

# golden years.

ENSURE YOUR FUTURE IS ROSY WITH OUR GUIDE TO STAYING HEALTHY THROUGH THE DECADES

WORDS POLLY SIMONS



When it comes to looking after ourselves, it seems Australians are an optimistic bunch.

Not only do we have one of the highest life expectancies in the world (79 for men and 84 for women), but when rating our wellbeing, more than half of us describe our health as excellent or very good.

Whatever our age (or at least, what we say it is), this attitude is already future-proofing us as, according to the Centenarian Institute at the University of NSW, a positive outlook is the key to living happily to 100 and beyond.

So, with that in mind, here's how to make the most of every decade – with a few check-ins along the way.

## TEENS: WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

During your teens, the choices seem limitless – should you head straight to uni or backpack around the world instead? Who will your friends be? Where will you live? It's the time to find out who you really are.

It's exciting, but it can easily become overwhelming if you don't have a support network to help.

“Young people are the most neglected in terms of mental health care,” says Avalon GP and a director of Sydney North Shore and Beaches Medicare Local, Dr Stephen Ginsborg. If you're feeling unhappy, moody or irritable, your sleep patterns have changed and you've been lacking in energy or motivation for more than a couple of weeks, see your

GP or go to the website [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au) for handy advice.

**Life lessons:** Learn about the dangers of drugs, binge drinking and STIs. And if you're 18, have a pap smear.

## 20s: THE UNTOUCHABLES

Your 20s are the “bounce back” years, when you can party all weekend and half the week and still power through work on Monday on the strength of a large cup of coffee and a bacon and egg roll. If you're delaying having children (more on that later), it's also the time to make inroads in your career, work overseas, travel to unusual places and generally have as much fun as you can without a care in the world.

It's also the time to form those healthy habits that will keep you fighting fit in the years to come. That means no smoking, drinking in moderation (try to have a least a couple of alcohol-free days a week) and making healthy eating a habit rather than just a New Year's resolution.

It also means finding a way of working exercise into your daily routine, whether it's going for a run, hitting the gym or taking the stairs instead of the lift.

“Your 20s and 30s are when you come to terms with preventative health care,” says Dr Ginsborg.

**Life lessons:** Studies have shown that keeping on the move, eating well and not smoking or drinking to excess are the best things you can do for a long and healthy life. Do you really want to take chances?

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## “your 20s are the “bounce back” years.”

### 30s: BUILDING ON GOOD FOUNDATIONS

For many, the 30s are the years for getting the balance right, whether that's marriage and family or building on the career success you've enjoyed so far while still having a life outside of work.

Exercise is great for stress relief, not just putting your post-baby body back in a bikini. Following a well-balanced diet that includes plenty of fruit and veggies (and a treat or two) will keep you firing on all cylinders.

If you want the pitter-patter of little feet in your future, now is the time to start making a few changes.

“After 35, fertility rapidly drops off,” says Mosman GP Dr Penny Adams of Sydney North Shore and Beaches Medicare Local. A GP can sort out any physical problems, help manage chronic conditions and review any medications that could interfere with your ability to conceive. And don't forget your social network – while postpartum depression affects one in seven women, mental health issues can affect anyone, so find someone you trust such as a spouse, mothers' group or friend, and keep talking. If that's not working, a GP can put you in touch with a psychologist under Medicare. Visit [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au) for more information.

**Life lessons:** Learn about breast awareness and self-examination. Your GP can show you how.

### 40s: THE GOOD LIFE

The 40s are for reaping the rewards of your hard work. You've got the dream job, the family and friends and (hopefully) can afford the odd fancy dinner or big overseas holiday. So enjoy it.

Giving yoga a go is not only a terrific way of de-stressing and creating a lean but healthy body (no stringy arms a la Madonna), but also counteracts declines in bone density, flexibility and metabolism. Don't forget to counteract your love of the good things in life with regular waistline and cholesterol checks.

**Life lessons:** Since 2006, the Federal Government has offered the free Medicare 45 Year Old Health Check to those at risk of developing conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

### 50s AND 60s: THE WONDER YEARS

Welcome to the holy trinity of living well – unlike previous years, you have the opportunity to do what you like, (hopefully) the income to do it and the good health (and good sense) to enjoy it.

Relish the new opportunities growing older brings: an empty nest means you can now travel without a backwards



glance (bonus points if your adult children can house sit!), downsizing means more time to do what YOU want to do without worrying about others.

Retirement offers up a whole host of possibilities including time to write that book or indulge your creative side (think it's impossible? *Little House on the Prairie* author Laura Ingalls Wilder didn't start writing until she was 64). For those who are divorced or separated, you have a chance to reinvent yourself.

Health-wise, cutting out caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods, increasing your intake of omega-3 fatty acids and learning good stress management techniques can help calm the menopause storm, while keeping active has been shown to do everything from protect your heart to relax arteries, strengthen bones, boost your immune system and stave off depression, dementia and Alzheimer's.

**Life lesson:** “None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm” - Henry David Thoreau.

### HEALTH CARE CHECKLIST

**Blood pressure:** Every two years, then every 6-12 months with increasing age and risk.

**Bone density:** Every five years from menopause. Men should check with their GP.

**Bowel cancer:** Every two years after 50.

**Breast cancer:** Self-check, then free through BreastScreen every two years after 40.

**Cholesterol and glucose levels:** Every two to five years, more often if you're overweight or have a family history of heart disease or Type 2 Diabetes.

**Glaucoma:** Every two years from 40, or 35 if you have a family history of the disease.

**Skin cancer:** Self-check every three to 12 months.

**Teeth:** Every 12 months.

**Waist circumference and BMI:** Every two years, more often if overweight or obese.

# Wrinkles

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