects may include ulcers, nutrition deficiency, organ failure and depression. Illegal drugs carry additional risks.

Can I drink when I am taking medication?

Many tablets and medicines cause problems with alcohol and you may need to stop drinking altogether. Paracetamol and sleeping tablets are particularly affected by alcohol. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking medicine if you are taking medication.

If you feel you need help please contact your doctor or one of the agencies listed in the contacts section.

Worried about the drinking or drug-taking of a friend or relative?

You may be worried that someone close to you is drinking too much or misusing drugs. This may make you feel alone, angry or ashamed.

Sometimes, having someone in the family who is drinking or misusing drugs causes problems such as arguments, physical fights or problems with money. If this is the case you may feel torn between loving the person and hating what they are doing to themselves and the family. People in this situation often find it very helpful to have someone who is outside the family to talk about their concerns or feelings.
Awareness
Many older people will be put off by language that appears to trivialise sex as 'for fun' outside the context of a loving relationship. You don’t have to lose your zest for life and sexual relationship just because you’re getting older.

Action
If you’ve lost intimacy between you, take time to explore all aspects of your relationship again. Remember, as long as you are both comfortable with it, it’s never too late to learn new ways!

Talk to
Talk to your spouse or partner if you feel you would like to re-energise your sexual relationship. You may be surprised by their response.

Prevention
Don’t let sexual problems prevent you from having an intimate relationship. Discuss your concerns with your doctor who will be able to advise you and discuss possible treatment.

WEBLINKS
www.ageconcern.org.uk
• www.nhs.uk
• www.gayindex.co.uk
• www.gaybritain.co.uk
• www.condomessentialwear.co.uk
• www.tht.org.uk
• www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/lesbian_gay_links.asp
• www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

I think my daughter would be shocked to know that I’m still interested in sex. But why shouldn’t I be? Just because I’m over 60 doesn’t mean I stop having those feelings and wanting to share my life with someone.

Contacts
• Intimate Relations: Living and Loving in Later Life by Dr Sarah Brewer. Available from Age Concern Books £19.99
• The New Love and Sex After 60 by Robert N. Butler and Myrna I. Lewis
• Relate
  01892 529927
• NHS Direct
  0845 4647

The younger generation often assume that sexual intimacy disappears once you reach 60. The truth is that desiring sex and having sexual relations doesn’t have to diminish as we get older.

The health benefits of sexual activity
There are many reasons why regular sex is good for you. In women it can increase blood oestrogen levels, helping to protect against coronary heart disease and osteoporosis, and helping to keep the pelvic floor muscles toned, reducing the risk of incontinence. In men, sex releases hormones which help strengthen bones and muscles, protect against heart disease and may relieve congestion in the prostate gland. For both sexes, in addition to the emotional benefits, it can be a great stress reliever, induce sleep and be fun!

Maintaining a relationship
When you’ve been with your spouse or partner for a great number of years, it can be easy to slip out of intimacy and into companionship. Good communication will help you to discuss ways of maintaining a close sexual relationship that suits both your needs. If you’re alone in your later years, socialising or taking up a new hobby can introduce you to people with similar interests. If you’re a lesbian or gay man there may be local groups you can join.

There are dating agencies that cater for older people, whether heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay or transgender – including anyone with a disability. Remember, safe sex isn’t just for younger people - Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) can affect anyone.

Your changing body
It’s an inevitable fact that, however young we feel inside, our bodies change physically as we age. Some people may find they have age related sexual problems. Men may find it more difficult to get and maintain an erection, while women may find lubrication a problem. Erectile dysfunction can be a sign of other health problems, so do speak to your doctor. These problems should not be just accepted as a part of growing older - your doctor can probably help you, so don’t be embarrassed to ask for advice.
When my bladder started to leak I thought it was something that I'd have to live with. Then I contacted my local continence service and realised that there was actually something that could be done to help me.

Contacts
• West Kent NHS Primary Care Trust 0800 0 850 850
• The Bladder & Bowel Foundation Nurse Helpline 0845 345 0165 Counsellor Helpline 0870 770 3246 General Enquiry 01536 533255
• Incontact 0870 770 3246

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Who can help?
You can ask your doctor or any Health Care Professional about referral to the Continence Service. You can also contact the Continence Service direct and make a self-referral.

What happens then?
A full continence service assessment will be carried out to obtain a clear history of your complaint. This may include a bladder scan, bladder diary and urinalysis. Following this a personalised treatment plan will be given to you and will be regularly reviewed.

What can you do to help yourself?
• Don’t go to the toilet just in case.
• Don’t hover over the toilet. Sit down properly.
• Reduce your intake of tea, coffee and fizzy drinks.
• Don’t stop drinking water.

Making you feel better
Do you have a problem?
Most people consider their toilet habits to be ‘normal’. But are they?
• Do you go to the toilet to pass urine 4-6 times each day?
• Do you have dry pants at all times?
• Do you pass 300-400mls of urine at a time? (A mug holds about 250mls)
• Do you pass urine easily, without straining or pain?
• Is your urine light in colour and odourless?
• Do you always make it to the toilet in time without having to rush?

Talk to
If you’re experiencing any problems with urinary or faecal incontinence you should contact your doctor or Continence Service. Many problems can be treated and in a lot of cases cured.

Prevention
Don’t let the problem continue, it’s important that you seek help. You can help yourself by thinking about what you drink. Cut back on tea, coffee and fizzy drinks. If you can change to decaffeinated drinks, this can make a big difference. Never go to the toilet ‘just in case’. Most importantly don’t stop drinking water.

Awareness
Around 5-9% of the adult population have significant problems with urinary incontinence and the majority of these could be successfully treated (DH Good Practice in Continence Service 2000). Urinary and faecal incontinence are common problems affecting both women and men of all ages.

Action
Is this a new problem? Is your urine dark in colour and/or smells offensive? Do you have any lower stomach or back pain? Does it hurt when you pass urine? If you have any of these symptoms consult your doctor as you may have a urinary infection. Have you been started on any new medications? If so ask your pharmacist or doctor if this could be a side effect.

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Awareness
If you feel you've lost confidence, haven't got the energy to go out, feel irritable, are sleeping badly, drinking more alcohol, and take little care over your appearance, you may be suffering from depression. If you're becoming more confused, forgetful or have sudden outbursts of emotion, you may be suffering from dementia. You should seek professional help.

Action
It may take time to realise that you're not behaving normally. Talk to family and friends. See if they have noticed any changes in your behaviour. Contact your doctor if you're worried.

Talk to
Discuss your concerns with your doctor, who will be able to assess you and advise you. Discuss any other symptoms you may have. Symptoms of dehydration and urinary infections can often be mistaken for symptoms of dementia.

Prevention
Get the support of family, friends and your doctor. The sooner you talk about any concerns, the more quickly you can be diagnosed, and treated if necessary, before the problem gets worse. If you're dealing with someone who has a mental health problem, talk to Rethink, who can offer help and support to carers.

WEBLINKS
- www.kent.gov.uk/socialcare
- www.alzheimers.org.uk
- www.samaritans.org.uk
- www.mind.org.uk
- www.rethink.org

Contacts
- Kent Adult Social Services 08458 247 247
- Alzheimer’s Society 020 7423 3500
- Dementia Helpline 0800 096 9000 (24 hour)
- Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 (24 hour)
- Mind info Line 0845 766 0163
- Rethink 0845 456 0455
- Mental Health Matters 0800 107 0160

I felt depressed after I retired and for weeks I hardly went out. But after a few months I realised things weren’t getting better, so I went to my doctor for help. It was difficult at first, but now I’m making the most of my life.

Keeping mentally healthy
Coping with change and new challenges
- Ageing doesn’t have to mean a decline in mental health
- Life changes can be positive
- Physical activity helps keep you mentally active
- Take steps to help prevent depression
- Make the most of growing older

Coping with life changes
There are many changes in life that can trigger anxiety, loss of confidence and depression, such as:
- Retirement.
- Bereavement.
- Loss of health or mobility.
- Moving home.

Retirement can lead to a loss of self-worth and not feeling an active member of society. The reduction in income can also force unwanted lifestyle changes. Bereavement is particularly hard to bear - not only have you lost a loved one, but your lifestyle may completely change.

A loss of health or mobility may mean getting out less or becoming more dependent on others. If you have to move home, for instance into a smaller flat or into a care home, you may find it hard to cope with the loss of friends and independence.

But there are steps you can take to help cope with these life changes (see Coping with loss page 30). Make sure you have other activities and hobbies in place when you retire, so that you're not suddenly faced with long, empty days. Use the support of family friends and local services if you're looking after a sick partner - you'll appreciate and need the support network especially if your partner dies. Keeping physically and mentally active will help reduce the risk of illness and disability. If you have to move home, try to stay within your local area, so that you can maintain contact with friends and family.

Looking after yourself
Physical activity is not only a good way of keeping healthy - it also helps to keep you mentally alert, and can help with stress and anxiety too.

A well-balanced diet is also vital to your health and well-being. This should include plenty of fruit and vegetables - remember tinned and frozen can be as good as fresh. Drink plenty of fresh water - especially in warm weather to keep yourself hydrated. Dehydration can cause dizziness and confusion. Make sure you get plenty of rest too.

Recognising there’s a problem
There are many factors that can lead to depression, such as bereavement, loneliness and ill health. Symptoms may include a loss of appetite, insomnia, weight loss, lack of motivation and little energy. It’s normal to feel one or two of these at any time, but if you’re affected by a combination of them, talk to your doctor about diagnosis and treatment.

Dementia or progressive brain dysfunction is a common concern for many as they grow older. Symptoms, such as forgetfulness, confusion, and emotional outbursts, may not be recognised as dementia at first, but will gradually worsen. If you think you, or your spouse or partner, is being affected by dementia, talk to your doctor (see Dementia page).

Remember suicide can affect older people as much as young people. If you’re concerned that someone is thinking of harming themselves, support and advice is available. As the carer of someone with a mental health condition you may be entitled to support yourself (see Caring for someone else page).
Dementia

forgetfulness doesn’t necessarily mean dementia

- Confusion or forgetfulness doesn’t mean someone has dementia
- If you’re worried see your doctor
- It’s important to have an early diagnosis to rule out any other condition that could be causing memory problems
- If you have a diagnosis of dementia you can continue to take an active part in the community and enjoy life

What is dementia?
Dementia is the progressive loss of the powers of the brain. There are many kinds of dementia but the most common are Alzheimer’s disease and vascular dementia and possibly a mixture of both. What all types of dementia have in common is that they damage and kill brain cells, so that the brain cannot work as well as it should.

What causes dementia?
Medical researchers all over the world are working to find causes and develop treatments. Alzheimer’s disease damages individual brain cells one by one, so that the brain can’t work as well as it used to. There may be a genetic factor in some cases of Alzheimer’s, but this does not mean that someone whose parent had Alzheimer’s will automatically develop the disease.

In the vascular dementias, there are problems with the blood supply to brain cells. For example, some people have tiny strokes (or infaricts) which damage small areas of the brain.

What are the symptoms?
Every person with dementia is different. How their illness affects them depends on which areas of their brain are most damaged.

One of the most common symptoms of dementia is memory loss. Most people’s memory gets worse as they get older but when someone has dementia they may forget the names of family members, they may burn pans because they have forgotten them or forget whether they have eaten lunch. They may repeat the same question again and again and not know they are doing it. They may lose their sense of time, which day it is or the time of day. They may forget where they are, or get lost even in a familiar place.

People with dementia may often be confused. Their ability to think can be damaged. They may make odd decisions, find it hard to solve problems and handling money may become difficult.

Dementia can also cause personality and behaviour changes.

What should I do if I’m worried?
Confusion or forgetfulness does not necessarily mean someone has dementia. Other conditions such as infections can cause similar problems, so see your doctor.

If your doctor finds no reason for the symptoms, they may want to refer you to the Mental Health Services for older people, who are the dementia specialists.

If you have a diagnosis of dementia you can continue to take an active part in the community and enjoy life.

I realised my memory wasn’t as good as it used to be, so I made an appointment with my doctor to find out why I was being so forgetful.

"
Caring for someone else

shifting responsibilities and adjusting roles

- Get support from family, friends and other carers
- Carers can ask for an assessment to determine what benefits and support you're entitled to
- Adjust to your changing role
- You're not alone - ask for help

Adjusting to the role of carer

If you’re looking after your spouse, partner, parent, friend or other relative because of age, sickness or disability, you are a carer. As you probably already know, becoming a carer can mean making major changes to your life and the life of the person you’re caring for. While some of these changes may bring their own rewards, others may take time to adapt to.

In becoming a carer you’ll be facing issues that you may not have had to deal with before. It can be hard to adjust to becoming a carer and someone being dependent on your support. An independent spouse or partner may now need constant attention, both physically and emotionally, and you may need to deal with problems such as confusion or loss of memory, incontinence and immobility. You may have been caring for a younger person, maybe a son or a daughter, for many years and are now finding it more difficult to cope.

You’ll also need to get used to other people’s new perceptions of you. Your spouse or partner, family, friends and new people you meet may see you solely as a carer, rather than the individual you always have been, or as a mother, father, wife or husband. Don’t be afraid to remind them you have your own hobbies and interests beyond caring. It’s important that you seek help in order to continue your previous activities.

Your role can often be a difficult one and it’s natural at times to feel resentment, anger or guilt. These are normal reactions to demanding circumstances, so don’t be too hard on yourself. Make the most of support from family, friends and local organisations. Take a break when you can – even a few minutes to yourself can sometimes help.

It’s often very stressful caring for someone else, however much you love them, and stress lowers your immune system, leaving you more susceptible to injury and illness. It’s important that you look after yourself as well as the person you’re caring for, which means eating a healthy, balanced diet and trying not to take on more than you can cope with. You should let your doctor know that you are a carer, so that they can support you in looking after your own health. Information is available locally to assist you in your caring role (see Contacts).
Making practical changes
Caring for someone may mean having to make some practical changes. You may need adaptations and improvements to your home to make life easier for both of you. This may mean simple adjustments, or more major changes such as installing a hoist over the bath, or making a home suitable for wheelchair access. In some cases it may be necessary to think about moving to a new home, more suited to your current needs.

Moving or handling the person you're caring for may be physically difficult for you and must be done correctly to prevent injury to yourself. Kent Adult Social Services can assist with sources of information and advice regarding equipment that may help. Households needing adaptations may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant from their local Council. Please see useful contacts and information at the back of this publication under your local area.

Assistance and benefits
As a carer, you are legally entitled to a Carer's Assessment to find out your needs and what services might be available to help you. You can have this at any time, even if the person you care for has refused an assessment or support services. The Carer's Assessment is an essential 'first step' in getting support services. Contact Kent Adult Social Services for more information.

Discussing how caring affects your life can be a valuable experience in its own right. It can also give you lots of information about other services that could help you, and other ideas for helping and supporting you as a carer.

There are also grants and benefits, in the form of allowances, which you or the person you're caring for may be entitled to, so it’s important to contact the Disability Benefits Enquiry Line or your local carers organisation, who will be able to advise you.

Care homes
If you, or the person you care for, are considering a care home or moving to more suitable accommodation, Kent Adult Social Services can advise you on quality, cost, and suitability for your needs even if you expect to bear the full cost yourself. You may also consider contacting the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 03000 616161 for detailed reports on care homes and other regulated care services.

Family life
It’s good to have the support of family and friends, so try to keep in touch, even if you live long distances apart.

Getting support
Carers often need support themselves, not only to help cope with the workload, but to deal with their own associated problems, such as stress and depression.

You may not label yourself a carer, and see it as your duty to look after a family member or friend. However, you may be entitled to support services that can greatly improve the quality of your life and that of the person you’re caring for. Use the contact numbers in this section to get in touch with local organisations who can advise you.

Carers breaks
Looking after yourself is important and sometimes you’ll need to take a break from your caring role. This might be to enjoy a hobby, catch up with friends or family or simply to have a rest. Having a change of scenery and making contact with other people can be enjoyable for the person you care for too. Breaks from caring can range from a few hours to several weeks and can include having a holiday with the person you care for but without having responsibility for providing care. Alternative care services can be provided in your home or away - contact your local carers organisation to find out more.

Kent Carers Emergency Card
If you spend time apart from the person you care for, even if it’s only for a few minutes, you may worry what will happen should you be taken ill or have an accident. Who will know that someone depends on you and how will they get the help they need? As a carer you can apply for an Emergency Card, which you would then carry in your purse or wallet. The emergency services know to look for this card and be alerted to your caring role. The card will have a 24 hour call centre number to ring and a unique identification number which will enable the call centre to activate a pre-arranged care plan for the person you care for. To find out more and to register contact your local carers organisation (Contacts listed on page 26).
Coping with loss

Your changing emotions

- Even an expected death can come as a shock
- Ask your funeral director for advice on arrangements
- Expect emotional mood swings, grieving takes time
- Look after yourself in your grief, get as much support as you can
- Help those closest to you by preparing legal matters and wills in advance

Your feelings

You may think you should be able to cope, especially if the death was expected, but you still find you can’t. You may think you’ve done all your grieving and then find you haven’t. You may think that having other people who care for you will make everything alright but it doesn’t – no one can fill the gap in your life. If other people were not aware of the nature of your relationship with the deceased you may feel excluded. Anger is a common part of grieving - anger at yourself, anger at the person who died, anger at friends and family and anger at the system.

Everything you took for granted has gone and you feel bereft and maybe worthless. You may feel you’ve nothing to look forward to.

Having someone to talk to will help. Allow yourself to express your feelings and talk about the person who has died.

Your life may indeed have changed. Your financial circumstances may be very different. You might be living by yourself for the first time. You might find that you have to manage tasks around the home that you’ve never had to do before. You may have no one to share memories or special jokes with.

Being practical

There are a number of practical things to be done following a death. If you can, ask a family member or friend to help out.

- A doctor will need to issue a death certificate.
- You should appoint a funeral director to make the arrangements. You may be entitled to help with funeral expenses.
- You must register the death within five days. You’ll need to take the death certificate with you to the Register Office.
- Tell family members, friends and colleagues.
- There may be organisations to notify too. If the deceased was receiving any welfare benefits then you should inform the benefits office. Other organisations to be informed include DfVA, the UK Passport Agency, Inland Revenue, and any bank or building societies. You may also need to contact their personal or occupational pension provider, insurance companies, mortgage provider, housing association or Council housing office, social care services, and utility suppliers. It can be upsetting to continue to receive post, especially junk mail, in the deceased person’s name. You may want to register the name and address of the deceased person with the Bereavement Register to alert people to stop receiving such post.
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There are a number of practical things to be done following a death. If you can, ask a family member or friend to help out.

- A doctor will need to issue a death certificate.
- You should appoint a funeral director to make the arrangements. You may be entitled to help with funeral expenses.
- You must register the death within five days. You’ll need to take the death certificate with you to the Register Office.
- Tell family members, friends and colleagues.
- There may be organisations to notify too. If the deceased was receiving any welfare benefits then you should inform the benefits office. Other organisations to be informed include DfVA, the UK Passport Agency, Inland Revenue, and any bank or building societies. You may also need to contact their personal or occupational pension provider, insurance companies, mortgage provider, housing association or Council housing office, social care services, and utility suppliers. It can be upsetting to continue to receive post, especially junk mail, in the deceased person’s name. You may want to register the name and address of the deceased person with the Bereavement Register to alert people to stop receiving such post.
- Even an expected death can come as a shock
- Ask your funeral director for advice on arrangements
- Expect emotional mood swings, grieving takes time
- Look after yourself in your grief, get as much support as you can
- Help those closest to you by preparing legal matters and wills in advance

Your feelings

You may think you should be able to cope, especially if the death was expected, but you still find you can’t. You may think you’ve done all your grieving and then find you haven’t. You may think that having other people who care for you will make everything alright but it doesn’t – no one can fill the gap in your life. If other people were not aware of the nature of your relationship with the deceased you may feel excluded. Anger is a common part of grieving - anger at yourself, anger at the person who died, anger at friends and family and anger at the system.

Everything you took for granted has gone and you feel bereft and maybe worthless. You may feel you’ve nothing to look forward to.

Having someone to talk to will help. Allow yourself to express your feelings and talk about the person who has died.

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Maintaining independence
dignity and choice

- You can maintain your independence at home
- Asking for support will help you to cope
- Many local organisations can help
- You may be entitled to payments to meet your needs
- Contact your doctor or district nurse to find out about community health services
- Consider whether you want to move to a smaller or sheltered property

Living in your own home, surrounded by possessions and years of personal history, is important to all of us. But looking after yourself and maintaining a home - cleaning, shopping and cooking - can become more difficult as age affects speed and mobility. That's why it's important to seek help early on. With regular support and assistance, you're more likely to be able to maintain your independence and enjoy life in the security of your own home.

Keep active!
The best way to maintain independence in your own home is by staying mentally and physically active. Get out and about as much as possible, meet friends, take up hobbies and eat healthy.

Accessing your needs
Kent Adult Social Services overall objective is to empower the people of Kent, to identify, choose and control the support or care they need to live safely and independently in their local communities. We are modernising our services so that:
- People can get the support they need, when they need it.
- Access is easier.
- People can choose the right support to live life as they want.

With the right support and assistance you're more likely to be able to maintain your independence and enjoy life in the security of your own home.

You may not want to choose support from social services, but instead, you may wish to choose support through a local community organisation or a leisure centre activity, which will meet your assessed need in a different way.

Getting the right services
There's a wide range of services that you may be eligible for. Kent Adult Social Services, your doctor and Primary Care Team, can provide services, either directly or by arranging for services to be provided by another organisation. Kent Adult Social Services do have to make a charge for their services. The actual cost will depend on your individual financial circumstances.

You may be offered an ‘Enablement Service’ which can support you to regain confidence and daily skills to maintain independence within your home. If you need further support you may be offered a direct payment. You can decide how to spend the money to get the service you need.

Home support
You may be offered help with personal care, such as bathing, dressing and some domestic tasks that you're finding difficult.

Contacts
Kent Adult Social Services
08458 247 247
West Kent Enable
01892 530330
Age Concern
0800 0 0 99 66
NHS Direct
0845 4647
Home Improvements Agency
Cluntyford & Gravesham
01474 568283
Midkent
01622 756462
Mid & West Kent
01732 355320
Bereavement Register
0870 600 7222

WEBLINKS
www.kent.gov.uk
www.westkentenable.org.uk
www.ageconcern.org.uk
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
www.emergencydirect.co.uk
Daytime activities

There are a variety of daytime activities across the county which offer the chance to meet other people outside your home, share activities and have a meal. To attend, you may have to be assessed as needing the service. It may be possible to have help with transport to and from the day centre.

Personal alarm schemes and assistive technology

If you live alone or find it difficult getting out and about, an alarm system gives you the security of knowing you can contact someone in an emergency. New developments have huge potential to support people to live in their own homes and to complement traditional care. Technology can provide you with more freedom and give carers more time to concentrate on the human aspects of support. There’s a range of equipment that might help you with everyday activities and help you to feel safer, without intruding into your independent life. Contact Kent Adult Social Services or your local Lifeline via Age Concern for further information.

Short breaks

If you’re a carer, or are being cared for by another person, respite care offers the chance of a short break. This could mean someone coming in to take over care in the home for a limited period, or having a short stay in a care home.

Meals at home

You can have meals delivered to your home if you’re having difficulty in cooking for yourself. Special diets and diets to meet your cultural needs can be catered for. Frozen meals can also be provided, so that you can defrost, heat and eat when you wish.

Other forms of help

If you’re finding it difficult to cope on your own, but don’t want to move, you may want to consider ‘live-in help’. Contact Kent Adult Social Services who can advise you on how to go about arranging this safely.

Direct Payments

The Direct Payments scheme means that, if you qualify for services, Kent Adult Social Services can give you money to arrange your own care and support. This enables you to choose the service you want for yourself.

Contacting your doctor

If you have any health problems, contact your local doctor. If necessary they can refer you to someone in the community health service, such as a district nurse or physiotherapist, community psychiatric nurse, or community pharmacist. Problems can often be solved by talking to your community pharmacist. Problems such as sore or broken skin can cause real difficulties in getting around, so don’t feel you are being a nuisance by asking for help with minor ailments. You can also contact NHS Direct 0845 4647, if you have a question about a health problem.

Keeping well in winter

It’s important to keep warm during cold weather. There are useful tips in leaflets from organisations like Help the Aged or from local ‘Keep Warm Keep Well’ campaigns. Details of this scheme are on the website www.dh.gov.uk or ask at Age Concern or your local Council.

Ask your doctor about the flu vaccination - if you’re over 65, or have a long-term medical condition such as asthma or diabetes. Flu can be a serious illness and older people are more susceptible to its effects. It’s important therefore to take the opportunity to be vaccinated each year.

You may be in receipt of benefits that qualify you to receive loft or cavity insulation. There are also national and local grant schemes that you may be able to access. For further information please contact www.ukenergytrust.co.uk or freephone 0800 512012.

Heatwave - be prepared

Make sure you know how to look after yourself and others if a heatwave occurs.

Why is a heatwave a problem?

The main risks are:

- Dehydration (not having enough water).
- Overheating can make symptoms worse for people with heart or breathing problems.
- Heat exhaustion.
- Heatstroke can make people very ill and can sometimes be fatal.

A heatwave can affect anyone, but most vulnerable are:

- Older people, especially those over 75.
- People with chronic conditions, i.e. heart or breathing problems.
- People with mobility problems.
- People with serious mental health problems.
- People on certain medication which may affect sweating and temperature control.
- People who misuse alcohol or drugs.

To reduce the risk:

- Avoid the heat. Stay out of the sun and plan ahead so you don’t go out between 11am and 3pm (the hottest part of the day).
- Avoid excessive physical activity, or do it later in the day.
- Keep rooms as cool as possible with shades or reflective material external to the glass, if this is not possible close pale coloured curtains.
- Metal blinds and dark curtains can make the room hotter.
- Keep windows closed while the room is cooler than it is outside. If safe to do so, open windows at night when the air is cooler.
- Have cool baths or showers and splash yourself with cool water.
- Drink water or fruit juice regularly, avoid alcohol, tea or coffee.
- Wear loose, cool clothing and a hat when outdoors.

Listen out for information on the radio or TV.

If an amber alert is issued, there’s a 60% chance that a heatwave will occur within the next few days. A red alert is issued when a heatwave is happening.

If someone feels unwell, get them somewhere cool to rest and give them plenty of fluids to drink.

Symptoms such as breathlessness, confusion, weakness, dizziness or cramps get worse or don’t go away, seek medical help.

Time in hospital

Whether you have to stay in hospital due to an accident, sudden illness or a planned admission, you’ll be asked for information about your home circumstances and how you managed at home previously. From the point of admission your hospital care team start planning for your discharge to ensure that, when you’re recovered and ready to be discharged, any support you need has been arranged. Ask ward staff for more information.

Adapting your home

There are all kinds of disability equipment available, such as grab rails, stair rails, rails in the bathroom or raised toilet seats. You may also want to get advice on altering your home. Contact Kent Adult Social Services who can direct you to sources of information and advice.

Householders may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant from their local Council.

Looking at alternatives

Consider a more suitable type of home if you’re struggling. There may come a time when you realise that your current home is no longer practical for you and should begin to consider the alternatives. See ‘Housing matters’ section on page 44 for options available.

Continuing health care

This is considered when a person has a long-standing illness, a severe disability, or a complex physical or mental health care problem. There’s specific national guidance on the eligibility for continuing health care. Following an assessment with input from all the people involved in your care, it will be decided if you’re eligible for continuing health care funding. If you meet the criteria, the necessary services will be paid for and arranged by the National Health Service.
Transport

staying mobile

● Free bus travel
● Dial-a-ride and community transport
● Blue Badge Parking Scheme
● Travelling to medical appointments

Bus travel
Many of the public bus routes are operated with easy-access, low-floor buses, reducing the height between the pavement and the bus entrance, which helps if you’ve a mobility problem. The buses have space for wheelchair passengers too.

Everyone who is over 60, or with an eligible disability, is entitled to a bus pass allowing free off-peak travel on local buses anywhere in England. You should contact your local District or Borough Council to apply for this.

Talk to
If you’re applying for a concessionary travel scheme or Blue Badge, ask whether you’ll need a mobility assessment or if your doctor needs to send information to support your application.

Rail travel
Many rail stations now have step-free access to platforms. For further information about rail accessibility contact National Rail Enquiries or visit their website both listed on the contacts page.

If you’re 60 or over, you can buy a Senior Railcard. You’ll save 1/3 on standard and first class rail fares throughout Great Britain for a whole year.

Blue Badge Parking Scheme
If you can’t walk very far you might be eligible for a blue car badge. You can use the badge whether you are a driver or a passenger. It means you can park nearer to your destination, and in restricted parking areas. Blue car badges are part of a nationally recognised disabled parking scheme but unfortunately cannot be issued for a temporary mobility problem. Contact Kent Adult Social Services to apply.

Travelling to medical appointments
Hospitals and doctor’s surgeries try to be flexible with the allocation of appointments where transport difficulties may arise. Do contact them if you’re having trouble arranging suitable transport. You may be entitled to further assistance, either financially or of a practical nature, to help you get to your appointment.

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Many of the public bus routes are operated with easy-access, low-floor buses, reducing the height between the pavement and the bus entrance, which helps if you’ve a mobility problem. The buses have space for wheelchair passengers too.

Everyone who is over 60, or with an eligible disability, is entitled to a bus pass allowing free off-peak travel on local buses anywhere in England. You should contact your local District or Borough Council to apply for this.

Talk to
If you’re applying for a concessionary travel scheme or Blue Badge, ask whether you’ll need a mobility assessment or if your doctor needs to send information to support your application.

Prevention
It can be isolating and depressing when you find it hard to get out and run daily errands or meet friends. The assisted transport services are there to help you - so find out now whether you are eligible.

Contacts
• Kent Adult Social Services 08458 247 247
• North West Kent Dial-a-ride 01622 605349
• National Rail Enquiries 08457 48 49 50
• Traveline Public Transport Information 0871 200 22 33
• Blue Badge Parking Scheme 01622 605020
• COMPAID Trust/Kent Karrier Dial-a-ride Services 01892 722297

WEBLINKS
• www.direct.gov.uk
• www.nationalrail.co.uk
• www.traveline.org.uk

Because I can’t drive any more, using buses around West Kent has opened up my whole life. I enjoy concessionary travel as well as the beautiful Kent countryside.

CONTACTS

Kent County Council co-ordinates a wide range of public transport services. This includes specialist transport for people with mobility difficulties. There are also many voluntary schemes operating in the county.

Action
Contact the numbers on this page and ask for details on the different schemes available. The sooner you find out the information you need, the sooner you can get out and about.

Talk to
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Prevention
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EMAI

transport@compaidtrust.org.uk

WEBLINK

www.direct.gov.uk • www.nationalrail.co.uk • www.traveline.org.uk
Awareness
You may have had the same bank or building society account for years, but feel you're not making the most from your money. Find out whether concessions are available and which account might best suit your circumstances.

Action
Get advice on what benefits you may be entitled to. Try Citizens Advice, Age Concern or The Pension, Disability and Carers Service. For personal finances contact your bank or building society, or use the services of an independent financial advisor.

Talk to
Discuss your personal finances with an independent financial advisor. If you're having problems with money take advice as soon as possible. The Citizens Advice is a good place to start. Their advice is free. Beware of people who charge for debt advice - it's rarely a good option.

Prevention
Get help and advice early before debts build up. Find cost-effective ways to make your money spread a little further. Take advantage of incentives like having the same supplier for your gas and electricity.

WEBLINKS
www.citizensadvice.org.uk
www.thepensionservice.gov.uk
www.nhfa.co.uk
www.direct.gov.uk
www.hmrc.gov.uk
www.taxaid.org.uk
www.publicguardian.gov.uk

I hadn’t updated my financial situation for years. But after getting advice, I realised I was missing out on some benefits and not making the most of my savings.

Contacts
• Citizens Advice: Dartford
  01322 224686
  Edenbridge
  01732 865131
  Gillingham
  01634 361239
  Maidstone
  01622 757882
  Sevenoaks
  01732 454443
  Sittingbourne
  01227 469494
  Tonbridge
  01732 330099
  Tunbridge Wells
  0844 499 4140
• The Pension Service
  0845 6060265
• Jobcentre Plus
  0800 055 6688
• National Home Fees
  Association (NHFA)
  0800 055 6688
• National Debtline
  0800 99 88 33
• National Debtline
  0808 808 4000

Looking after your finances
you’ve worked hard, so make your money work hard too

• Look at your personal finances closely - do a financial health check
• Know how to claim benefits, discounts and allowances, even with savings you may be entitled to some help
• Update your finances and get help with any debts
• Seek professional advice for your financial future

Don’t neglect personal finances
As you get older, your needs and priorities change. If you have savings, make sure that they are in the right place. If money is tight check that you’re claiming everything that you should. In fact check anyway - some benefits depend on age, health or other circumstances rather than on how much money you already have (see Knowing what you’re entitled to page for contact details on where to get help). If you’re concerned about debts of any amount or struggling to pay bills, help is available - contact your local Citizens Advice.

Insurance
Check that you are adequately insured for your car, home and contents. Can you get a better deal with a different insurer?

Utilities
Check to see whether you are getting the best deal from your telephone, gas and/or electricity company. Paying by direct debit may be cheaper.

Banking
Make sure that the bank accounts you hold are still the best for your changing needs. Don’t forget that your local Credit Union offers a range of saving schemes and low-cost loans. These are open to everyone but can be especially useful for people on a low income.

Income and outgoings
Income, savings, pensions and taxes are often inter-linked and changes to one can affect the others. As there are often new deals available, get advice on making the most of your money.

Getting advice
If necessary discuss your personal finances with a financial advisor. Banks and building societies have their own financial advisors, but you don’t have to take their advice. Alternatively, an independent financial advisor can give you advice but check their fees first. The Citizens Advice will help with any debt problems - it’s never too soon to contact them and they won’t charge you for help and advice.

Lasting Power of Attorney
This ensures that your wishes are carried out in the future should you be unable to take decisions for yourself. See Organising your will and legal matters page for information on setting up a lasting Power of Attorney.

Pre-paid funeral plans
There are many companies which offer a pre-paid funeral arranging service, it’s a simple way to provide for your funeral in advance. This will help to reduce the emotional and financial burden on your family and friends. It also means that you know that your wishes will be carried out after your death. Contact your local Citizens Advice for information and help.

Equity Release Schemes
Equity Release Schemes offer older homeowners the chance to get cash for some of the value of their home. Sometimes this will be a lump sum, but other schemes will give you regular payments. Before you participate in an Equity Release Scheme you must seek independent financial and legal advice to ensure that this is the best way to make your money work for you.
Awareness
Many older people are not claiming money they’re entitled to because they haven’t looked into whether they are eligible or not. Don’t miss out – even a small extra payment each week can make a big difference.

Action
The pension and benefits system can be very complex, so rather than trying to work out on your own what you may be entitled to, you should seek specialist advice. Your local Council or Gateway can also provide you with Citizens Advice contact details. Act now and get what you’re entitled to.

Talk to
It’s easy to quickly find out what benefits you may be entitled to, by contacting Age Concern or the Citizens Advice for a confidential discussion.

Prevention
You’re entitled to financial help and support. Many people find it difficult to make ends meet because they are not claiming the benefits they are entitled to. All you have to do is ask. Age Concern and Citizens Advice both provide benefit checks.

WEBLINKS
• www.westkentenable.org.uk
• www.adviceguide.org.uk
• www.direct.gov.uk
• www.thepensionservice.gov.uk
• www.ageconcern.org.uk

Contacts
• West Kent Enable
  01892 530330
• Citizens Advice: Dartford
  01322 224666
• Greenhead
  01474 361239
• Maidstone
  01622 757882
• Sevenoaks
  01732 454443
• Swindon
  01322 644949
• Tonbridge
  01732 350099
• Tunbridge Wells
  0844 499 4140
• Jobcentre Plus
  0800 055 6688
• The Pension Service
  0845 6060265
• Age Concern
  0800 00 99 66

I had a bit of money in the bank, so I didn’t think I would be entitled to anything. But I got assessed by the benefits advisor and now the little extra I get each month makes a big difference to my quality of life.

Don’t assume you’re not eligible for entitlements
Ask a benefits advisor to assess your financial situation
Don’t be embarrassed to ask for advice
You may still be entitled even if you have savings
Many older people are not claiming money they’re entitled to

You may be entitled to financial allowances if you need someone to help care for you, if you have a physical or mental disability, or if you’re a carer. At 60, you’ll also be entitled to other concessions, such as free or reduced price travel, and reduced price entry to leisure centres or adult education classes.

Attendance Allowance
This is a tax-free benefit for over 65s who have an illness or disability and need help with personal care. It is not affected by your savings. The money can be paid directly into an account of your choice. Getting Attendance Allowance may increase other benefits that you’re already getting. Inform your benefits office if your health changes.

Disability Living Allowance
This allowance can be claimed by people who need help in caring for themselves or in getting around because they are ill, disabled or terminally ill. You’re not eligible to make a new claim for Disability Living Allowance if you’re over 65. In this case you should claim Attendance Allowance instead.

Council Tax reductions
You’re entitled to a reduction of 25% in your Council Tax if you live alone. Some people who have dementia and some carers are also able to claim a reduction. You may also be able to claim a reduction to your bill if your home has been adapted for a disabled person.

There are many benefits, allowances, discounts and concessions you may be entitled to, even if you have personal savings. It’s important to try and work out what these are. Some benefits, such as Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Pension Credit, are based on your financial circumstances (but not the value of your home). Other benefits, such as the Winter Fuel Payment and Age Related Allowance, are based purely on your age. Others are based on your care needs, such as the Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance or Carer’s Allowance.

Over 60
You may be entitled to travel concessions from your District or Borough Council – please see useful contacts and information at the back of this booklet. If you receive Pension Credit you may also be able to get a refund on reasonable travel costs to hospital appointments. Contact organisations such as Age Concern, Citizens Advice and the Pension Service for advice.

Understanding your entitlements
While you may know that you’re eligible for some entitlements, there may be other benefits you’re unaware of, so ask your benefits advisor to check for you. These may include:
  • Pension Credit.
  • Winter Fuel Tax Credit (if you’ve not retired).
  • Housing Benefit.
  • Council Tax Benefit.
  • Social Fund (such as Winter Fuel Payments, or to help cover extra costs, such as paying for a funeral).
Organising your will and legal matters

Making your wishes known

- A will means that your wishes will be followed
- Make sure that your wishes are known
- Drawing up a will doesn't have to cost a lot
- Get financial help for legal matters
- A Living Will states your wishes for future treatment
- Organising your legal matters will help your family

Why make a will?
Even if you feel you don't have much to leave, it's important that what you do have is left to those you care about. If you don't make a will, this means you die 'intestate'. Your spouse or partner will be the main beneficiary unless stated otherwise. If you're not married to your partner they won't automatically be a beneficiary, so make arrangements in advance. The absence of a will causes lengthy delays so organise things in advance.

Other legal matters
Visit www.lawsociety.org.uk to find details of a suitable local solicitor. Some solicitors may have funding schemes to help with the cost. Remember to check in advance what fees will apply.

Making your wishes known
Age Concern provides a document that gives details on your wishes for funeral arrangements. It has spaces where you can fill in information so your family and friends understand your wishes after your death. This document should be given to a trusted family member for safe keeping. It can not be used as a will.

Call freephone 0800 00 99 66 and ask for the form headed ‘To my family, friends and executors…’

Living Will
A Living Will usually takes the form of a written statement setting out your advance wishes in agreeing to or refusing medical treatment. Living Wills can include general statements about your wishes which are not legally binding and specific refusals of treatment called ‘Advanced Decisions’. You can use an Advanced Decision to indicate your wish to refuse all or some forms of medical treatment if you lose mental capacity in the future. You cannot use it to request treatment. It must be signed whilst mentally competent.

Lasting Power of Attorney
A Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) is a legal document that lets you appoint someone you trust as an ‘attorney’ to make decisions on your behalf. It can be drawn up at any time while you have capacity but has no legal standing until it is registered with the Office of the Public Guardian. A registered LPA can be used at any time, whether you’ve the mental ability to act for yourself or not.

Partnership rights
If you and your partner are not married you should seek advice because different rules apply around:
- Bereavement and registration of death.
- Inheritance.
- ‘Next of kin’ status and incapacity.
- Pension provision.
- Tenancy.
- Wills and intestacy (if you die without leaving a will).

Organ donation
If you wish to become an organ donor call the NHS Organ Donor Line on 0845 60 60 400 (7am to 11pm).
Awareness
Many people think more about where they live as they grow older. Upkeep of the home can become a problem and there are grants available to help. Where we live has a great effect on the quality of our lives so it’s wise to look at all the options very carefully.

Action
Seek advice and information about alternative ways of remaining independent in your home, maintaining your home or moving to another home. Talk things through with family and friends, or someone you trust such as your doctor or social worker.

Talk to
Talk to your local Age Concern, Citizens Advice, Sheltered Housing Team or Housing Advice Centre. National organisations like Help the Aged, Council and the Elderly Accommodation Counsellor produce fact sheets and run helplines. Their advice includes renting and purchasing options. Council or housing association tenants can talk to their housing officer at their local neighbourhood office or Housing Association.

Prevention
It’s better to think ahead about your housing needs rather than making a decision in a crisis. Choosing where and how you live should be your decision and no one should try and persuade you to do something that you’re not sure about. If you’re facing the possibility of losing your home you should contact the housing advice team at your Council.

Contacts
• Kent Adult Social Services 08458 247 247
• Age Concern/Help the Aged 020 7278 1114
• Council & Care 0845 300 7585
• Kent Supporting People 0845 247 100
• Waterfront 0800 316 2814
• Elderly Accommodation Council 020 7820 1343
• Dartford Borough Council 01322 343343
• Gravesham Borough Council 01474 337000
• Maidstone Borough Council 01622 602000
• Sevenoaks District Council 01732 227000
• Swalecliff Town Council 01322 365855
• Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council 01732 845252
• Tonbridge Wells Borough Council 01892 665200
• Energy Saving Advice Service 0800 312012

WEBLINKS

I was worried I would have to leave my lovely home as I had no savings to repair it and make it safer and more comfortable for me to live in. But I found out that this needn’t be the case and was able to get a grant to help with the costs of some of the adaptations.

Home improvements
Your home may need repairs to be safer or more comfortable. If you’re a homeowner with savings, you’ll probably have to pay for these yourself. Your local Age Concern or Council can supply a list of tradespersons, or contact Consumer Direct. If you’re a homeowner getting means-tested benefits, or at least one person in the household is 60 or over has a long-term illness or disability, you may qualify for a grant. If you rent privately you may still get a grant for work you are responsible for Contact your Council’s Home Improvement or Housing Team.

Home Improvement Agencies
Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) provide advice, support and assistance to help older, disabled or vulnerable people repair, improve, maintain or adapt their own homes so they can remain living there independently and as safely and comfortably as possible.

When you contact the HIA, they will arrange to visit your home and carry out an assessment to find out what repairs or improvements you need. Guidance will be given on the best way to pay for the work. This could be through, for example, local authority grants, home energy efficiency grants, equity release schemes and loans, benefits, insurance claims or charitable sources. Once you have decided on the work, the HIA will prepare the drawings and specification for the work and then engage reputable builders to tender and compete for the work.

The type of work that can be carried out can include, for example:

• Repairs
  • Roof repairs.
  • Damp proofing and plastering.
  • Loft and other insulation.
  • Major structural repairs.
  • Central heating.
  • Electrical work.
  • Improvements to windows and doors.

• Adaptations
  • Stair lifts or through floor lifts.
  • Ramps.
  • Installing ground floor showers and toilets.
  • Extensions and en-suite facilities.
  • Moving electrical sockets and light switches to make them reachable.

A warmer home
The Warm Front Scheme provides grants to make homes (owned or privately-rented) warmer, healthier and more energy-efficient for people receiving benefits. If you don’t qualify for Warm Front your Council may offer energy-efficiency grants. If eligible, you could receive a grant of up to £3,500 (or £6,000 where oil, low carbon or renewal technologies are recommended). These grants help pay for a package of insulation and heating improvements, such as:

  • Loft insulation.
  • Damp proofing.
  • Cavity wall insulation.
  • Hot water tank insulation.
  • Gas, electric or oil central heating.
  • Glass fronted fire.

Repairs may be needed to make your home safer or more comfortable
• There may be grants available to help with the upkeep of your home
• Where we live has a great effect on the quality of our lives
• Choosing where and how you live should be your decision

Home matters
living where you want
An assessor will visit your home and ask to see proof of your benefits, discuss with you the energy efficiency options available to you under Warm Front, and recommend improvements based on the needs of your property. The visit will take no longer than one hour and will normally happen within 21 working days once they have approved your application.

Handyperson Schemes
There may be a Handyperson Scheme in your area to help with odd jobs for older and disabled homeowners or private tenants. Odd jobs can include, for example, replacing light bulbs, fitting plugs and fuses, putting up curtains and shelves. This is a low-cost service, or free if you receive benefits. Contact your local Home Improvement Agency (see Maintaining independence on page 32).

Disabled Facilities Grants
One of the grants available to help older or disabled people pay for the costs of adapting their homes is called a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). This is a means tested grant, (unless the applicant is aged under 18), which can be obtained from your local Council. Eligible work is wide-ranging, providing for access to the home and basic facilities within it; for example, providing ramps, door widening, stair lifts and level access showers. Anyone can apply whether they live in their own home, are privately renting or a Council or housing association tenant. Applications are considered upon a referral from an Occupational Therapist (OT) and your local Council can put you in touch with one. The assessment that the OT carries out will determine whether you have to make a contribution, if any towards the costs of the adaptations. The grant would then cover the remainder of the costs. The current maximum grant allowed per application is £30,000. Contact your local Council for more information.

Supporting People
This government programme pays for housing-related support to help you live independently in your own home, including sheltered housing. Supporting People can provide housing support to help you remain living in your home. The type of support that can be offered includes, for example:

- Budgeting and financial management.
- Setting up home and resettlement support.
- Understanding tenancy agreements.
- Life skills and being independent at home.
- Staying safe at home.
- How to access daytime activities, training, education and employment within a community.
- Finding a doctor and accessing other necessary services.
- Dealing with other agencies.
- Neighbour issues.

This service is free and available to regardless of whether you own your own home, rent privately, or are a Council or Housing Association tenant. Contact your local Lifeline, Housing office or the Supporting People Team.

Housing and homelessness advice
For impartial advice on housing and the options available to you, contact your local Council Housing Department.

If you think you may be threatened with homelessness, don’t leave things until it’s too late. Contact your local Council as soon as possible who will be able to offer you advice, and if eligible and in priority need, could provide you with housing assistance.

If you’re a Council and Housing Association tenant
You may be interested in swapping homes or moving to another area through a mutual exchange with another tenant. Check with your Council or Housing Association landlord about how this works. You can also take part in the national ‘HomeSwapper’ scheme (www.homeswapper.co.uk).

If your children have all left home now, you may be living on your own in a family sized property and be interested in downsizing to a smaller home. Many Council’s run schemes that offer cash incentive payments for releasing family sized properties in return for moving into a smaller home. Contact your local Council to find out if this is happening in your area.

Kent Homechoice
All the local Councils in Kent, together with Housing Associations, now advertise their homes for rent and people can bid for a property of their choice. This new system called Choice Based Lettings, means that for the first time people have an active role in choosing where they want to live. Visit www.kenthomechoice.org.uk or contact your Council for further details.

Extra care housing
These are self-contained flats offering 24 hour care and support on-site and usually some meals. Contact your local Housing Department about renting. The Elderly Accommodation Council can advise about purchase.

Care homes
Care homes provide 24 hour personal care and some provide nursing care. Kent Adult Social Services can advise you on quality, cost and suitability for your needs. Contact Kent Adult Social Services, Counsel and Care or Age Concern.

Housing options
You may be thinking about whether your current home is still suitable for you now or will be suitable in the future. Where you live should be your choice and there are many housing options available to you.

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Keeping yourself safe

Reducing the risks

- Secure your home so you feel safe - don’t let strangers in without identification
- Don’t buy from doorstep callers, get quotes for work on your home and use recommended contractors. Don’t part with money before any work has been satisfactorily completed
- Keep safe on the streets

Secure windows and doors

Make sure not to leave windows or doors unlocked when you are out or sleeping. Front and back doors should be fitted with five-knife mortice locks. If you like a window open at night, fit it with a lock so that it can only open a few inches. Locks should be fitted through one of the hardyperson schemes (operated by the Home Improvement Agencies - please see useful contacts and information at the back of this booklet) or by a qualified locksmith. Make sure you have a chain on your front door.

Bogus callers and doorstep sales

Sometimes people may try to gain entry to your property by pretending that they are from a reputable organisation. Always ask for identification and only let people into your house if they provide this. If in doubt, you can telephone their company to check. Don’t feel pressured into paying for things sold at the door. By law you must be given time to think about any purchase made on the doorstep. Ask for time before deciding. If work is carried out on your property don’t pay for repairs until the work is completed to your satisfaction. Get quotes and use recommended contractors. The ‘Buy with Confidence’ scheme can assist with this or contact your local Home Improvement Agency. If you’re dissatisfied with work that you’ve paid for call West Kent Trading Standards or Consumer Direct.

Out and about

In urban areas reduce your risk of an attack by sticking to busy routes where plenty of other people are about. Keep your house keys separate from other possessions so that if your bag is stolen the thief does not have your address and your keys. Also you’ll still be able to get into your home. Keep your bag with you and don’t leave it unattended: for example in a supermarket trolley. However, don’t fight any attempt to snatch your bag - you run the risk of harm or injury.

Peace of mind

Ensure your home contents for theft or fire. If you keep valuables at home take photographs of them so you have a record of what’s missing if you’re burgled. Marking your property with your postcode can deter burglars because it makes it harder for them to sell the goods. Your local police station can provide special pens and postcode stickers to deter potential thieves.

Don’t keep large sums of money at home and keep a list of credit cards and their emergency telephone numbers so you are able to inform the company if your cards are stolen.

If you’ve suffered a crime

Contact the Police immediately and give as many details as you can. If credit cards were stolen inform the relevant companies and if keys are missing change the locks. The Police can put you in contact with Victim Support. Keep your local Police number somewhere handy.

Almost all fires in the home can be prevented

To make your home safer and to help reduce deaths and casualties from fire in the home, Kent Fire and Rescue Service offers a free home safety visit. The visit involves home fire and safety advice from a Fire Officer and the installation of free smoke alarms, if required. The alarms have batteries that last up to ten years for added peace of mind. To arrange a free home safety visit telephone 0800 923 7000.
Awareness
As you get older, it's easier to fall and hurt yourself. Tell your doctor or nurse if you've had a fall as you may be at risk of having further falls. It's important to make an action plan of what to do if you should fall.

Action
Check to see how you can make your home safer, room by room. Install stair and handrails if necessary. Check loose carpets and make sure items that you use every day are within reach. Correctly fitting footwear can reduce the likelihood of a fall - check your footwear regularly, including slippers.

Talk to
If you're worried about getting help after falling, you may want to get a 'Community Alarm' (a Lifeline). The alarm can check your home for any possible hazards and can be used for a variety of emergencies. For example, if you feel you need help walking. Remaining fit and mobile will help strengthen your bones, reducing the risk of falls.

In the bedroom
Test your bath water to prevent scalding. If you're in sheltered housing you can have thermostatic mixing valves fitted. Use a non-slip rubber mat to stop you sliding when you get into the bath. A handrail is useful if you need extra support. It's a good idea to leave the door unlocked in case you need help.

WEBLINKS
www.kent.gov.uk • www.inouchsupport.co.uk • www.direct.gov.uk • www.ageconcern.org.uk • www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
Awareness

For an immediately serious situation, don’t hesitate to call 999. What about the less serious but still very worrying things that can occur at any time? It’s helpful to have an idea of what to do as well as a list of some useful numbers you might need.

Action

You can prepare for some emergencies by having a box of essential items kept in a place you can easily locate. The box could include: a torch and batteries, candles and matches (not to be used if you suspect a gas leak), a list of essential telephone numbers for family, friends and your doctor’s surgery, small first-aid kit, and spare hat and gloves in case your heating fails.

Have a plan, written down or in your mind, about what you would do if your property were to flood, catch fire, spring a leak, or need emergency repairs.

Talk to

Discuss what to do in different kinds of emergencies with family members or friends. Think about how you might get to a place of safety.

Prevention

Planning and being prepared for an emergency helps to reduce the feelings of panic and fear. Reduce fire hazards in your home. Fit smoke detectors - at least one on every floor. The Community Safety Team may be able to provide these free of charge. Telephone 0800 177 7069 for more information.

Contacts

• Kent Adult Social Services 08458 247 247
• Ambulance, Fire Brigade, Police & Coastguard DIAL 999
• Floodline 0845 988 1188
• National Gas Emergency Service 0800 111 999
• Power cuts EDF Distribution South East 0800 783 8866
• To report a leak from a water main 0800 028 3399
• NHS Direct 0845 464 7
• Consumer Direct 08454 04 05 06

WEBLINKS

www.pfe.gov.uk • www.environment-agency.gov.uk • www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk • www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

What to do in an emergency

staying in control

• Try to remain calm, think before acting and try to reassure others
• Make sure 999 has been called if people are injured or if there’s a threat to life
• Know where and how to turn off water, gas and electricity supplies in your home
• If you’re at home and an emergency happens, try to gather together some essential items such as keys, cash and a list of useful phone numbers

How to stay in control of an emergency situation

Don’t panic! Staying calm means the emergency services can get the information they need from you more easily. Summarise the situation briefly and clearly. Try to use a landline telephone rather than a mobile so the services can locate you if you get cut off. If it’s a fire, call from a safe distance.

The emergency services, local authorities and providers of residential accommodation would be on hand to assist in the event of a flood or other serious emergency.

What to do if you smell gas

Open the windows to clear the air. That should reduce the smell, as well as any danger. If it’s dark, don’t turn on lights (to avoid the risk of sparks) and never use a naked flame to see your way.

It may not even be a leak - check your gas cooker or fire has not been accidentally turned on. If not then shut down all your gas appliances and turn off your gas at the mains supply.

Do you know where that is?

It’s probably under the stairs or near the door.

Flooding

Changes in our climate, such as more severe storms and wetter winters, will increase the risk of flooding. To find out if you are at risk check with the Environment Agency or Floodline. A free telephone warning service is also available.

What to do when a pipe bursts

Do you know where your mains stop tap is? If not, try looking under the sink or where the pipe comes into your home. Turning it clockwise will shut down the supply. It could take a few moments for the water to stop.

What is a medical emergency?

When it comes to your health or the health of someone in your family, it’s often very obvious if the person is seriously ill and needs immediate emergency care.

An emergency is a critical or life-threatening situation. The Accident and Emergency Department is not an alternative to your doctor. Contact your doctor, pharmacist or NHS Direct for non-urgent medical care.

Do you have a mobile phone?

If you find yourself outside the coverage area of your mobile network and there’s an emergency, dial 112. The mobile will search any worldwide network to establish the emergency number for you.
Older people at risk of harm

keeping safe

• Abuse of older people has been called a ‘hidden and often ignored problem in society’
• Abuse isn’t common and you can do a great deal to keep safe
• Both older men and women can be at risk of being harmed
• Abuse can happen anywhere

The abuser may be well known to the older person. The strain of caring for someone, especially on a long-term basis, can lead people to act in ways that they shouldn’t. There may be a single or occasional act of abuse as the result of frustration. Or there are systematic attacks, deliberate acts with intent to harm.

These may be caused by a relative or carer having their own physical or mental health problems, the breakdown of the relationship or the carer’s inability to provide the level of care needed. In nursing homes or residential care homes, abuse can occur when staff are inadequately trained or supervised and have little management support or guidance. Abuse can be an unintentional reaction to circumstances a person does not know how to deal with.

Domestic violence is a term used for abuse between people who share the same home or ex-partner or other people no longer living in the home. Domestic violence can affect victims in many ways, including isolation from family and friends, poor mental and physical health, anxiety, depression and a lowered sense of self-worth.

You can be harmed by someone in the following ways:

• Physical abuse causing physical harm either deliberately or by rough or thoughtless behaviour.

contacts

• Adult Social Care Emergency Service 08458 247 100
• West Kent Enable 01892 330330
• Care Quality Commission 03000 616161
• Age Concern 0800 00 99 66
• Carers UK 0808 808 7777
• Counsel & Care 0845 300 7585
• National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 200 247
• Elder Abuse Response Helpline 0808 808 8141

weblinks


awareness

Anyone can experience abuse and the abuser may be known to them. The abuser can be someone you know well or a stranger. The Adult Social Care Emergency Service has a legal responsibility to prevent, investigate and take action where it is alleged a vulnerable adult is being abused. Abuse is an action affecting someone’s human or civil rights. It may be a single act or happen repeatedly over time. The abuse may be deliberate or the result of ignorance. The vulnerable adult may be neglected or taken advantage of.

action

Explain your concerns to someone you trust and ask for action to be taken. Never feel embarrassed about highlighting your concerns or reporting abuse. You have the right to say who you trust. Talk to your doctor, a relative, friend or carer. Call the Police, Social Care Emergency Service, Age Concern or Elder Abuse. All of these agencies will ensure that adequate support is given.

Talk to somebody you trust like your doctor, a relative, friend or carer. Call the Police, Social Care Emergency Service, Age Concern or Action on Elder Abuse. All of these services will work to ensure that support is provided.

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Useful contacts and information

West Kent NHS Helpline
Freephone helpline run by NHS West Kent Customer Services Team - first port of call for all questions and comments about your local NHS.
0800 0 850 850 www.westkentnhs.nhs.uk

NHS Direct
Confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day. Provides list of pharmacists open after 8pm and on Bank Holidays.
0845 4647 957 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Kent Counselling Network
Get involved with your local NHS and for NHS West Kent to seek your opinion. For more information go to www.kentcounselling.org.uk or telephone NHS West Kent on 0800 0 850 850

Age Concern Malling
01732 873977 www.ageconcerntunbridgewells.co.uk

Age Concern Tonbridge
01732 361100 www.ageconcerntonbridge.org.uk

Age Concern Tunbridge Wells
01892 522591 www.ageconcerntonbridge.org.uk

Positive Ageing Tunbridge
01732 354775

Carers First - Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and surrounding areas
01732 373555 www.carersfirst.org.uk

Citizens Rights for Older People
01622 812228 www.citizensrights.org.uk

Tunbridge Wells Malling Access Group
01892 518391 mgm@pkshoey.co.uk

Tunbridge Wells Access Group
Lynda twaccess@btinternet.com

North West Kent Carers Support Service
01322 662046 nkcarrers@kentken.org

Carers Project
01622 985274 www.vam-online.org.uk

Carers Direct
0800 802 0020 CarersDirect@nhschoices.nhs.uk

CarersLine
0800 808 7777 info@carersuk.org

Crossroads
0845 450 0350 www.crossroads.org.uk

North West Kent Independent Advocacy Scheme Dartford & Gravesham
07886 672254 or 07866 104109

Assist - Advocacy Service
01892 542086

Kent Advocacy for Disabled People
01622 725282

Gateway
Maidstone Gateway
King Street, Maidstone ME15 6JQ.
01622 602000

Tonbridge Wells Gateway
8 Grove Road, Tonbridge Wells TN1 2AB. 01892 326121

Tonbridge Gateway
Tonbridge Castle, Castle Street, Tonbridge TN9 1BG.
01732 876322

To enquire about a Gateway in your area please call 08458 247 247.

The Good Neighbour Project
Help with befriending and exercise or falls prevention. For further information please contact Kent Adult Social Services.
08484 247 100 or look on the website www.kent.gov.uk and search for Brighter Futures.

DARTFORD

Dartford Borough Council
Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DR.
01322 343349 www.durham.gov.uk

Dartford Library
Central Park, Dartford, Kent DA1 1EU.
01322 231321

Age Concern Dartford
Meadow Day Centre, Meadowside, Dartford, Kent DA1 2LS. 01322 226496

Rural Age Concern Darenth Valley
37 High Street, Swanley, Kent BR8 8AE.
01322 268106 Out of hours 07889 133633 www.ageconcerntunbridgewells.co.uk

Kent Advocacy for Disabled People
01622 278916 www.ageconcernmalling.org.uk

Gravesham

Gravesend Borough Council
Meadow Day Centre, Meadowside, Dartford, Kent DA1 1EU.
01322 278916 www.ageconcerntunbridgewells.co.uk

Gravesend Council Advice Bureau
Trinity Resource Centre, High Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DE. 01322 326486

Volunteer Centre Dartford District
33 Essex Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 2AU. 01322 272476 www.durham.gov.uk

In Touch Home Improvement Agency
Dartford & Gravesham
01474 566283

Turning Point West Kent
Dartford Substance Misuse Service
4A-6A Hythe Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1BS.
01322 278916

MIND - Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley
Almshouses, 18 West Hill, Dartford, Kent DA1 1EP.
01322 291380 www.dartford.gov.uk

Alzheimer & Dementia Support Service
The Almshouses, 18 West Hill, Dartford, Kent DA1 1EP.
01322 291380 www.dartford.gov.uk

InTouch Advocacy Network (and IMCA)
Mental Health Advocacy Service
First Floor, 79 Hythe Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1BS. 01322 285234 www.imica-advocacy-network.org.uk

Acacia Hall
(A Dartford Borough Council facility)
01322 345490

Rehabilitation Circuit Tues 12:30-13:45 cardiac Rehabilitation Circuit Wed 13:30-14:45 over 55s - plus 8am-1pm and 13:30-15:30 and Weds 13:30-15:30

Rethink Sahayak
Support Services to the BME community who use Mental Health Services
4-5 High Street, Gravesend, Kent DA11 1BS. 01474 364837 or 01474 364498 www.rachshik.org

GRAVESEND

Gravesend Borough Council
Civic Centre, Windmill St, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1AJ.
01474 370000 www.gravesham.gov.uk

Gravesham Library
Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA11 1BE.
01474 327328

Age Concern Gravesend
Day Centre, Clarence Row, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1HJ.
01474 564999 www.gravesendageconcern.co.uk

Rural Age Concern
27-37 High Street, Swanley, Kent BR8 8AE.
01322 651118 www.kentadvice.org.uk

Gravesham Council Advice Bureau
46 Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1BA.
01474 361239 www.gravesham.gov.uk

The Gravesham Volunteer Centre
The Arc, 43 Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1BA. 01474 332279

In Touch Home Improvement Agency
Dartford & Gravesham 01474 566283

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01322 291380 www.dartford.gov.uk

Alzheimer & Dementia Support
Dene Holm House, Dene Holm Road, Northfleet, Gravesend, Kent DA11 1BY.
01474 333999 www.alzheimeranddementia.org.uk

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ADVOCACY

Gravesend Advocacy
01474 364387 or 01474 364498 www.rachshik.org

Maidstone

Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ.
01622 602000 www.maidstone.gov.uk

Maidstone Library
5 Faiths Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1LH.
01622 732448 www.kent.gov.uk

Age Concern Maidstone
11 Gt. Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6XH.
01622 735619 www.ageconcernmaidstone.org.uk

Maidstone Council Advice Bureau
2 Bower Mount Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8RY.
01622 754242 www.maidstoneadvocacy.org.uk

Maidstone Volunteer Centre - Volunteer Action Maidstone (VAM)
39-48 Marlborough Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1HH.
01622 767337 www.vam-online.org.uk

In Touch Home Improvement Agency - Maidstone
Maidstone Community Support Centre
39-48 Marlborough Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1HH.
01622 765496

Turning Point Substance Misuse Service
49 Marlborough Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1EH.
01622 490444
that inaccuracies won't occur. Kent County Council, its employees or partner agencies won't be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused as a result of reliance on such information.

Every effort has been made to keep the information in this booklet up-to-date and accurate. However, we cannot guarantee that inaccuracies won't occur. Kent County Council, its employees or partner agencies won't be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused as a result of reliance on such information.

Kent County Council

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This booklet is about making the most of life as you get older, and tells you where to find information if you need support. If you need help or support to understand this information, please contact us at the West Kent Customer Care Team. This publication can also be supplied in braille, audio or large print if requested. An interpreter service is available for those who need it. For this information in your own language, please contact West Kent Customer Care on 01732 525187.

Bengali

কিছু যে সমস্যা হয় তা নিজে করে নেওয়া নিজের জন্য যে সমস্যা হয় [West Kent Customer Care] এর মাধ্যমে সমাধান করা যেতে পারে । 01732 525187

Chinese

有关著数问题的疑问，可寻求West Kent 客户服务部门，电话为：01732 525187

Czech

Pokud tyto informace poskytuje ve svém jazyce, spoléh se prosím s občanským právem a zastupujícím občanským sdružením West Kent na číslo 01732 525187.

French

Afin d'obtenir ces informations en français, merci de bien vouloir contacter le service Clientèle de la région West Kent au numéro suivant : 01732 525187

Mandarin

若要获取您所选语言的相关信息，请联系West Kent 客户服务部门，电话为：01732 525187

Polish

Aby uzyskać tę informację w języku polskim, prosimy skontaktować się z Biurem Obsługi Klientów West Kent, pod numerem 01732 525187.

Punjabi

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਭੌਸ ਨੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਸੰਨੁਖਾ ਜਞਾਤ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਵਨਰੀ ਤੋਂ ਸਹੀ ਮਾਰਡਰਮ ਦੀ ਰੋਗ ਸੰਨੁਖਾ ਜਾਹਿਰਕੁਤੀ ਕਰਨ [West Kent Customer Care] ਨੂੰ ਤਬਦੀਲ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਸੂਚ ਕਰਨਾ ਪ੍ਰਕੌਸ਼ਲ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ 01732 525187

Tagalog

Para sa importante, tama ang terso na mga pang-aralang makinuk-ugma sa Customer Care ng West Kent sa 01732 525187

Tamil

தமிழ் புரிந்து செலுத்து, நூற்றாண்டுகளா, செல்வா காலம் வைப்பது, செல்வா, வியளவாயா, வெளியிட்டு விளக்கா. [West Kent Customer Care] தமிழ் மொழியிலும், தமிழ் வேளியிலும் பணிபுரிதலுக்கான தமிழ் தகவலை பிடிக்கும். 01732 525187

Turkish

Bu bilgi kendiliğinden alınır içen keda 01732 525187 numaralı West Kent Müşteri Hizmetleri ile ısrıktır kurum.

Urdu

ایہی توبہ ایہی سمجھوں حاصل کیا جا سکتا ہے ، وہاں کوئی مقوامت نہیں ہے [West Kent Customer Care] 01732 525187