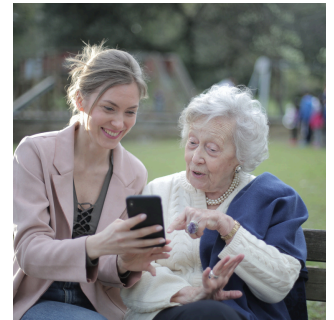


# Helping older family to stay well



Hertfordshire and  
West Essex  
Integrated Care Board

*Caring for parents or older family members as they age can feel overwhelming, but small steps can make a big difference. Dr Elizabeth Kendrick, Medical Director at Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust, has supported older adults and their families in her time as a GP with a special interest in older people. With her expertise in frailty care, she shares practical advice on how to help your older family stay well, maintain their independence, and plan for the future.*



**DR ELIZABETH KENDRICK**  
MEDICAL DIRECTOR

## What key things can I do to help older people I know stay well as they age?

Encouraging regular movement - that is one of the best things you can do. We are talking even short daily walks, helping people to maintain strength and balance. We need to make sure people are keeping up to date with their vaccinations, including COVID, flu and pneumonia, and we are looking at how we support good nutrition and hydration as well. Think about social connection, making sure people stay engaged with their friends, hobbies, community activities, these all have a significant impact on overall wellbeing. People in their 50s and 60s can start preparing, doing things like Pilates and tai chi to reduce their risk of falls later, into their 70s and 80s.

## How do I know if they are taking the right medicines?

As we get older, we tend to take more medicines for different things. With this we are finding that, with age, some of those medicines might not work quite as well, or they might start causing side effects. So, we encourage people to have regular medication reviews with their GP or pharmacist, ideally once a year, just to check everything is still right. If someone seems more tired, dizzy or a bit more confused than usual, it could be the medication, and it is worth getting it looked at.

As we age, more of a drug can get into the brain or build up in the body, so something that was fine for years might suddenly start causing problems.

## What signs should I look out for that my older relatives may need more support?

We need to also keep an eye on how people are moving - their balance, their energy levels. If someone is starting to struggle with everyday things, if they are becoming a bit more forgetful, or just not interested in the things they used to enjoy, that can be a sign they might need a bit more support. We would encourage people to have a conversation with their GP - even just bringing it up at their next appointment can make a real difference.

## How can I help them plan for their future care?

Encourage people to start having those really important conversations about what matters most to them if they were to become unwell. Would they want to be treated at home if that is possible? Do they have particular wishes around the kind of care they would want? These are things that are much easier to talk about early on. People can be helped to record those preferences.

That might be through an Advance Care Plan, which may also include a ReSPECT form, so that when decisions need to be made, everyone is clear, and their wishes can be respected.

## What should I do if conversations about future care worries them?

We know these conversations can feel difficult at first, which is completely natural. Start small by asking someone what is important to them, what matters most in their life, rather than diving straight into the details about care. We reassure people that planning ahead does not mean giving up independence, it is actually about staying in control, making sure their wishes are known. Should they wish to do so, they can always change their mind later on.

## What can I do if I think older family or friends need more help?

There's lots of helpful information available. The Age UK website is a great place to start, with practical advice on all sorts of topics. If you are looking to find out what local services or support might be available, you can contact:

**Herts Help** on 0300 123 4044  
[info@hertshelp.net](mailto:info@hertshelp.net)

**Essex Frontline:** 01799 618855  
<https://essexfrontline.org.uk/>  
[info@frontlinerrferrals.org.uk](mailto:info@frontlinerrferrals.org.uk)