

# Almost Old

Help yourself to a grand old age

*A DIY course with Rachel McAlpine*



*You will probably live longer than you expect  
but how you age is largely up to you.*

*What luck!*

# Almost old?

*Welcome to the bonus years!*



Have you had a wake-up birthday?  
Can you barely believe  
you're a certain age  
and dread what lies ahead?  
Is your future self a blurry screen  
or a stereotyped cartoon?  
Are you frozen even though you know  
exactly what to do?  
Do you think it's too late or too soon?

Now's the perfect time  
to face the facts and get a grip  
and get control of your precious life  
not because you ought to  
but because you can  
tweak your life and make the best  
of your bonus years  
and here's the bottom line:  
you're not dead!

I devised this comprehensive but simple DIY course for myself when I was 75. It was so successful that I'm sharing it. If I can do it, so can you. Welcome!



*Rachel*

# Don't be scared of the bonus years



## ***Immediate and long-term benefits***

There are hundreds of ways to age well, and by doing the *Almost Old* course you can find your own.

As you work through the tasks you set yourself, you'll discover that one small change can grow and kick-start other changes, and that many small changes can transform your quality of life.

*Almost Old* has all the tools you need. Trust the process and expect to:

1. Make lasting changes to your attitude and lifestyle—but only the ones you want.
2. Feel more positive and in control of your future.
3. Be surprised by happiness.
4. Enjoy the life you are lucky enough to be living.

*If you compare yourself to others, you may become vain and bitter;  
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.*

~ Desiderata

# A DIY path to aging well

Some go into battle against the aging process. (You can't win.) Some pretend it's never going to happen. Some prefer to control the way they age—slowly and cheerfully. *Almost Old* is a workbook to help you do just that. A framework is provided, but you set your own agenda.

Actually, you already know what to do. Every day you read more research, more policies, and above all, tips on how to age well. It's mostly common sense.



Trouble is, knowing isn't doing. Changing human behaviour is notoriously hard. (Diets, anyone?) Now you'll learn how to start new habits that stick.

- Work out what's going on in your life.
- Decide what you want to change for your future well-being.
- Make small changes using easy methods that are proven to work.

You'll do a quick-and-honest audit of various aspects of your lifestyle and attitudes and decide on your own priorities. Over 12 months you'll start at least 12 tiny new habits of your choice and take other small steps. Together, these will boost your well-being and open up new possibilities for the next decades of your life.

And yes, you do have time in your busy life for this. It's a leisure course, in several senses. You need to go slowly, because it takes time to form new habits.

# How it all began

When I was 74, I discovered that my personal life expectancy was 98 or 99. I was appalled. Then I wondered why I was appalled. Answer: I subconsciously saw old age as something horrible, disgusting, humiliating, unthinkable—and something that would never happen to me. But I was wrong: I could have another 25 bonus years ahead of me.

I desperately needed to get a clear idea of what old age could be like. As soon as I started researching the realities of old age I discovered that the quality of life in old age was largely (maybe 60%?) determined by lifestyle and attitude—not by genes or fate. And for me, as a lucky middle-class person living in New Zealand, lifestyle and attitude are largely my own responsibility.

## ***My boot camp for the bonus years***

So, being a nerdy and experimental kind of person, I devised my own solution. Even knowing perfectly well that I could die next Tuesday, I intended to make my potential old age as happy and healthy and useful as possible.

Soon I was drowning in research and policies about healthy aging, positive aging, successful (?) aging, creative aging and so forth. I was confused by endless guidelines and tips. So I selected 12 aspects of lifestyle and attitude that seemed important to me personally. And I attended to one per month. For each aspect of life I started at least one very small habit and took one other step. This satisfied my need to do *something* instead of nothing.

## ***My boot camp brought ongoing benefits***

I was surprised at the unexpected benefits of just following the procedures of my boot camp. Many tiny habits are still with me and have grown in the last 5 years. Some big changes have transformed my weekly schedule. In stressful times I'm more confident, more able to solve problems, happier. I'm daily delighted at being alive.

## ***The one enormous secret: heaps of itsy bitsy teeny weeny habits***

People ask me, "What's your secret?" And I do have one. The secret to aging the way you want lies in doing many itsy bitsy teeny weeny things—things you really want to do—not in worrying or hoping or doing nothing.

You can hardly fail. And you'll feel so much better.

# What's different about this course

***It's structured—but you set your own tasks***

TIMING (FLEXIBLE)	TOPICS (FLEXIBLE)	MAKE NOTES	TINY AUDIT	TINY HABITS	1-TIME ACTION	OPTIONAL WRITING
Jan	Housing					
Feb	Food & Health					
March	Exercise					
April	Finances					
May	Hobbies					
June	People					
July	Voice					
August	Brain & Sleep					
September	Mind					
October	Happiness					
November	Identity					
December	Purpose					

***You don't need will-power or moral strength—  
you just follow procedures***

Tick the boxes and enjoy yourself. Timing is flexible. Topics are flexible. You must only do things that you want to do. It doesn't make sense to feel guilty at any point. You cannot fail, because at least one tiny habit or one-time action will bring rewards, gently influencing other aspects of your lifestyle and attitudes.

***There is no hierarchy of tasks***

As long as you follow the structure, it hardly matters which tiny habit or one-time action you decide to do. There are no big tasks, just your choice of many little ones. Trust your gut or pick tasks at random. If in doubt, use your first idea.

***You are your own guru***

You are in charge. You are only doing little things, not things that could ruin your life. You are only doing things you want to do. You will find your own way of being old. Because you are taking control, one it'sy bitsy teeny weeny habit at a time.

# Elements of training

## **LEARN ABOUT TINY HABITS**

Before you start on monthly topics, go to <http://tinyhabits.com/join> and do BJ Fogg's free, tiny, 5-day course.

**REASON:** Resolutions do not stick. Affirmations do not stick. Blue-sky dreaming doesn't stick but teeny tiny habits do.

## **1. MAKE NOTES**

Think about the topic of the month. Google it. Make notes or mind-maps or diagrams. Note which ideas appeal to you and seem relevant to your future life.

**REASON:** to update your knowledge, look towards the future, and find your personal priorities.

## **2. AUDIT YOURSELF**

Check how you're doing right now with this month's topic, knowing that as you grow older your needs will change.

**REASON:** to set a benchmark for growth or change.

## **3. START A TINY HABIT OR TWO**

Choose a habit you *want* to start (or stop) related to each topic. Decide on a reminder, a 30-second ritual, and an instant reward. Practise new habits for at least 4 weeks.

**REASON:** A new phase of life requires new habits that stick.

## **4. A ONE-TIME ACTION**

Each month do one simple thing to alter the environment that is influencing your behaviour or attitude.

**REASON:** a changed environment resets behaviour.

## **OPTIONAL WRITING**

Each month has an optional written exercise.

**REASON:** to explore your ideas and feelings, get a new perspective or change the story of your life.

# Tiny habits & one-time actions

## ***A tiny habit: something you do often and automatically***

Starting a habit needs to be as easy as flossing one tooth. The phrase “tiny habits” was coined by BJ Fogg of Stanford University. James Clear calls them Atomic Habits.

Any habit that sticks requires three steps in a specific sequence.

1. Decide on a habit you *want* to start. Reduce it to a very short, easy ritual.
2. Choose a reminder to start the ritual: something you already do every day, or that happens often, like cleaning your teeth or catching a bus.
3. Choose a tiny reward: something as simple as a cup of tea or a “Yay!”

## **Do your new 3-step tiny habit every day for at least 4 weeks**

1. First you notice the tiny **reminder**.
2. Straight after the reminder, you do a tiny **ritual**, 30 seconds maximum.
3. You immediately give yourself a tiny **reward**.

After practising the tiny habit for a few days you may want to expand it or do it more often or change it or drop it. Feel free to experiment—you’re in charge.

## **Get the new-habit habit**

With *Almost Old*, you will start at least one new habit every month.

You will gradually become a person who is able to change your own behaviour. By establishing a bunch of tiny rituals you can change the way you behave and even the way you think. By choosing to make small changes, you gain a mighty boost of power.

Changing your own behaviour is an extraordinary skill that you can apply to a surprising range of problems.

## ***A one-time action is something you do once***

At times you want to do something extra. Feel free, but don’t feel burdened.

- A one-time action is achievable and measurable: when it’s done, it’s done.
- It often involves changing your environment in some way.
- It is not broad and aspirational like “get fit” or “make my home safe.” Aspirations are valuable, but to achieve them, you need to *do* something.
- A one-time action is specific and soon, like “join a gym next week” or “install a banister this month” or “hire a shredder bin today.”



# Get a group together

All the work you do for this course, you'll do individually. But it's good to share this life-changing experience with others. You'll appreciate their company and support as you work through the topics. Start a Meet-up group or get together with a few friends and meet regularly to discuss your decisions and progress.

## ***Suggested group protocol***

1. **Be kind.** You need each other for support, inspiration, and encouragement.
2. **Be trustworthy.** Discussions must be confidential.
3. **Take turns.** Everyone must have their turn at speaking.
4. **Listen actively.** Check that you understand. Don't interrupt with instant advice.
5. **Watch your language.** Try to use neutral words about old people and old age.

## ***What to do in your meetings***

- Talk about the *Almost Old* programme and how it's working for you.
- Tell each other about your plans and progress.
- You'll want to talk about other things and socialise. Best do this before or after the discussion.

## Psst: beware your inner ageist!



# Month 1: HOUSING

## *A tiny bit of research*

Don't struggle. Take it easy. You don't have to know everything. Each month, just get an idea of current thinking around the topic of the month.

- Read and listen and think a bit about housing for older people.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings or videos) seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about your own living situation*

neighbourhood / comfort / security / safety / falls / furniture / home support / access / clutter / sharing / cleaning / renting / visiting / moving / treasures / space / place / warmth / location / living alone / turangawaiwai / place of origin /

## *In a few words, what sort of home do you want in 15 years?*

## *Tiny self-audit*

What is your living situation like right now? What's good, bad, what needs attention?

## *Start at least one tiny habit (see page 8)*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to improve your living situation*

[See page 8]

# Month 2: FOOD & HEALTH CARE

## *A tiny bit of research*

You don't have to know everything. Just browse current thinking on the topic.

- Read and listen and think a bit about food and health care for older people.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings) seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about your own food and health care*

pleasure / duty / what you honestly eat / food diary / cooking / 7 per day / taste / fresh / packaged / protein / snacks / sugar / weight / water / alcohol / how you eat / what's in your fridge / home delivery / vitamins / health management / teeth / WOF / medications

## *What sort of diet and health care do you want in old age?*

## *Tiny self-audit*

What's good and bad about your eating patterns? How are you managing health care?

## *Start tiny habits to improve your eating patterns*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to improve your eating patterns or health care*

# Month 3: EXERCISE

## *A tiny bit of research*

Take a look at current mainstream thinking around this month's hot topic.

- Read and listen and think a bit about exercise for older people.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings) seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about exercise after 65*

strength / aerobic fitness / flexibility / balance / stretching / reaching / muscles / standing / sitting / walking / jogging / swimming / gym / sports & games / yoga / Pilates / tai chi / dancing / outdoors / schedule / effects on brain, health, mood / guilt / enjoyment / friends /

## *What exercise do you want to be doing in 15 years?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your exercise habits*

How much exercise do you do? What do you do to stay fit, strong, and flexible?

## *Start at least one tiny exercise habit*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to update your exercise habits*

# Month 4: FINANCES

## *A tiny bit of research*

Take it easy. Just look for some new ideas about this month's topic.

- Read and listen and think a bit about financial issues for older people.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings) seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about personal finance in old age*

your attitude to money / budgeting / income / savings / treats / financial plan / cash / security / risk / scams / spending / supporting others / being supported / borrowing / lending / donations / generosity / credit card / true value / volunteering / skimping /

## *What would be an OK financial situation for you in old age?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your financial management*

How well are you managing your personal finances right now?

## *Start at least one tiny financial management habit*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to update your financial management*

# Month 5: HOBBIES

## *A tiny bit of research*

What are other people saying about hobbies and special interests in later years?

- Read and listen and think a bit about this month's topic.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings or videos) on this month's topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about hobbies in later years*

definition / your strengths / grow your talents / creativity / learning / food for the brain / skills / ongoing achievement / reading and writing / time / groups and clubs / pride / fun / play / passion / novelty / productive hobbies / receptive hobbies /

## *What special interest(s) would you like to pursue in future?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your hobbies or special interests*

What hobbies or special interests do you have now? How important are they to you?

## *Start at least one tiny habit with a view to hobbies in old age*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to advance a hobby or special interest*

# Month 6: PEOPLE

## *A tiny bit of research*

Find out what the experts are saying about this month's topic.

- Read and think a bit about the importance of social life in later years.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings) on this month's topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about hobbies in later years*

loneliness / isolation / social life / relationships / sex / kind friends, toxic friends / young friends / old friends / new friends / helping others / aroha / mana / parties / weekly schedule / strangers / supermarket / status / smiling / volunteering / clubs and groups / children

## *How would you like your social life to be 15 years from now?*

## *Tiny self-audit*

What's your social life like right now? How satisfied are you with your relationships?

## *Start at least one tiny habit for a better social life*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to improve your people-life*

# Month 7: VOICE

## *A tiny bit of research*

Browse for ideas about this month's topic: voice and self expression in later life.

- Read and think a bit about the voices of older people.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings or videos) on this month's topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about voices in later years*

tone of voice / breathing / self-expression / voicing your true thoughts / speak up / speak out / singing / writing / social media / listen to yourself / talking too much / being heard / listen actively / accent / whisper / sing / conversation / hydration / Toastmasters

## *How would you like your voice to be 15 years from now?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your voice or creative outlet*

What is your voice like and how do you use it? How do you express yourself now?

## *Start at least one tiny habit around creativity or self-expression*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to help you express yourself*



# Month 8: BRAIN & SLEEP

## *A tiny bit of research*

What do the experts say about brain health and sleep in old age?

- Read and think a bit about this month's topic.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings or videos) on this month's topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about the brain & sleep in later years*

neuroplasticity / cognitive reserve / decision-making / diet, exercise, social life / hearing / brainstorm / new skills / exert body and brain / to learn, teach / white matter / read books / adapt / screen-free / regular sleep / nap / pressure / lifestyle vs. genes / memory /

## *How do you hope to be thinking & sleeping 15 years from now?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your brain and sleep*

How is your brain working these days? Notice any changes? How are you sleeping?

## *Start a tiny habit to exercise or rest your brain*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to help memory, cognition or sleep*

# Month 9: MIND

## *A tiny bit of research*

- Browse information about mindfulness and equanimity in old age.
- Read and think a bit about the topic of the month.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips on this topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about mindfulness in old age*

state of mind / peace of mind / managing stress / a lot on your mind / breathe / distractions / meditate / mantras / pause, be present, proceed / daydream / it's all in the mind / relax / story telling / write a memoir / time / music / creativity / changing your mind

## *How calm and alert do you want to be 15 years from now?*

## *Tiny self-audit for your state of mind*

How do you rate yourself for calmness, awareness, relaxation and mindfulness? How often are you present in the moment (as opposed to thinking about the past or future)?

## *Start a tiny habit to improve your state of mind*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to increase your ability to be calm and alert*

# Month 10: HAPPINESS

## *A tiny bit of research*

What do the experts say about happiness in old age?

- Read and think a bit about the topic of the month.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings or videos) about happiness seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about happiness and old people*

definitions / small feelings / equilibrium / pleasure / pride / moments / learn optimism / gratitude / forgive / grudges / reframe / envy / FOMO / photobook of happy memories / thank you / hugs / give / volunteer / help / “yes, and...” / firsts / happiness curve

## *How contented with your life do you want to be in 15 years?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your satisfaction with life*

How happy are you now on a scale of 1-10? How contented are you with your life?

## *Start one or two tiny habits to increase your happiness*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to increase your satisfaction with life*

# Month 11: IDENTITY

## *A tiny bit of research*

What do experts and creative people say about identity and self-esteem in old age?

- Read and think a bit about the impact of old age on one's sense of self.
- Consider which 2 or 3 tips (or policies or stories or news or research findings) on this month's topic seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about identity and self-esteem in old people*

stereotypes / agism / roles / character / talents / mirrors / whakapapa / individuality / self-esteem / the "other" / wisdom / frailty / uniqueness / invisibility / personhood / elders / experience / knowledge / guidance / respect / grey hair / fashion / posture / kaumatua /

## *How you want people to see you in 15 years time?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your sense of identity*

Who are you? What is special about you? How do other people see you?

## *Start at least one tiny habit related to your identity*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to strengthen your sense of identity*

# Month 12: PURPOSE

## *A tiny bit of research*

Explore this month's topic any way you want.

- Read and think a bit about the ways older people contribute to the world.
- Consider which tips (or policies or stories or research) about older people's roles in life seem relevant to you personally.

## *Some ideas to explore about the roles of older people*

life-work / values / passion / achievements / beliefs / leadership / family / humanity / legacy / reasons for living / being useful / humanity / inspiration / help / philosophy / duty / wisdom / experience / memoir / kaitiakitanga / continuity / mortality / love / religion

## *What might be your purpose, role or task in old age?*

## *Tiny self-audit of your current roles*

You have very good reasons for living right now. Can you summarise them?

## *Start at least one tiny habit related to your future role*

	Habit #1	Habit #2
Reminder		
Ritual		
Reward		

## *A one-time action to help you fulfil your long-term role in life*

# How did it go?

If you have finished the *Almost Old* DIY course I'm guessing that...

- **You put in a lot of effort.**
- **Things did not go to plan**—but you still tackled many aspects of your life and made many small changes.
- **Some of your tiny habits grew** into bigger or different habits and others died a natural death. Sometimes you changed direction. Some topics took longer and others were quickly resolved.

True?

**None of these variations matter** because some of your chosen changes have made a dramatic difference to your lifestyle or attitude. Maybe you haven't even realised this yet, but their effects will ripple through the rest of your life.

**Results are always unpredictable** because we are all lopsided. It's impossible to be equally "good" in all areas from finance to self-expression, from exercise to human relations.

**Take credit** for having the strength to even start this course, let alone finish it. Above all, you've got *the new-habit habit*: you know how to change your own behaviour, and you know you can do it.

**If you finished the course, you have passed with distinction.**

- You set your own agenda.
- You decided what to read, what to change, what new habits to start.
- And then you did something.

That's a lot: 12 topics, 12 changes, 12 habits. And if you did less, you can finish the course another time—or not. Your call.

In this course, you were the curriculum designer, the researcher, the trainer and the trainee. You did it your way, which is the best way for you.

# OPTIONAL WRITING EXERCISES

## ***Writing exercise 1: Housing***

Write about your current home. Describe in detail any features that make your life easy and pleasant and any that make it difficult or unpleasant.

Write in detail about the feelings you have about your home.

Be as honest as you can.

Write for 20 minutes.

In all these writing exercises, your writing is private. Write for yourself alone: no need to show it to anyone. When you're finished, if in doubt, destroy it!

## ***Writing exercise 2: Food & Health Care***

Write a love poem or a speech praising certain parts of your own body.

Say what you admire and appreciate about your body.

Don't mention anything you habitually see as ugly, or any "bad" features.

Just love this body which has served you well for so many years. You're still alive! That's a miracle that you and your beautiful body have achieved.

Be positive and don't hold back.

Write for 20 minutes.

This is private writing: no need to show it to anyone unless you want to.

### ***Writing exercise 3: Exercise***

Write a dialogue between yourself and a fitness coach.

The coach is asking many blunt questions which you must answer fully and honestly.

He or she questions you about some of these things:

- your history with exercising
- what exercise you do now, and why
- what sort of exercise you like, and why
- what sort of exercise you dislike and why
- what your feelings are about people who exercise
- what sort of exercise you believe you need now
- what sort of exercise you believe you will need as you grow older.

Write for 20 minutes without stopping.

This is private: no need to show it to anyone unless you want to.

### ***Writing exercise 4: Finances***

Write a detailed description of yourself going shopping, with three constraints.

1. Write in the third person, as if you are a stranger watching you go shopping. Don't use *I* or *me* but write about yourself as *he* or *she*.
2. Describe every little thing the stranger can see or hear and nothing else. (This is hard.)
3. Don't mention any thoughts or feelings, because a stranger cannot know what you are thinking or feeling.

Write for 20 minutes without stopping.

This is private: no need to show it to anyone unless you want to.



## ***Writing exercise 5: Hobbies***

**STEP 1. Make an extreme list of 100 interesting hobbies.** Start a numbered list as a .doc or .xls or use lined paper. Start naming hobbies and don't stop until you reach 100. It's easier than it sounds. If you run out of ideas just start again, or do variations on a theme (knitting, knitting socks, knitting hats...). Your ideas can be silly: don't worry, doesn't matter.

**STEP 2. Analyse the extreme list.** Look for themes and pick 4-6. Colour code them. Calculate percentages, e.g. if one theme has 20 items, that's 20% of the total.

**STEP 3. Any action required?** It's your call. Mostly you'll just absorb the data. Sometimes you may want to act on the data, do something big or small. Over to you.

## ***Writing exercise 6: People***

Write in great detail about a significant outing or visit with a friend or family member. (Don't choose anything traumatic.)

Describe everything you did, said and felt. Don't hold anything back.

What are the implications? What was the other person feeling?

What did you learn, if anything?

Write for 20 minutes without stopping. Don't show anyone.

## ***Writing exercise 7: Voice***

For this little exercise write with your non-dominant hand: if you're right-handed, put your pen in your left hand, and vice versa. (Don't use a computer for this exercise.)

Without thinking much at all, write for 10–15 minutes about your own voice, what it sounds like and feels like and how you feel about it.

Then think about what you wrote and what it might mean.

### ***Writing exercise 8: Brain & Sleep***

Write for 20 minutes non-stop about a demanding and difficult thing you did, one that required sustained mental effort and continual learning.

Write about how the experience affected you and what you learned from it.

Don't worry about style: this is just for yourself, to find out what you think and feel about your brain.

### ***Writing exercise 9: State of mind***

Write about a dream you've had. Any dream will do, or even a daydream.

Write in the present tense, as if the dream is happening now.

Give as much detail as possible about what happened, colours, feelings, words, people, unknowns.

Write about what you think the dream might mean.

If your interpretation seems negative, see if you can reframe the dream in a positive light. Then write a second, positive interpretation.

Your own interpretations are the ones that matter, so no need to show your writing to anyone.

### ***Writing exercise 10: Happiness***

Keep a gratitude diary every evening for a month. Most people enjoy this.

As always, this is for you alone.

1. Write down one good thing that happened today, big or small or even very small. If you say it's a good thing, then it's a good thing — you're the boss.
2. For each good thing, write down *why* it happened. Again, your reason is correct.
3. You did something to help make this good thing happen! Write down how you made it happen or helped to make it happen, even if your contribution was tiny (or even imaginary). Any answer is a good answer.

## ***Writing exercise 11: Identity***

Sit where you can see yourself in a mirror.

For 20 minutes write without stopping, in depth and in detail. Write only for yourself. Choose one of the following topics:

- **Either:** Who are you, who do others think you are, and who will you be in 15 years?
- **Or:** “You can’t be that old—you look so young!” “You’re only as old as you feel.” When people say this, what do they mean? What do they imply about old people?
- **Or:** How much of your identity is vested in your position at work? Who are you (or who will you be) after you retire from that position?

## ***Writing exercise 12: Purpose***

You’re going to write a letter to your future 90-year-old self (Old-You).

Old-You has various health problems but still enjoys many pleasures.

Old-You wonders seriously (but not morbidly) why nature allows human beings to live so long.

In your letter you will explain passionately all the reasons why Old-You is highly valued and appreciated and loved.

Explain also that family and friends and society expect something from Old-You in future. What is it that they expect from you?

# This is just the beginning

You are almost old, but not old yet. It may be 20 or 30 years or more before you start to feel biologically old.

Life will keep throwing new challenges at you. It always has, always does. But now you have a bunch of skills to help you adapt to ongoing changes.

- You can self-audit.
- You've mastered the new-habit habit.
- You can change your own behaviour and your thoughts.
- You can spot ageism and nip it in the bud.
- You know that happiness is inclined to come naturally in old age, regardless of circumstances, especially if you practise.

You're ready to live another few decades with confidence.

Your group may want to have occasional meetings to share progress and problems: that's up to you. If by now you have become a group of trusted allies, that's one more blessing.

Congratulations—and welcome to the bonus years!



# Selected non-fiction books

*The Power of Habit* Charles Duhigg

*How to Age* Ann Karpf

*The Secret Life of the Grown-Up Brain* Barbara Strauch

*The Nostalgia Factory. Memory, Time and Aging* Douwe Draaisma

*The 5-Minute Meditator* Eric Harrison (Australian edition if you can find it)

*Learned Optimism* Martin E.P. Seligman

*The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth In Ancient Wisdom* Jonathan Haidt

*This Chair Rocks. A manifesto against ageism* Ashton Applewhite

*The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning* Margareta Magnusson

*The Art of Aging* Sherwin B. Nuland

*Being Mortal. Illness, Medicine, and what matters in the end* Atul Gawande

## A few other resources

*Tiny Habits: Free 5-day program to build habits* <https://tinyhabits.com/join/>

*All In The Mind* BBC (podcast: on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher)

*How To Be Old* Rachel McAlpine (book of poems, in press for 2020, The Cuba Press)

*How To Be Old* Rachel McAlpine (podcast: on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher)

*Engaging With Aging* Doris Carnevali, 97-year-old Professor Emerita, University of Washington School of Nursing (a blog about her own experience of aging)

*The Summer Before the Dark* Doris Lessing (novel)

*Memento Mori* Muriel Spark (novel)

# P.S. Please help

This is only the first draft of *Almost Old*, the workbook.

Please tell me about your experience with *Almost Old* so that I can improve it for others.

1. Which parts of the workbook were difficult or confusing for you, if any?
1. Where did you want more information, or less?
2. What brilliant suggestions do you have for the next draft of the workbook?
3. What tiny suggestions do you have for the next draft of the workbook?
4. Your personal reflections on the course itself

Please send your replies to me at [rachel@writing.co.nz](mailto:rachel@writing.co.nz) or comment anywhere on my website, WriteIntoLife.com.

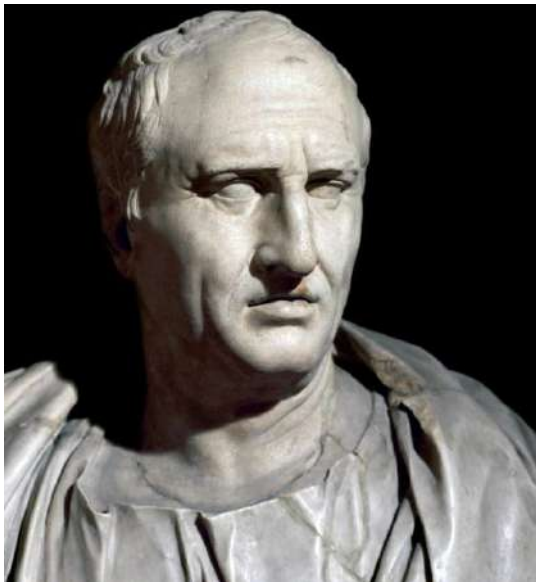
You'll be helping everyone who does the *Almost Old* DIY course in future. Thank you!

## ***Copyright and contact details***

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*You should use what you have, and whatever you should chance to be doing, do it with all your might.*

Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 BC

You have the desire for a good life after 65. You have the knowledge. You have the tools to shape your own old age. Start now with one tiny habit.

Rachel McAlpine 1940–



Resources: [Writeintolife.com](http://Writeintolife.com)

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