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Staying Fit as You Age

Easy Exercises for Older Adults

As you grow older, you may start noticing that you're not as strong or agile as you once were. You may wonder whether you can do something about it.

The solution is surprisingly simple: Exercise. Regardless of your age, regular physical activity can yield significant growth in stamina, flexibility, strength, and overall fitness.

And you don't need fancy equipment or to leave your home to start an exercise program. (But get your doctor's OK first if you have a disability or get winded easily. And if you feel pain while exercising, stop.)

The following routine stresses easy exercises. It's not necessary to do all the activities in one day. But try to do some activity each day.

The Daily-Activity Workout

Many of the day-to-day things you already do help increase your fitness. With slight modification, these activities can help even more.

Walk 'n' stroll. Regular walking is the backbone of any exercise pro-

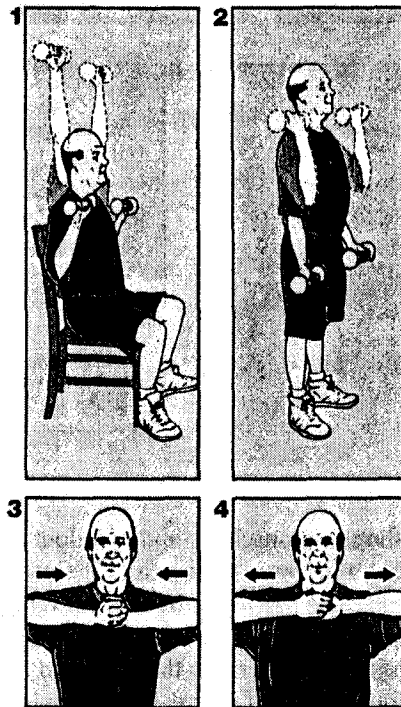


Figure 1. For the military press, sit on a straight-backed chair with your back straight against the backrest. Push weights from shoulder height to overhead until your elbows are straight. Lower the weights back to shoulder level, then repeat.

Figure 2. Stand against a wall for the biceps curl. Hold weights with your arms fully lowered. Without moving your back, bend your elbows to bring the weights to shoulder height. Lower and repeat.

Figure 3. To strengthen your chest muscles while standing or sitting, press your palms together in front of your chest, hold a few seconds, then relax and repeat.

Figure 4. For the shoulder pull, lock fingers in front of your chest and pull in opposite directions. Hold a few seconds, then relax and repeat. This strengthens upper-back muscles.

gram. Walk as often as you can, daily if possible, and aim for at least 30 minutes a day. If you cannot do this all at once, break it into pieces. Walk at a brisk but comfortable pace at which you can talk easily. Find a nice route, and enjoy yourself!

Lift and carry. Practice lifting and carrying a package that requires two hands. With your back straight, lift the package from a waist-high table. Hold the package at chest level with your elbows at 90° angles. Carry it awhile and place it elsewhere in your home on another waist-high table—but don't go up or down stairs with it. Try to do this several times a day.

Start with a few books in a box, and add books as you feel comfortable and as you build strength.

Stair climb. Even if it's hard, try to climb at least a few flights of stairs a day. Use the hand rails as much as needed, but try to gradually rely on them only for balance. Don't try for speed—the goal is stronger leg muscles for climbing stairs with ease.

Chair push-up. Sit in a firm chair that has sturdy armrests. Grasp the armrests and push off with your arms and legs to a standing position. Slowly lower to a sitting position, then push up again. Repeat as is comfortable.

continued

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clip and copy for use as a patient handout.

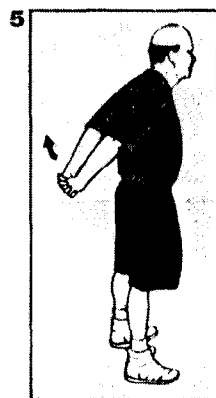


Figure 5. To stretch your chest and shoulder muscles, interlace your fingers behind your buttocks with your elbows bent. Slowly straighten your arms. Hold for 30 seconds.



Figure 6. For the thigh stretch, lean against a table or wall with your left hand. With your right knee bent, loop a towel around your right ankle and hold both ends with your right hand (or grasp your ankle if you can). Pull until you feel a gentle stretch. Hold for 30 seconds, switch legs, and repeat.

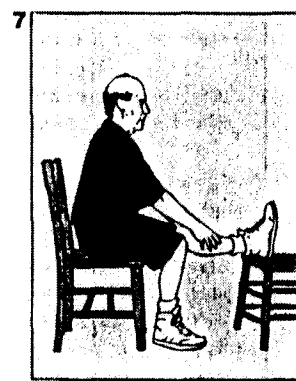


Figure 7. To work the muscles at the back of your thigh (the hamstrings), sit in a chair with your back straight. Place your left leg on another chair in front of you. Place both hands just above your left knee and bend forward from your hips, not your waist (keep your back straight). Slide your hands toward your foot until you feel a gentle stretch. Hold for 30 seconds, switch legs, and repeat.



Figure 8. To stretch your calves, face a wall at arm's length, and put both hands on the wall. Place your right foot farther from the wall than your left. Bend your left leg while keeping your right leg straight and your right heel firmly on the floor. With a straight back, move your hips toward the wall until you feel a gentle stretch in your right calf. Hold for 30 seconds, switch legs, and repeat.

Further Fitness

Try adding other components to your program.

Upper-body strength. You can "lift weights" with everyday items, such as food cans or partially filled plastic cartons, or with light weights on a barbell or dumbbells. Start with a weight you can comfortably lift 10 times. Add one lift each day until you reach 25. Then try a slightly heavier weight at 10 repetitions and repeat the cycle. Two good lifts are the military press (figure 1) and biceps curl (figure 2).

Other strengthening exercises don't involve lifting. To flex your biceps, hold your arms out at your sides like a circus strongman, flex your biceps for a few seconds by bringing your fists toward your ears, then relax and repeat three times (gradually work up to 10 times). To strengthen your upper-arm and

shoulder muscles, stand in a doorway and press your hands against the door frame at about ear level. Hold a few seconds, then relax and repeat two or three times. Also try the chest push (figure 3) and shoulder pull (figure 4) three times each.

Upper-body flexibility. To stretch your neck, swivel your head left, then turn your neck until you are looking right. Return left and repeat 10 times. Work up to 25 times. To work the muscles around your shoulders, shrug your shoulders as if you don't understand, trying to touch your shoulders to your ears. Roll your shoulders forward in a circular motion, then backward. Relax and repeat 10 to 25 times.

To work your arms and shoulders, interlace your fingers overhead, palms up. Push upward until your elbows are straight or you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold for 30 sec-

onds. To stretch your fingers, spread them as far as possible, make a fist, then stretch them outward again. Repeat 10 to 25 times. Then add the chest stretch (figure 5).

Lower-body flexibility. The daily activity exercises will strengthen your legs, but for added flexibility, do the thigh (figure 6), hamstring (figure 7), and calf (figure 8) stretches. Hold each stretch comfortably for 30 seconds on each leg.

Get Going!

You don't need any fancy gear or clothes for this simple program—just start exercising. It's never too late, and the sooner you start, the better you'll feel. **FSM**

Remember: This information is not intended as a substitute for medical treatment. Before starting an exercise program, consult a physician.