



Exercising to reduce falls

Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

How to get started

For older adults, multicomponent physical activity, that emphasizes functional balance and strength training is important to improve physical function and decrease the risk of falls or injury from a fall. These activities can be done at home or in a structured group setting. Exercises that combine many types of activities, especially muscle strengthening and balance exercise, has been shown to be effective. Exercise helps you to do the activities of daily living such as household chores and join in social activities with family and friends.

If you have already had a number of falls, ensure you include strength and balance exercises in your exercise plan as these will improve your ability to prevent a trip becoming a fall. When you have built up your muscle strength and improved your balance control, include walking or another type of exercise into your plan, and also incorporate stretch exercises.

Many factors can contribute to falls and to the risk of falls, so ask your doctor or healthcare provider for more information on how you can prevent them and how you can exercise safely and effectively to reduce your falls risk.

Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.

Warm up and cool down

Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely. Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely. Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

Improve balance

How much:	At least three days a week. Start with one session and work gradually towards more.
How hard:	Choose 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10–15 times .
How long:	Hold each balance for 10–30 seconds. Use support, if necessary, and then gradually reduce it (e.g. from hand, to fingertips, to letting go).
What type:	Try yoga, Tai Chi, home balance exercises. If you are at high risk of falling, use a sturdy chair or wall for support or join a structured multicomponent class. Great balance exercises include tandem stand, tandem walk, one leg stand, heel walk, toe walk, sit to stand, side stepping and stair walking. Always exercise safely when doing balance exercises. If necessary, ask a healthcare provider to demonstrate suitable exercises and provide support until you feel confident.

What will it do for me?

Practicing balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries and maintain your balance.

Build strength

How much:	At least two days a week. Start with one session and work gradually towards more.
How hard:	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities.
How long:	Choose 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Try 1–3 sets of each exercise.
What type:	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. At home, try slow sit to stands, squats, heel raises, wall push-ups, arm curls, front and side arm raises and regular stair walks using weights.

What will it do for me?

Strength exercises improve your overall strength, prevent falls and help with balance and coordination.

Be active

Some is good, more is better

How much:	Aim for at least 150-300 minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least 75-150 minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
How hard:	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
How long:	Aim to spread out sessions throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10 minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.
What type:	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities: Walking, cycling, dancing, recreational sport or leisure activities that challenge coordination and agility help to reduce your falls risk. Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health. Group classes provide a great social element. Choose exercises that you enjoy! Start exercises in a chair if balance or stamina is a problem and progress to walking or standing exercises when your confidence and fitness level increase.

What will it do for me?

Regular exercise significantly reduces your risk of heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, stroke, hypertension, obesity and osteoporosis. It also reduces depression, anxiety and stress, helps you move easily and maintain your balance.



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Sedentary living

Reduce the amount of time being sedentary. Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity). It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer. Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none!**

Exercise safety

Exercise in a safe environment free from clutter or equipment. Start with a chair-based exercise plan to improve your leg and ankle strength if you are at high risk from falling. Never exercise holding onto an object that may move.

Ask for additional advice from your doctor or healthcare provider if you have another long-term health condition such as osteoporosis or arthritis.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

Resources

Osteoporosis Canada provides great tips to stay active through guidelines and video with the goal of reducing falls and resulting fractures. <https://osteoporosis.ca/exercise-recommendations/>

Scan for more physical activity resources!

