

# NUTRITION FOR SENIORS

## Healthy Eating Habits



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Home Instead  
SENIOR CARE®

*To us, it's personal.*

## ABOUT NGAIRE HOBBS

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Ngaire Hobbs is an expert dietitian and published author specialising in ageing and brain health.

Her extensive experience spans various areas of nutrition, including clinical dietetics, research and consultation – working in hospitals, private practice, aged and community care and in close collaboration with producers and consumers within the food industry.

**Ngaire is passionate about helping seniors relish the power of good food to get the most out of life and thrive instead of suffering unnecessary physical and mental frailty and decline with age.**

Her books *Eat to Cheat Ageing* (2014), *Eat to Cheat Dementia* (2016) and *Better Brain Food* (2017) draw on her clinical expertise, providing evidence-based, sensible, practical advice in everyday language to help older people and people living with dementia continue to live with vitality and independence into their later years.

With a shared commitment to enhancing the lives of ageing adults through care and education, Home Instead Senior Care has proudly partnered with Ngaire to bring you *Nutrition for Seniors: Healthy Eating Habits*

We hope this guide will give you a better understanding of our body's unique nutritional needs as we grow older, helping you to live and age well.

The information contained in this booklet is for general information and guidance only. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided in this booklet is correct and current Home Instead Senior Care cannot accept legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may have been made.



# **NUTRITION FOR SENIORS**

## **Healthy Eating Habits**

### **Table of Contents**

Healthy Eating Habits	2
Appetite Changes with Age	3
Top 10 Myths around Nutrition and Ageing	6
Malnutrition in Seniors	8
The Power of Protein	9
Muscle Power	10
Healthy Body, Healthy Mind	11
Keeping your Brain Going	12
Making Meals Enjoyable	14
Fortifying Foods	17
Difficulty Swallowing	17
Help is Available for Healthy Eating Habits	18
Discover More	19



## HEALTHY EATING HABITS FOR EATING AS YOU AGE

We know that it is important to lead an active, healthy lifestyle and this doesn't change as you get older. However, what does change is your body and with that your nutritional needs.

Eating well is key to ensuring you get the most out of life in your senior years. This booklet explores nutrition for seniors and what you need to eat to fuel your vitality, preserve your independence and prevent unnecessary physical and mental frailty and decline with age.

# APPETITES CHANGE WITH AGE

It seems simple – eat when you're hungry and don't when you're not.

But unfortunately, it's not that simple and mistakes are often made. Feeling hungry, or feeling full happens due to a combination of signals and processes including habit, stimulation of the senses and the relay of messages via nerves and hormones in the digestive system to the brain.

Inconveniently, many of these are affected by ageing, this changes in appetite. When inaccurately relayed messages about hunger or fullness combine with the effects of medications or illness, it is common to get 'not hungry' signals despite not having had the food and nutrients you need.

As you get older, it is important to make a conscious effort not to fall into the habit of eating less and less. The process of eating, especially small, frequent meals, can help bring your appetite back on track.



# ***What affects your appetite?***

## **Changes in your digestive system**

The appetite centre of your brain receives messages from your digestive system to give you the feeling of fullness. It then reminds you to eat again in a few hours. As you age, this system loses its accuracy and the wrong messages can get relayed, tricking you into eating less.

## **Changes in your sense of taste and smell**

As you age your taste buds and your sense of smell diminish. Both can be further affected by illness and medications. It's not surprising we lose enthusiasm for eating when these senses are reduced.

## **Changes in your saliva**

As you get older you produce less saliva and this can be exacerbated by medications. Saliva plays an important role in your ability to taste foods, your ability to swallow and the health of your teeth.

## **Medications**

Different medications can affect your appetite. It's important to regularly review (with your doctor) the medications that you take.

## **Illness and medical procedures**

Anytime you are fighting illness or infection it is normal for your appetite to decrease. But food plays an important role in helping your body repair itself. It is essential to eat throughout your illness despite what your appetite is telling you.

## **Nutrient deficiencies**

A poor appetite can be self-perpetuating as eating poorly results in reduced consumption and absorption of essential vitamins and minerals including vitamin B1, magnesium, sodium, iron and zinc; these all being associated with a reduced appetite.

## **Emotional wellbeing**

Stress, depression, anxiety, grief, serious illnesses or accidents can cause a loss of appetite. You may find your appetite completely absent, feel full after only one mouthful, or you may also feel like your throat 'closes up' or your mouth feels too dry to swallow when you try to eat.

## **Bowel issues**

Constipation, diarrhoea and nausea, will affect your appetite and food intake. Your bowel works better when you have a good quantity of food and fluids passing through and when actions of muscles in your belly, hips, legs and even arms move your body.



## WAYS TO COMBAT LACK OF APPETITE

- ✓ Recognise the **'not hungry'** messages as mistakes and **try to eat** when you know you should.
- ✓ **Eat by the clock** if you need to. Have something to eat every two to three hours. Your brain benefits from the **repetition and reminders** of eating regularly, so **make eating an enjoyable** and helpful habit.
- ✓ If you have lost weight, you need more meals – e.g. **5 or 6 small meals** a day containing high **protein**, high **calorie** & **nutritious foods**.
- ✓ If you just can't face food, a **high protein supplement** between meals or instead of meals for a short while can give you the nutrients you need until your appetite returns.
- ✓ **Be kind to yourself**. Use treats to tempt your appetite. A few treats here and there along with more nutritious foods can remind your appetite that food is pleasurable and important.

If your appetite is poor, make sure what you are eating you are benefiting from – give high protein, high calorie foods priority and add vegetables, fruits, grains and nuts. You can also add extra protein and calories to fortify your food so every mouthful is enjoyable, easy to eat and nutrient boosted.

# TOP 10 MYTHS

## Around Nutrition & Ageing

### 1. Your stomach shrinks as you get older

Although your appetite and your capacity to eat may change, your stomach doesn't shrink when you get older. In fact, not eating well enough only accelerates the ageing process.

### 2. Weight loss is healthy

This may be true in middle age, but it is not the case when we are older. Instead, dieting or unintentional weight loss needs to be avoided in our later years because it causes loss of essential body muscle, which contributes to poor health in many ways. Additionally, a few extra kilo's in later age is beneficial to support your body and brain in the years ahead. Therefore it is always important to combine good exercise with an eating plan rich in protein and in fact,

### 3. You need to eat less as you get older

Whilst your metabolism slows and your energy output decreases, food and eating is what protects and fuels you and is your key to ageing well. Whilst you may need to eat less of some things, your body will need more of others, particularly foods rich in protein, vitamins and minerals.

### 4. Only eat what you feel like

The ageing process can play tricks on our appetite and the triggers that tell us if we are hungry or full. As a result, older people might eat less than their bodies really need. It is important to realise the vital importance of continuing to eat despite the tricks, so your body continues to get the energy and nutrients it needs to function. An outright loss of appetite is not normal and could be symptomatic of an underlying health problem. If you are having problems, try to eat small meals regularly throughout the day, even if you don't always feel like it.

### 5. You need a low-fat diet

Contrary to deeply entrenched popular opinion, a low-fat diet is not always the best, especially for older people. Fat is an important source of calories and some seniors might need to eat a bit extra to maintain weight. For most however, eating foods containing mostly unsaturated fats is best for heart, body and brain health. Fats found in foods such as olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocado, and oily fish are ideal.

### 6. Eat more vegetables

Whilst nutrient-rich vegetables continue to be essential in your diet, protein foods



need to be at the centre of your plate, with the vegetables surrounding it from now on. That's because you need more, not less, protein as you get older. Protein keeps your muscles, your immune system, your body's organs and brain and other systems working and renewing continuously. Vegetables are always important, but if your appetite is small, ensure you get the protein in first, then enjoy the vegetables.

### **7. You only need to drink water when you're thirsty**

If you feel thirsty you are already a bit dehydrated and that's a problem as neither your body or your brain can work at peak capacity if you are dehydrated. Dehydration can bring on confusion, delirium, hampers kidney function and worsens a multitude of other conditions that commonly affect older people. Seniors tend not to sense thirst as efficiently and are therefore at greater risk of dehydration, making fluid intake an essential element of overall nutrition.

### **8. Supplements are sufficient**

Of course we can't live off vitamins and supplements alone. Your body works best when it is digesting food. What's more, most supplements promoted to help you live longer, boost memory, fight off dementia and more, fail to live up to their claims. And there's another problem – many interact with common medications or just don't work as well as when you eat them in their natural form. Sharing a meal with family and friends is a great way of consuming all of the vitamins and minerals that you need to keep your body happy and healthy.

### **9. You must always eat a 'proper meal'**

Making sure you eat regularly is essential to help you live well and remain independent as you age. However, eating three full meals a day can be a struggle if you have a loss of appetite or find cooking too difficult or time-consuming. You can opt for prepacked meals, frozen dinners or take-away foods, but some of these don't contain the protein and other nutrients especially important to support ageing bodies and brains, and others are high in sodium or saturated fats. If three good meals are too much of a challenge, 5 or 6 small meals or well-chosen snacks can be just as beneficial. The saying 'making good choices' still rings true with old age – just make sure the 'something' you do eat it is nutritious.

### **10. Malnutrition is part of getting older**

Malnutrition can affect anyone, at any age and it is not a normal part of the ageing process. However, seniors are at greater risk of malnutrition and it is important that you don't dismiss the warning signs as being a part of 'old age'.



# MALNUTRITION IN SENIORS

Malnutrition occurs when a person is not eating enough of the right foods and as a result, is not getting the nutrients that their body needs to function properly.

Malnutrition is a major cause of ill health in seniors, contributing to falls, confusion, infection, pressure injuries (bed sores), preventable hospital admissions, postoperative complications, rapid physical and cognitive decline and even premature death.

Whilst malnutrition is a major cause of ill health, ill health can also cause malnutrition due to loss of appetite and poor eating habits.

Malnutrition is not just something that happens in old age. Anyone can be malnourished, at any age, but age increases the risk because people often eat less food than they did when they were younger, even though their needs for nutrients don't decrease. Eating less over time can easily lead to problems.

## ***Signs of possible malnutrition:***

- Weight loss
- Reduced appetite
- Lack of interest in food and drinks
- Feeling tired all the time
- Loss of strength and energy
- Poor concentration
- Getting ill often and taking a long time to recover
- Wounds taking a long time to heal
- Feeling cold or colder than usual
- Low mood or depression

The most common sign of malnutrition is weight loss, particularly unintentional weight loss over a relatively short period of time (e.g. a few months). Whilst most people who are malnourished will lose weight, it is possible to be a healthy weight or even overweight and still be malnourished. If you or your loved one have unintentionally lost weight over the past few months, it's important to consult your doctor and ideally to get a referral to an Accredited Practising Dietitian in your area.



## Sources of Protein

- ✓ Lean meat, poultry, fish and seafood
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Dairy products like milk, yoghurt and cheese
- ✓ Soy products like tofu
- ✓ Seeds and nuts
- ✓ Beans and legumes, such as lentils and chickpeas

# THE POWER OF PROTEIN

Vegetables and fruits are an irreplaceable source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, but as we age we need more of some things than we did when we were younger and protein is one of them.

Protein is constantly being used to do your body's repair work. Every cell in your body has a lifespan – some have hours, others have days, even months before they are replaced with new ones. Protein is used to keep this continual renewal going and is also essential for an effective immune system to help repair wounds and to provide back-up brain fuel supply.

Your body continually draws on protein reserves from your muscles. Therefore, you need to eat for your muscles and ensure you are getting enough protein to sustain your body and your muscle reserves. Having a protein food at the centre of each meal will ensure your body won't have to struggle to get all the nutrients you need.



## MUSCLE POWER

In addition to eating protein foods, you also need to work your muscles so that any protein you do eat gets the best possible chance of returning to them.

Muscles are reminded to rebuild and repair only when you work them and they need to work against weight or resistance to encourage that. Anything you do to work your muscles helps: get up out of your chair, stand tall, carry things, use the stairs, walk instead of drive, sweep the floor – most activities of daily living will work your muscles.

Resistance exercise is the most important for supporting recovery, building strength, maintaining ability and improving your long-term health.

Swimming, aqua aerobics, Tai Chi and other activities that use your own body weight as resistance and gets your heart rate up are also good for rebuilding and repairing your muscles.

# HEALTHY BODY, HEALTHY MIND

What applies to your muscles, applies to your brain. Keep it active and feed it properly to keep it functioning healthily.

Your brain uses different fuels to the rest of your body and it is very demanding, using 20 per cent or more of your body's total energy supply and functioning with a constant access to blood sugar (glucose).

Glucose is the main fuel for your brain and comes from carbohydrates in food, from a small storage reserve and can be made from protein reserves stored in your muscles. While the rest of your body can use body fat as an alternate energy source, the brain can't. Your muscles supply backup brain fuel if you are not eating well and as you age its important to avoid loss of body muscle.

Eating the right food, keeping physically active and mentally stimulated not only keeps up fuel and nourishment, but it is critical to protect brain cells from damage which could lead to cognitive decline, including dementia.



# KEEPING YOUR BRAIN GOING

## 1. Eat regularly

Keep up your food supply, especially carbohydrates and protein. Put a protein food at the centre of your meals and add vegetables, fruits and grains for carbohydrates and nutrients to help ensure your brain has a constant access to blood sugar (glucose).

## 2. Hydrate

Keep your fluids up, you need 6-8 glasses of fluid each day, but they don't need to always be water. If you are eating well, water is great; but if your appetite is low, its vital that you make the most of every mouthful by drinking liquids that also contain nutrients, milk drinks, supplement drinks, soups or juice.

## 3. Eat colours

Colourful foods contain antioxidants and other substances which can help reduce chronic inflammation. Antioxidants 'mop up' free radicals that might otherwise cause damage to cells in your body and brain as the years go on. Mix up the colourful foods at each meal for the greatest benefit: think a rainbow of vegetables and fruits including berries, herbs, egg yolk, nuts and seeds. Whilst there are a variety of commercial supplements on the market – antioxidants work best when you absorb them from the foods they originally came from.



#### 4. Challenge yourself.

Your brain likes to learn and be challenged by new things, this doesn't dissipate with age.

#### 5. Be social

Socialisation is much more than avoiding loneliness – it ensures your brain continues to mastermind the complex thought processes involved in making conversation, behaving appropriately, negotiating, and other things you need to juggle in social situations.

#### 6. Exercise

Exercise keeps blood flowing through the brain. It also challenges it to coordinate all the different systems needed to work your muscles, your balance, your senses needed to hear, feel and see as well as your memory and ability to follow instructions. Exercise also boosts levels of a special substance that helps form new connections in the brain – extremely important to long term brain health.

### *How are you keeping you body & mind active?*

Here are 4 things you could do to keep your **BODY** healthy & active

1. Choose activities that suit your lifestyle, consider your budget, physical abilities, location and times.
2. Make exercise a social event, find a friend or family member to be active with or make some new friends through a class or club.
3. Look for incidental ways to move your body every day - park further away from the shop entrance or use the stairs instead of the lift or escalator.
4. Practice Tai Chi and Qi Gong - martial arts increases balance and strength.

Here are 4 things you could do to keep your **BRAIN** healthy & active

1. Remaining cognitively active through social activities such as joining a book club or taking a cooking class.
2. Challenge yourself with puzzles, crosswords or math problems.
3. Experiment with things that require manual dexterity as well as mental effort, such as drawing, painting, and other crafts.
4. Learn a new word every day.

# MAKING MEALS ENJOYABLE

Food isn't just about nutrition. Preparing and eating food is a sensory experience about sharing and enjoying, and is often an important part of shared cultural traditions. We have already acknowledged that with ageing, foods don't always taste the same as they used to, but that doesn't mean we can't continue to make meals and eating enjoyable.

Below are our top tips for stimulating your senses and making meals more palatable, presentable and ultimately more enjoyable for seniors.

## ***Amp up the flavour***

Enhance the flavour of your meals by adding fresh or dried herbs, spices, onion, garlic, ginger, pepper or cooking with wine or acidic flavours like citrus or vinegar. Adding a good natural, or Greek-style yoghurt to recipes also boosts flavour.

Salt is a common flavour enhancer but some people may need to use it sparingly on medical advice. For those who need a sodium restriction, keeping salt to a minimum is a good idea. But for those with very low appetites, or who are at high risk of malnutrition, adding salt to food for flavour, thereby improving the likelihood it's eaten, is more important. Salt might not be the best for everyone, but not eating enough food is far more dangerous in later age. It is always best to consult with your healthcare professional for advice.

The same goes for sugar – adding lots of sugar is not the best for everyone, but if it adds appeal to foods and encourages people who are not eating well to take that extra mouthful, then it has an important part to play. Occasional foods like chocolate, cakes and ice cream can help revive flagging appetites, so they actually do have an important place in boosting nutrition for those more frail.

## ***Try new things***

Experiment with different foods and cuisines and try new recipes from friends, newspapers, magazines, websites or cooking shows. Look for ways to combine foods from the different food groups in creative ways and try out different kinds of fruits, vegetables, grains that add colour and texture to your meals. You could also take a cooking class to learn new ways to prepare meals and snacks that are good for you.

## ***Plate up***

Although our taste buds may diminish, we also eat with our eyes therefore how we present food can make it more appealing. Adding different colours and textures of food not only adds extra vitamins and minerals, it also makes dishes look and taste more appealing.

For example, you can add granola to yogurt, dried fruit and nuts to oatmeal and cheese sauce to crunchy vegetables, curry or pasta sauce. Taking care in how you present your meal, balancing the colour, texture and variety of food on your plate, using smaller plates for smaller meals, even adding a little garnish can help make meals more appealing and enjoyable.

Always consider the needs of the person eating and remember that being too generous is just as much of a problem as not being generous enough. People with small appetites can be so put off by a big plate of food that they eat nothing at all, which is far more problematic and much more wasteful.



## ***Cook for company***

Cooking together and sharing the entire experience of meal planning, shopping, preparing and cooking can also help make meals more enjoyable; as can cooking for the enjoyment of others. You could start a breakfast, lunch, or dinner club where everyone can gather together taking turns to cook for each other.

## ***Reminisce***

Cooking meals of yester-year, enjoying the flavours of old and reminiscing on old pastimes can be equally as great as trying new things. Especially if the simple thought of traditional fare can stoke your appetite and rekindle your enjoyment of food.

## ***Make meals easier to eat***

The physiological changes that seniors experience with age, especially reduced saliva and dental changes, can lead to difficulty chewing and swallowing. Eating soft, moist foods that don't require as much chewing such as smoothies, soups, casseroles, stewed fruits etc. can make meals less of an effort, easier to eat and more enjoyable.

## ***Eat with others***

Eating with others is a surefire way to enjoy meals more. Sharing meals with neighbours, family or friends and making regular plans to eat with others, will bring back the social aspect of eating where you share good food and good conversation.

## ***Get out and about***

Add a sense of adventure to your meals and venture out for a meal, visit friends and family or even try a picnic and enjoy some fresh air and the outdoors.



## FORTIFYING FOODS

Despite your best efforts, your diet may simply not be providing your body the nutrients it needs to sustain you, especially if your appetite is low or you are finding it a challenge to eat enough food to maintain your weight. Real, whole foods should always be your priority but you can fortify foods by adding protein and calories to boost the nutritional value of what you eat. You can fortify foods by adding milk powder, ground or whole nuts, extra eggs, seeds and legumes into your meal preparation. For some, a high protein powder supplement might be suggested to help.



## DIFFICULTY SWALLOWING

If you have trouble swallowing, a condition known as dysphagia, a speech pathologist can advise you on ways to alter the texture or consistency of food and drinks to help you swallow safely and ensure you continue to get all the nutrients you need from your diet. People who have trouble swallowing are at risk of poor nutrition and dehydration if not managed properly and need to take extra precautions to ensure this doesn't happen, seeking help from a dietitian is recommended.

Certain types of foods and thin fluids such as water, milk, tea, coffee, juice and soup can easily 'go down the wrong way' and may need to be thickened. Your speech pathologist may recommend changes to the textures of foods or drinks, and provide rehabilitation techniques and exercises to help you swallow safely.

# HELP IS AVAILABLE

## For Healthy Eating Habits

Understanding your nutritional needs is one thing, forming healthy habits is another. With age, shopping, meal preparation, cooking and eating for one can prove difficult. You may no longer drive and getting to and from the shops is a challenge. You may not have the same strength you once did to carry groceries on your own. You may be uninspired to cook and eat for one, hate cleaning up or have simply lost interest cooking after all these years.

A Home Instead CAREGiver can help ensure you continue to eat and live well at home. Our CAREGivers can provide transport to the shops, help you select and carry groceries, unpack, plan and prepare meals. A CAREGiver can assist you to cook meals, clean up and provide welcome companionship during meals at home or accompany you to a café or restaurant to enjoy dining out.

Whatever your needs, a Home Instead CAREGiver can help you achieve optimal nutrition to maintain your strength, independence and vitality.



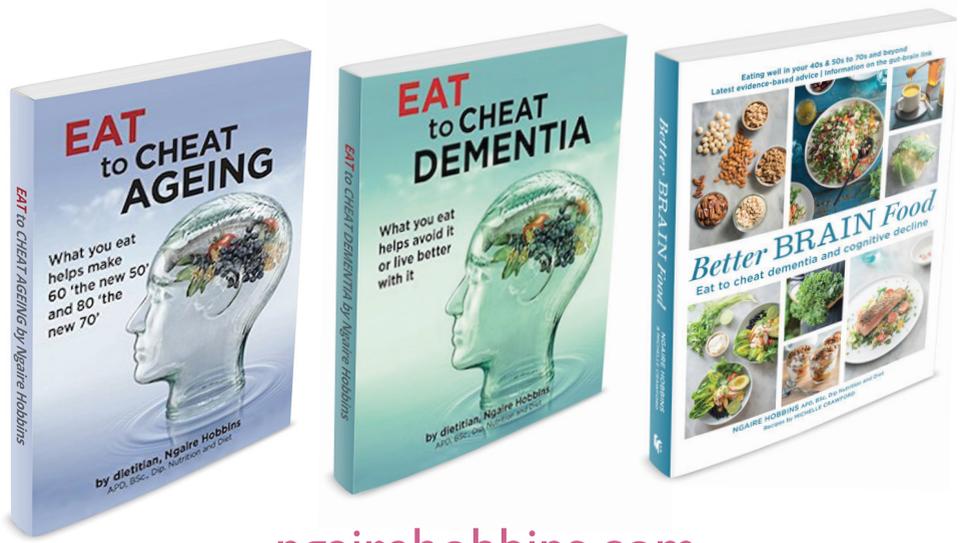


## Discover More

Most healthy eating advice is for people in their 30s, 40s or 50s but some of this information can be unhelpful if you are into your late 60s and beyond.

Ngaire Hobbins draws on her wealth of experience to highlight issues in health and nutrition for older people, providing practical ways to help you thrive and live vital, independent lives.

Discover more about nutrition for seniors, recipe ideas or to buy Ngaire's books in paperback or for your e-reader, visit [www.ngairehobbins.com](http://www.ngairehobbins.com)



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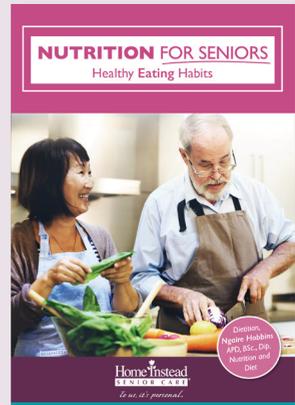
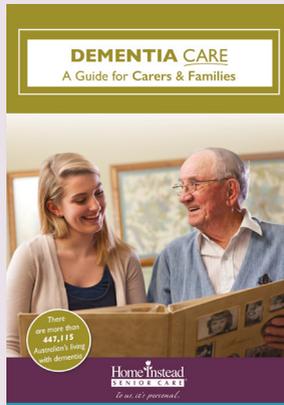
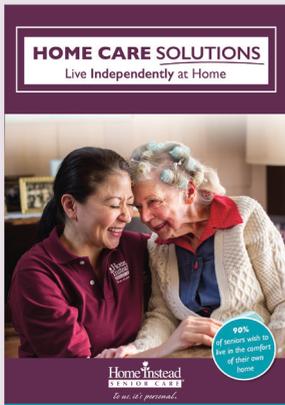


# Home Instead Senior Care Resources

## *Information, tools, tips and other guides.*

As a community care organisation, we are committed to educating and empowering individuals, families, carers and communities with an understanding of the various home care services and support available to them.

Home Instead Senior Care strives to help you navigate ageing with a variety of senior care resources. From help with understanding the aged care system, negotiating family relationships and difficult conversations to resources on home safety, end-of-life planning and managing conditions such as dementia; helping you find answers is important to us.



Our website is another great resource for senior focused information along with our monthly newsletter and Facebook pages.

Find out more today at; [HomeInstead.com.au](http://HomeInstead.com.au)

I would **recommend** Home Instead Senior Care services to anyone looking for **personalised, kind, and respectful** care for their **loved ones**

Maureen



*To us, it's personal.®*

**Home Instead Senior Care is YOUR specialist,  
national provider of high quality in-home care  
for older people.**

We help with a range of personal and lifestyle needs while providing welcome companionship. Our services include assistance with personal care, light household duties, meal preparation, medication reminders, transport to appointments, shopping and social outings. We take personal responsibility for providing the best in-home care and support to meet our clients' needs and are committed to addressing the individual and national challenges of Australia's ageing population.

Established in 1994, Home Instead now provides senior care across a network of over 1000 offices around the world.

In Australia, Home Instead Senior Care's national network of independently owned and operated offices are committed to changing the face of ageing by enhancing the lives of seniors and their families.

We understand that to you, it's about finding trustworthy care for your ageing loved one.

**To us, it's personal.**

Contact your local Home Instead Senior Care office for a free no-obligation care consultation where we can discuss your needs and provide you with information, advice, care and support to help you and your family find the right home care solution for you.



*To us, it's personal.*

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