

Exercise Plan for Seniors

Ideally, you should be able to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate endurance activity a week. This would include walking, swimming, cycling, and a little bit of time every day to improve strength, flexibility, and balance. The 150 minutes is the prescribed amount of moderate-intensity exercise that the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) suggest for generally fit Americans aged 65 and older. Even though this sounds like a lot, the good news is that you can break it down into 10- or 15-minute chunks of exercise two or more times a day. Here is an example of what a week might look like, along with suggestions for some exercises you can do to get started:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
15-minute walk x 2	15-minute walk x 2	30 minute cycling, swimming, water aerobics, Zumba, etc.	Rest	30 minute walk (or 15-minute walk x 2)	30 minute cycling, swimming, water aerobics, Zumba, etc.	Rest
Strength		Strength		Strength		
Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance
Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility

Six-Minute Strength Routine

There are dozens of exercises you can do to build strength without having to set foot in a gym. Here are a few examples for people who are just getting started.

Abdominal Contractions

To increase strength in abdominal muscles

Take a deep breath and tighten your abdominal muscles. Hold for three breaths and then release the contraction. Repeat 10 times.

Wall Push-Ups

To increase strength in chest and shoulders

Stand about three feet away from a wall, facing the wall, with feet shoulder-width apart. Lean forward and place your hands flat on the wall, in line with your shoulders. Your body should be in “plank” position, with your spine in straight, not sagging or arched. Lower your body toward the wall and then push back. Repeat 10 times.

Pelvic Tilts

To strengthen and stretch muscles in the lower back

Take a deep breath, tighten your buttocks, and tilt your hips slightly forward. Hold for a three-count. Now tilt your hips back, and hold for three seconds. It's a very subtle movement. Repeat eight to 12 times.

Shoulder Blade Squeeze

To strengthen postural muscles and stretch the chest

Sit up straight in your seat, rest your hands in your lap, and squeeze your shoulder blades toward one another. Focus on keeping your shoulders down, not hunched up toward your ears, and hold for three

seconds. Release and repeat eight to 12 times.

Toe Taps

To strengthen lower legs

Sitting in a chair and keeping your heels on the floor, lift your toes high enough that you can feel the muscles along your shin working. This helps keep blood circulating in your legs and also strengthens the lower leg. Repeat 20 times.

Heel Raises

To strengthen upper calves

Sitting in a chair, keep your toes and the balls of your feet on the floor and lift your heels. Repeat 20 times.

Knee Lifts

To strengthen thighs

Seated in a chair, with your arms resting but not pressing on the armrests, contract your right quadriceps muscles and lift your leg. Your knee and the back of your thigh should be two or three inches off the seat. Pause for three seconds and slowly lower your leg. Complete eight to 12 repetitions and then repeat with the opposite leg.

Shoulder and Upper Back Stretch

To stretch the shoulders and back

Bend your right arm, raising it so your elbow is chest level and your right fist is near your left shoulder. Place your left hand on your right elbow and gently pull your right arm across your chest. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat with the opposite arm.

Ankle Rotations

To strengthen calves

Seated in a chair, lift your right foot off the floor and slowly rotate your foot five times to the right and then five times to the left. Repeat with the left foot.

Stretch it Out

Getting into the habit of stretching every day will improve your range of motion and make every activity — including reaching for a dish from a cupboard — more comfortable. Here are two basic stretches to start with.

Neck Stretch

To relieve tension in the neck and upper back

Stand with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Keep your hands relaxed at your sides. Don't tip your head forward or backward as you turn your head slowly to the right. Stop when you feel a slight stretch. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Now turn to the left. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Repeat three to five times.

Upper Back

To relieve tension in the shoulders and upper back

Sit in a firm chair. Place your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Hold your arms up and out in front at shoulder height, palms facing outward (backs of your hands pressed together). Relax your shoulders so they are not scrunched up near your ears. Reach your fingertips out until you feel a stretch – your back will move away from the back of the chair. Stop and hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Repeat three to five times.

Balance Boosters

Since accidental falls are a significant source of injury for many seniors, including balance exercises in your exercise regimen is essential. Doing balance exercises, such as the ones described here, or an activity like tai chi or yoga, makes it easier to walk on uneven surfaces without losing balance. You can do these exercises every day, several times a day — even when you're standing in line at the bank or the grocery store.

Shifting Weight

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your weight evenly distributed on both feet. Relax your hands at your sides (you can also do this exercise with a sturdy chair in front of you in case you need to grab it for balance). Shift your weight on to your right side, then lift your left foot a few inches off the floor. Hold for 10 seconds, eventually working up to 30 seconds. Return to the starting position and repeat with the opposite leg. Repeat three times.

Single Leg Balance

Stand with your feet hip-width apart, hands on hips (or on the back of a sturdy chair if you need support). Lift your left foot off the floor, bending at the knee and lifting your heel halfway between the floor and your buttocks. Hold for 10 seconds, eventually working up to 30 seconds. Return to the starting position and repeat with the opposite leg. Repeat three times.