

Everyday ways to support wellbeing



Getting older is a natural part of life. Many older adults live independently, contribute to their communities, and bring valuable wisdom and experience. While ageing brings change, it doesn't mean decline, many age-related changes can be managed through staying active, connected, and engaged in what matters most.

This booklet focuses on the physical aspects of keeping yourself healthy and safe as you grow older.

Key topics	Page
Mobility and physical activity	2-5
Nutrition tips for healthy ageing	5-8
Sleep and rest	8-10
The senses: hearing, sight, and smell	10-13
Oral hygiene	13-14
Foot care	15-16
Skin care	16-17
Screening for cancer	17-19
Drugs: medicines, alcohol, smoking	19-20
Sexual wellbeing	21
Keeping warm in winter	22
Safety and fall prevention around the home	22-23

Feeling financially secure, independent, healthy, and safe all play a big part in creating the lifestyle you want, no matter your age.

As we age, our quality of life can be influenced by our approach to ageing.

This includes:

- the way we adapt and respond to change
- · use of humour
- our sense of fun
- remaining active and connected to our communities
- · our level of confidence.

Additionally, it's helpful to care for every part of our wellbeing, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual—to support a balanced and fulfilling life.

Staying active every day

Gentle movement supports wellbeing at any age. It's never too late to start.

Move every day, your way

Regular activity helps maintain strength, balance, confidence, and overall wellbeing.

- Start small. Begin gently and build your activity level gradually over time. A few minutes a day is a great place to start.
- Aim for 150 minutes a week. Try to work toward a total of 150 minutes of cardiovascular activity per week. This can be broken into smaller sessions, for example, five 30-minute walks.
- Use your breath as a guide. You should notice your breathing increase slightly. If it becomes difficult to speak full sentences, reduce the intensity.
- Support good posture. Stand or sit with your weight evenly balanced, tummy gently engaged, shoulders relaxed, and spine lengthened. Breathe evenly.
- Create a personal activity plan. Choose activities that feel enjoyable and manageable. Every bit counts.
- · Connecting through movement.

Being active with others can add variety, motivation, and a sense of connection. Consider:

- walking with a friend or group swimming or joining an aqua aerobics class
- · taking part in dance sessions, like line dancing
- practising yoga or tai chi
- spending time in the garden
- · playing croquet, going bowling, or cycling.

Wake-up moves to start your day

Begin your day with a few simple exercises while still lying in bed. These gentle movements help wake up your muscles and joints.

Before getting out of bed

Repeat each movement several times at your own pace.

- Ankle circles and flexes. Move your feet up and down at the ankles, then circle them slowly in both directions.
- Knee bends. Bend one knee at a time toward your shoulder, then return to a resting position.
- **Hip lifts.** With feet flat and knees bent, gently lift your hips off the bed and lower them again.
- Arm stretches. Stretch your arms out to the sides, then raise them slowly over your head.

Once you're up

 Tightrope walk. Walk along an imaginary straight line, placing one foot directly in front of the other.

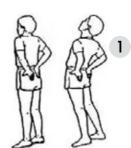
Tip: Stay close to a wall or rail for support if needed.

Supporting a sore or stiff back

Back discomfort can make everyday activities more difficult. Gentle movement and regular stretching can help ease stiffness and strengthen the muscles that support your spine. These simple exercises can be done **twice a day**, or as part of a morning and evening routine.

Back-friendly exercises

- 1. Standing back stretch
 - Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
 - Place your hands on your lower back for support.

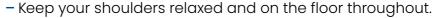


- Breathe out as you gently bend backward, keeping your neck straight.
- Return to standing and repeat a few times.

2. Knee roll (spinal rotation)

- Lie on your back with arms out to the side.
- Bend both knees and lift them toward your chest.
- Slowly roll your knees to one side and hold briefly.





3. Single leg lift

- Lie flat on your back with your legs straight.

- Lift one leg slowly, only as far as is comfortable.
- Hold for about 20 seconds.
- Lower your leg and repeat with the other side.



Tips for managing morning discomfort

It's common to feel more stiff or sore in the morning. Some people find it helpful to do light activity — like getting dressed, walking to the bathroom, or having breakfast — before doing their stretches.

Also, check that your mattress is supportive enough. A mattress that's too soft may contribute to ongoing back discomfort.

Protecting your back when lifting

Lifting the right way can help reduce strain on your back and prevent injury. These tips may help:

- Keep the load close to your body this reduces pressure on your spine.
- Use your legs to do the lifting:
 - Place your feet shoulder-width apart, with toes pointing forward.
 - Bend your knees, not your back.
- Keep your back as straight as possible throughout the movement.
- Move slowly and pause at each step lift, pause; carry, pause; lower, pause.

More information

- For further advice about stretching, walking, and safe movement, you can call 0800 ACTIVE (0800 228 483).
- To find out what physical activities are available in your area, contact your local:
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - gym or pool
 - community or recreation centre
 - or check your local library's noticeboard.

Nutrition tips for healthy ageing

As we get older, our metabolism tends to slow down, meaning we use less energy than when we were younger. Because of this, fewer calories are needed to maintain a healthy weight. Eating a balanced, varied diet is important to provide energy, support strength, and protect against illness.

Food groups

Aim to include these food groups each day:

- Vegetables and fruit. Eat at least three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit daily.
- Breads and cereals. Aim for at least six servings daily, mostly wholegrain and high in fibre. Examples include:
 - 2 wheat-based breakfast biscuits such as Weet-Bix
 - -1 slice of wholegrain bread or a wholegrain roll
 - 1 cup cooked rice (try brown rice)
 - 1 medium-sized muffin
 - 2 plain biscuits,.
- Milk and milk products. Have at least three servings daily, mostly low- or reduced-fat options. Examples:
 - -1 glass of milk
 - 2 slices of cheese.
- Protein sources. Include at least one serving of meat, poultry, fish, seafood, or eggs daily or two servings of legumes, nuts, or seeds.

Helpful tips

- Stay hydrated. Drink about eight cups of fluid each day. Water is the best choice.
- Increase fibre. Eat plenty of high-fibre foods like wholegrain bread, breakfast cereals (for, example porridge or Weet-Bix), vegetables, and fruit to help prevent constipation.
- Add more legumes. Include foods such as lentils, split peas, and cooked dried beans. Try:
 - baked beans on toast
 - soups with split peas and barley
 - adding canned lentils to mince dishes.









- Eat mindfully. Chew your food well. Avoid heavy meals late at night if you want to reduce indigestion. If indigestion continues, speak with your doctor.
- Limit unhealthy foods. Reduce foods high in fat and sugar but low in nutrients like cakes, biscuits, sweets, and fried foods.

Weight management

Remember to check your weight regularly with your doctor.

If overweight: Try increasing physical activity and reducing fatty or sugary foods.

If underweight: Include nutritious snacks between meals, such as yoghurt, fruit, nuts, peanut butter on toast, or a glass of milk.

Planning meals and eating well

Mealtimes are a chance to care for ourselves. Planning ahead makes it easier to enjoy food that feels good and fuels your day.

- Plan ahead to make shopping and cooking easier. Having a few go-to meals in mind can help reduce stress and food waste.
- Consider sharing meals. Inviting a friend or neighbour over, or joining others for a shared meal, can make eating more enjoyable and sociable.
- Experiment with new recipes. It's a great way to stay engaged with food and discover new favourites.
- Choose lower-fat options. Trim visible fat from meat and look for foods with less saturated fat where possible.
- Limit added salt. Try flavouring meals with herbs, spices, lemon juice, or vinegar instead.
- Keep a few staples on hand. Tinned, dried, and frozen foods are handy to have in case it's harder to get out for shopping.



 Batch cook and freeze leftovers. Making extra food and freezing it in meal-sized portions can save time and effort on busy or low-energy days. Be sure to label with the date and rotate older meals to the front.

If you'd like more personalised advice, ask your doctor or health provider for a referral to a dietitian. A helpful resource may be *Eating well for healthy older people* available from healthed.govt.nz/products/eating-for-healthy-older-people-te-kai-totika-e-ora-ai-te-hunga-kaumatua

Sleep and rest

Sleep patterns often change as we get older — and that's completely normal.

- Many people find they sleep for slightly fewer hours around six to seven hours a night.
- What matters most is not how long you sleep, but how rested you feel when you wake up.
- Sleep happens in cycles, usually lasting about 90 minutes each. Most people have four or five cycles a night.

Each cycle includes two types of sleep:

- Non-REM (quiet) sleep happens soon after you fall asleep.
 During this stage, brain waves slow, body temperature drops, and the body gets a chance to recover. This type of sleep supports physical health and healing.
- REM (dream) sleep follows and supports memory, mood, and cognitive function.

Understanding sleep changes

As we age, levels of **melatonin**, the hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle, tend to decrease. This often leads to **less deep (non-REM) sleep** and **more REM sleep**. It's also common to wake more often during the night.

Supporting better sleep

If sleep doesn't come easily or you often wake during the night, the following ideas may help improve the quality of your rest:

- Keep a regular routine. Try to go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day.
- Stay active during the day. Even a short daily walk can help reduce tension. Getting some sunlight exposure also supports your natural sleep rhythm.
- Time meals to suit your body. Some people find they sleep better by eating their main meal at midday and keeping the evening meal lighter.
- Avoid stimulants in the evening. Try to reduce tea, coffee, alcohol, and cigarettes later in the day, as they can interfere with sleep.
- Unwind before bedtime. Enjoy quiet activities like reading, listening to music, or taking a warm shower to help you relax.
- Let go of lingering worries. Try mentally "putting aside" any unresolved concerns. You might imagine placing them in an envelope to open tomorrow.
- Limit screen time before bed. Instead of watching television or using a device in the hour before sleep, choose calming alternatives like reading or listening to the radio.
- Try gentle relaxation techniques. In bed, breathe slowly and deeply. You can also try gently tightening and releasing each muscle group to help your body wind down.
- Don't focus on not sleeping. If you're awake, it's okay. Try to rest your body and mind, without pressure to fall asleep right away.



A note on sleeping pills

Sleeping pills may be useful for **short-term relief**, such as during a particularly stressful period or illness. However, they are **not intended as a long-term solution** for ongoing sleep difficulties.

These medications can have side effects, including:

- changes in mood or alertness
- reduced concentration
- increased risk of poor balance or falls
- potential interactions with other medications
- dependence over time.

If you're finding it hard to sleep, you're not alone, and support is available. Talk to your doctor or nurse about what you're experiencing. In some cases, a referral to a **sleep clinic** may be helpful.

Sleep challenges can also be linked to underlying issues such as anxiety or depression, which are treatable conditions. Seeking help is a positive and important step toward improving your overall wellbeing.

Hearing

As we grow older, it's common to experience some gradual hearing loss due to changes in the inner ear. This can affect both the volume and clarity of sound, making conversations more challenging, especially in noisy environments.

You can make communication easier by:

- reducing background noise
- ensuring good lighting
- facing the person when speaking so they can see your facial expressions and lips.

Hearing changes can also be caused by other factors, so it's a good idea to speak with your doctor if you notice:

- Difficulty understanding speech, especially in crowds or from a distance.
- Trouble hearing high-pitched sounds.
- · Needing to turn up the TV or radio louder than others prefer.
- · Missing the doorbell or telephone ringing.
- Hearing ringing, buzzing, or hissing sounds.

If needed, a qualified audiologist can help by fitting a hearing aid tailored to your needs. Today's hearing aids are advanced and can improve your hearing in many everyday situations. It might take a little time to adjust, but many people find they make a big difference in staying connected with others.

To learn more, visit Hearing New Zealand – Te Kāhui Rongo o Aotearoa

Sight

It's common for eyesight to change gradually as we age. Many people start using glasses for reading or close-up tasks. Over time, the lens in the eye becomes less flexible, which can affect sharpness and make it harder to see fine details or distinguish between some colours. Night vision may also decline, which can make driving or moving around in low light more difficult.

Let your doctor know if you notice any of the following:

- Unusual or heavy discharge from the eyes.
- Redness or swelling in or around the eyes.
- · Loss of vision.
- · Blurred, dim, or double vision.
- · Blind spots or shadows.
- A narrowed field of vision.



Helpful environmental tips

- Use good lighting throughout your home, especially in hallways, staircases, and bathrooms.
- Reduce glare by using adjustable blinds and matte surfaces where possible.
- Use contrasting colours for steps, door frames, and edges of furniture to make them easier to see.
- Keep walkways clear of clutter to reduce trip hazards.
- Use large-print labels or tactile markers on important household items.
- Night lights in bedrooms and bathrooms can improve safety during overnight trips to the toilet.

It's a good idea to have our eyes checked every two to three years. Eye conditions like glaucoma, cataracts, and macular degeneration may not have early symptoms but can often be managed well when caught early. People with diabetes should have regular eye screenings as part of their ongoing care.

For more information, speak with your local optometrist or visit the New Zealand Association of Optometrists

Smell

As we age, it's natural for our sense of smell to become less sensitive. This can mean missing out on familiar scents and aromas that once brought pleasure. It can also make it harder to detect unpleasant or potentially dangerous odours, such as:

- spoiled food
- gas leaks
- smoke or fire
- body odour.

When our sense of smell isn't as reliable, there are some simple steps we can take to remain safe and well:

- Check food labels and storage carefully always look at use-by dates and inspect food before eating.
- Install smoke alarms and test their batteries monthly to ensure you'll be alerted in case of fire.
- Have gas appliances inspected regularly by a qualified technician.
- Ventilate the home regularly to keep the air fresh.
- Maintain personal hygiene routines.
- Consider installing a gas detector if you use gas heating or cooking appliances.

If you notice any sudden or significant changes in your sense of smell, it's a good idea to speak with your doctor.

Oral hygiene

Teeth and gums play an important role in overall health, helping with chewing, digestion, and comfort. Whether we have our natural teeth or wear dentures, keeping our mouth clean and healthy supports overall wellbeing and quality of life.

Daily care makes a difference

- Brush teeth or dentures at least twice a day.
- Floss regularly if you have natural teeth.
- Visit your dentist for a check-up at least once a year.
- Use fluoride toothpaste unless advised otherwise by your dental team.



Gum health

See your dentist if you notice any of the following:

- · Bleeding gums when brushing.
- Changes in the shape or colour of your gums.
- Ongoing bad breath or a strange taste in your mouth.
- Teeth that feel loose or shift position.

These may be signs of gum infection, which can lead to tooth loss if untreated.

Denture care

Well-fitting dentures help with eating, speaking, and feeling confident. To care for dentures:

- Have them checked every five years. They may need adjusting or replacing.
- See your dentist if your dentures feel uncomfortable or cause any soreness.
- Clean them daily with a soft brush and a denture cleaner or mild toothpaste.
- Soak them in a glass or mug of water overnight if you take them out while sleeping.
- Store dentures safely and out of reach of children or pets.

Support and assistance

If you need help accessing dental care, support may be available.

For information

- For information about publicly funded dental services and emergency dental care information, see info.health.nz/servicessupport/publicly-funded-health-and-disability-services
- For Work and Income support, see workandincome.govt.nz/ eligibility/health-and-disability/dental-treatment or 0800 559 009

Foot care

Healthy feet are essential for comfort, independence, and staying active. Over time, wear and tear, poorly fitting shoes, reduced circulation, or medical conditions can all affect foot health. Regular care can help prevent discomfort and more serious issues.

Podiatrists recommend the following for healthy feet

- Wash feet daily and dry them thoroughly, especially between the toes.
- Trim toenails straight across and level with the tips of your toes to help prevent ingrown nails.
- Check feet daily for any redness, swelling, cracks, or sores, especially if you have diabetes.
- Moisturise your feet with a plain, unscented lotion to keep skin soft.
- Put your feet up to rest when sitting or watching television to improve circulation.
- Wear well-fitting, supportive shoes that give your toes room to move.
- Change socks or stockings daily, and choose natural, breathable fabrics.
- Exercise your feet and toes regularly to improve strength and circulation.
- Warm cold feet gradually. Never place them near direct heat sources.
- Wear warm socks in cooler weather, especially if you're prone to chilblains.
- See a doctor or podiatrist for help with problems like ingrown toenails, discharge, corns, or if you're unable to cut your own nails safely.

Environmental tips for foot safety

- Ensure floors are free from clutter and slippery rugs.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathroom and wear supportive slippers indoors.
- Sit in a stable chair with good lighting when trimming nails or applying moisturiser.

To find a registered podiatrist in your area, visit the Podiatrists Board of New Zealand

Skincare

As we age, our skin naturally becomes thinner, drier, and less elastic, making it more prone to damage. You may notice dryness, brown spots, or broken veins, especially if you've had a lot of sun exposure over the years. However, daily care can help keep our skin healthy and comfortable.

Tips for caring for your skin

- Moisturise regularly using a plain, fragrance-free cream on dry areas.
- Avoid harsh soaps, shampoos, or cosmetics that may irritate sensitive skin.
- Use warm water bathing or showering. Very hot water can dry out the skin.
- Protect your hands with gloves when gardening or using cleaning products.
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) when spending time outdoors, even on cloudy days.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat to shade your face and neck from the sun.
- Stay hydrated by drinking around eight glasses of fluid a day, unless advised otherwise by your doctor.

- Exercise daily to promote healthy blood flow and skin tissue.
- Check your skin regularly and let your doctor know if you notice:
 - new or changing moles
 - unexplained rashes
 - rough patches or sores that don't heal.

Environmental tips

- Keep indoor air from becoming too dry by using a humidifier if needed
- Use soft, natural fabrics for clothing and bedding to reduce irritation.
- Place non-slip mats in the bathroom to avoid falls, especially if skin is sensitive or fragile.

Early detection of skin problems, including skin cancer, can make treatment easier and more effective. If in doubt, get it checked.

Screening for cancer

Cancer screening helps detect certain cancers early, when treatment is often more effective. Several free screening programmes are available in Aotearoa New Zealand to support early detection and save lives.

Bowel screening

The **National Bowel Screening Programme** is free for people aged **60 to 74**. It aims to find bowel cancer early, when it can often be successfully treated.

- You'll receive a test kit in the mail if you're eligible.
- The test is done at home and sent back for free.
- If anything unusual is found, you'll be offered further tests.

For more information, visit: timetoscreen.nz

Cervical screening

Cervical screening is one of the best ways to protect against cervical cancer. You're eligible for free screening if you:

- are a woman or person with a cervix
- are aged 25 to 69
- · have ever been sexually active.

It doesn't matter how long ago you were last sexually active, what your gender identity is, or your sexuality. If you have a cervix, regular screening is recommended.

- A **new type of cervical screening test** is now available, which can often be done by **self-test**.
- If you've had a total hysterectomy (removal of uterus and cervix), check with your doctor whether you still need screening.

Always speak to your doctor, nurse, or community health provider if you notice **any unusual symptoms**, regardless of your age or screening history.

Breast screening

The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. Regular breast screening can help find cancer early, often before a lump can be felt, when treatment is most likely to be successful.

A mammogram (a low-dose breast X-ray) can detect small changes in the breast tissue. If anything unusual is found,



further tests will be offered to check if it might be cancer.

Who is eligible?

If you are aged **45 to 69**, you can have a **free screening mammogram** every two years through **BreastScreen Aotearoa**, New Zealand's national breast screening

programme. The age range for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand is being extended to 74.

- You don't need a referral. Contact BreastScreen Aotearoa to enrol or check if you're due.
- The appointment is quick and usually takes around 30 minutes.
- · Mobile screening units are available in many areas.

Things to remember:

- Breast cancer can affect anyone, regardless of family history.
- Even if you feel well and have no symptoms, screening is still important.
- Let your doctor or nurse know if you notice any changes in your breasts between screenings.

To find out more or to book, call **0800 270 200** or visit breastscreen.org.nz

Prostate cancer testing

Men aged 50 and over should discuss prostate testing with their doctor (usually GP). You can also use the Kupe decision tool kupe.net.nz/ to help you decide if you should get a prostate cancer check.

Medicines, alcohol, and smoking Medicines

As we age, our bodies process medications differently. This means older adults are more likely to experience side effects or interactions between medications, alcohol, or other drugs. These can lead to problems such as falls, confusion, or depression.

Tips for safe medicine use

 Know what medicines you're taking, why you need them, and what side effects to watch for.

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Follow the instructions on the label.
- Consider using a pill organiser or asking your pharmacist for a blister pack to help manage multiple medications.
- Always check whether alcohol or other drugs should be avoided while taking your medicine.
- Report any side effects like dizziness, rashes, indigestion, or confusion to your doctor.

For more information, speak to your pharmacist or ask for the Age Concern factsheet on medication use at ageconcern.org.nz

Alcohol

As we get older, our bodies become more sensitive to alcohol. The liver processes alcohol less efficiently, which can lead to higher blood alcohol levels and stronger reactions.

Important things to know

- Drinking alcohol daily is not recommended.
- Occasional light drinking (for example, one or two glasses) is generally safe for most people.
- Heavy drinking can lead to liver, heart, and kidney disease, as well as memory problems, sleep issues, and an increased risk of falls.
- Alcohol can affect relationships, alter the effects of medicines, and provide calories without essential nutrients.

For more information or advice contact the Alcohol Drug Helpline: 0800 787 797 or read the *Alcohol and Older People* guide available at order.healthpromotion.govt.nz/collections/alcohol/products/alcohol-and-older-people-booklet

Smoking

Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body and increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, lung disease, and cancers of the mouth, throat, and lungs.

Good news: Quitting smoking at any age brings health benefits. Many people choose to quit to improve their health and protect the wellbeing of those around them.

For more information or support, call Quitline on **0800** 778 778 or visit quit.org.nz

Sexual wellbeing

Sexual interest and activity may change with age. Many older people continue to enjoy fulfilling sexual relationships.

Things to consider

- Communication with your partner is key. Talk openly about your needs and any concerns.
- Physical changes like vaginal dryness or erectile difficulties are common. Speak to your doctor; treatments are available.
- Pleasure doesn't always have to involve intercourse. Gentle touch and intimacy are just as important.

For more information, visit Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa or call 07 810 6610 to make an appointment.

Around the home

Staying warm and well in winter

Older adults are more vulnerable to the cold due to reduced activity, medications, or changes in how the body regulates temperature. Cold homes can increase the risk of serious illnesses such as pneumonia, stroke, and heart attack.

Tips to stay warm

- Keep the main living areas between 18–22°C. Use a wall thermometer to check the temperature.
- Make sure you have enough heating and fuel. Insulate your home and block draughts if possible.
- Treat heating as essential to your health, not a luxury.
- Get a flu vaccination every autumn.

Home safety and falls prevention

Making your home safer can help you stay independent and prevent injuries. Visit acc.co.nz/preventing-injury/trips-falls for more advice.

General tips

- Keep floors clear of clutter and secure rugs with non-slip backing.
- Ensure hallways and stairs are well-lit.
- Use handrails and grab bars in bathrooms and stairways.
- Wear supportive, non-slip shoes.

Bathrooms

- Use non-slip mats in the shower and bath.
- Install grab rails and consider a shower seat.
- Use a pull-out mirror to avoid overreaching.

Lighting

- Keep a torch by your bed and test batteries regularly.
- Install night lights in bedrooms, bathrooms, and hallways.

Kitchens

- Store commonly used items between waist and eye level.
- Use a step ladder or reaching tool instead of climbing on furniture.
- Move hot or heavy items safely by sliding rather than lifting.

Bedrooms

- Sit down when dressing.
- Get up slowly from bed: roll onto your side, sit up, then stand gradually.

Gardening and maintenance

- Use lightweight tools and raised garden beds.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects or overreaching. Ask for help when needed.

Planning for a fall

Even with precautions, falls can happen. It's important to plan ahead.

Be prepared

- · Keep a phone nearby at all times.
- · Consider a personal alarm system.
- Leave a spare key with someone you trust or in a secure outdoor lockbox.

If you fall

- Stay calm and assess your condition.
- Try to get up using something sturdy for support.
- If you can't get up, try to call for help and make yourself comfortable.
- Always let your doctor know about the fall.



Useful contacts

Age Concern New Zealand

- 0800 65 2 105
- · ageconcern.org.nz

Citizens Advice Bureau

- 0800 367 222
- · cab.org.nz

Hearing New Zealand

- 0800 233 445
- · hearing.org.nz

Blind Low Vision NZ

- 0800 24 33 33
- blindlowvision.org.nz

SeniorNet

seniornet.nz

Regional Sports Trusts

· sportnz.org.nz

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora

info.health.nz/

Also check with your:

- GP or nurse for health advice
- · Local public health unit
- · Library for local events, services, and health information



This resource is available from healthed.govt.nz or your local health district.

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