

## PREVENTING FALLS: EXERCISES FOR STRENGTH AND BALANCE

There are four types of exercise we all need for the best benefit to our bodies:

1. Endurance or cardiovascular activities: exercise that makes us breathe harder.
2. Exercise that uses muscles and keeps them in shape.
3. Movements and activities that improve balance.
4. Stretches that keep us flexible.

Strength and balance exercises are especially helpful in preventing falls. The following five exercises can help you build strength and improve your balance:

- **Plantar Flexion**

Strengthens ankle and calf muscles. Use ankle weights, if you are ready.

For balance: As you progress, hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. Stand straight, feet flat on floor, holding onto a table or chair for balance.
2. Slowly stand on tiptoe, as high as possible.
3. Hold position for 1 second.
4. Slowly lower heels all the way back down. Pause.
5. Do the exercise 8 to 15 times.
6. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 repetitions.

Variation: As you become stronger, do the exercise standing on one leg only, alternating legs for a total of 8 to 15 times on each leg. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.

- **Knee Flexion**

Strengthens muscles in back of thigh. Use ankle weights, if you are ready. For

balance: As you progress, hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. Stand straight holding onto a table or chair for balance.
2. Slowly bend knee as far as possible, so foot lifts up behind you. Don't move your upper leg at all; bend your knee only.
3. Hold position for 1 second.
4. Slowly lower foot all the way back down. Pause.
5. Repeat with other leg.
6. Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.
7. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.

- **Hip Flexion**

Strengthens thigh and hip muscles. Use ankle weights, if you are ready. For balance:

As you progress, hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then

1. Stand straight to the side or behind a chair or table, holding on for balance.
2. Slowly bend one knee toward chest, without bending waist or hips.



3. Hold position for 1 second.
  4. Slowly lower leg all the way down. Pause.
  5. Repeat with other leg.
  6. Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.
  7. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.
- **Hip Extension**  
Strengthens buttock and lower-back muscles. Use ankle weights, if you are ready.  
For balance: As you progress, hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.
    1. Stand 12 to 18 inches from a table or chair, feet slightly apart.
    2. Bend forward at hips at about 45-degree angle; hold onto a table or chair for balance.
    3. Slowly lift one leg straight backwards without bending your knee, pointing your toes, or bending your upper body any farther forward.
    4. Hold position for 1 second.
    5. Slowly lower leg. Pause.
    6. Repeat with other leg.
    7. Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.
    8. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.
  - **Side Leg Raise**  
Strengthens muscles at sides of hips and thighs. Use ankle weights, if you are ready.  
For balance: As you progress, hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.
    1. Stand straight, directly behind table or chair, feet slightly apart.
    2. Hold onto a table or chair for balance.
    3. Slowly lift one leg 6-12 inches out to side. Keep your back and both legs straight. Don't point your toes outward; keep them facing forward.
    4. Hold position for 1 second.
    5. Slowly lower leg. Pause.
    6. Repeat with other leg.
    7. Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.
    8. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.
  - **Anytime/Anywhere**  
The following exercises can help improve balance and can be done anytime, anywhere, as long as you have something sturdy nearby to hold onto if you become unsteady.
    - Walk heel-to-toe. Position your heel just in front of the toes of the opposite foot each time you take a step. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.
    - Stand on one foot (for example, while waiting in line at the grocery store or bus stop). Alternate feet.
    - Stand up and sit down without using your hands.

Almost anyone can improve their health by becoming more active. But older adults should



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Live  
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check with a doctor before beginning a new physical activity program. And if you've been inactive, start with short 5-10 minute intervals of moderate physical activity and gradually build up. For a complete program of exercises, see "Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging" at <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/>.

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[National Institute on Aging](#)



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