

# FITNESS for Seniors





# Walking Toward Health

Walking yields significant health benefits — and no special equipment is required.

All you need is a good pair of shoes and access to wide open spaces. Research shows that walking can effectively lower blood pressure, reduce stress and regulate blood sugar levels. Walking also plays a vital role in weight management.

Doctors say even short daily walks can lead to significant improvements in your overall health. By gradually increasing your walking duration, you can build the endurance necessary for longer distances.

Just remember to consult with your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise program. They can provide personalized recommendations for a regimen that aligns with your specific capabilities and goals.

## START OUT SLOWLY

It's tempting to dive right in, hitting every sidewalk in the neighborhood. Instead, pace yourself to avoid overexertion, especially in the initial stages. For those new to walking, begin with five to ten-minute intervals. This approach will help improve your overall fitness and well-being while minimizing the risk of injury or soreness. Before you head out, make



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sure you have shoes that are sturdy and comfortable. Inappropriate footwear may lead to stumbles, strains, falls and stiffness.

## INCREASING GOALS

Once you establish a consistent routine and can walk longer distances without excessive fatigue or breathlessness, consider increasing

your pace and intensity. You'll be making a positive impact on your heart health, particularly as you better manage your blood pressure. Incorporate topographic variations into your outdoor walking by finding a gentle slope in your community or local park. If you live in an area where the surrounding landscape is flat, take advantage of inclines or

interval settings on a treadmill.

## TAKE NOTES

Consider adding a step-tracking application to your mobile device, if one isn't already pre-installed. These apps monitor your progress and can assist in setting realistic goals for future walks. You may be surprised

at the number of steps accumulated through everyday activities such as walking the dog or mowing the lawn. Organic activities like those make it easier to achieve your step goals. Wearable technology like smartwatches also supports your journey toward improved fitness by tracking vital health metrics, including heart rate.



# Dealing with Arthritis

For more than 50 million Americans with arthritis, exercising can be a real challenge.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that nearly 25 percent of all Americans are dealing with arthritis. As many as half of them admit that they limit their own daily activities because of this excruciating condition. More than 25 percent say they have severe pain.

## MOST COMMON FORMS

Arthritis encompasses over 100 different types, most of which lead to pain and stiffness around the affected joints. The most prevalent form of arthritis is osteoarthritis; other common forms include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and gout. The most common symptoms associated with arthritis are pain, stiffness in the joints, aching and swelling.

Some forms may also affect organs. Inflammatory arthritis sufferers may face additional health complications due to a weakened immune system caused by the illness itself or from the associated medications.

## HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED

Diagnosis is made through physical examinations, a comprehensive medical history review and various tests including X-rays and blood work. It's possible to have multiple forms



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of arthritis. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential for effective management.

## LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS

Low-impact physical activities such as walking, swimming and cycling are known to alleviate arthritis pain while enhancing mood and overall quality of life. The Centers for Disease Control endorses

several programs specifically designed for those managing arthritis, including the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program, Active Living Everyday program, Fit & Strong, EnhanceFitness and Walk with Ease-Group, among others. Maintaining an active lifestyle can aid in achieving a healthy weight, and that in turn decreases the risk of

developing osteoarthritis — particularly in the hips, ankles and knees.

## TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

Consult with your personal health care professional before starting any new exercise regimen — especially individuals with inflammatory arthritis, where early intervention and effective management play a

critical role. Seek medical attention if you encounter symptoms such as sharp or persistent pain, limping and prolonged pain after exercise that lasts more than two hours or worsens at night. Be on the lookout for continual swelling not alleviated by rest, medication or topical treatments, and any increase in swelling or warm sensations in the joints.

# Weightlifting and You

Strength training can help counteract many age-related factors that slow us down.

As we age, many seniors have to deal with muscle loss and worry about brittle bones. They may also have problems with mobility and balance. Lifting weights can address those issues, and may even alleviate symptoms of depression and cognitive deterioration.

## SAFETY FIRST

As with any new exercise regimen, talk to your doctor about your goals and limitations before beginning strength training. Begin by mastering proper form to minimize the risk of injury. Begin by only using your own body weight to perform exercises. As your strength improves, you can begin the transition to weighted workouts.

## WEIGHT LEVELS

For weighted workouts, start with the lightest weight available. Your goal should be to complete three sets of 8 to 12 repetitions while focusing on correct form. As you grow stronger and the current weights feel manageable, progressively increase the weight as comfort allows.

## MAKING A SCHEDULE

Incorporate weight training into your routine three to four non-consecutive days each week, allowing adequate



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recovery time for your muscles. You may alternate these sessions with cardiovascular training. Just remember that recovery might take longer as you age, so be sure to give yourself ample time to recuperate between workouts.

## EXERCISE OPTIONS

Incline push-ups and the

stationary lunge are two great initial workouts. For an incline push-up, position yourself facing a stable surface. The more vertical your position, the easier the exercise will be. Place your hands on the surface slightly wider than shoulder-width apart and move your feet back to form a comfortable angle. With your arms

straight and aligned with your body, bend your elbows to lower your chest towards the surface, pause briefly, and then press back to the starting position.

To do a stationary lunge, stand upright with your arms relaxed at your sides. Step back with your right foot, keeping your toes grounded and your

heel lifted. Bend your left knee to lower your body as far as is comfortable, allowing your back knee to bend and hover just above the floor. Make sure your weight is distributed on your front heel. Engage your core and lift your chest. Pause briefly before pushing through your front foot to return to a standing position.



# Focus on Eating Right

All the exercise in the world might not help if you're still making poor dietary choices.

Your new healthier lifestyle requires a two-pronged approach: Align your physical fitness objectives with a commitment to proper nutrition. Even minor adjustments to your diet can significantly affect your results when paired with a well-structured workout plan. A healthy diet will provide all the energy necessary while helping you effectively manage your weight. Talk to your healthcare provider before implementing major changes, particularly if you are following a specific diet or are unfamiliar with all your options.

## MEETING NUTRITIOUS NEEDS

Protein becomes even more crucial as your physical activity increases, since it plays such a vital role in health as we age. Increased protein intake can help mitigate the effects of sarcopenia, the natural decline of muscle mass, function and strength that often occurs in seniors. Protein supports recovery from exercise, helps maintain mobility and balance, and aids in building and preserving strength. According to medical professionals, 30 to 35 percent of your total caloric intake should consist of protein, which also facilitates vitamin absorption, concentration and



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energy levels.

## A WORLD OF CHOICES

Maintaining a healthy diet does not require overly restricting yourself or experiencing hunger pangs. Diversify your protein sources to prevent monotony and dissatisfaction, while incorporating healthier options such as fish, poultry, legumes and beans. These

foods are nutrient-dense and can be prepared in a variety of delicious ways. Adding more vitamin-rich vegetables to your meals promotes overall health and helps you feel “full.” For optimal bone health, consider including fat-free or low-fat dairy products fortified with vitamin D.

## CELEBRATING PROGRESS

The age-old encouragement

to find balance in life holds true in the context of dietary habits as well. As you navigate a path to wellness through diet and exercise, don't forget to celebrate the small achievements that mark your progress. Treat yourself to a beloved snack or small dessert as a means of recognition, and that can help you remain motivated. If you have concerns about potential

setbacks, there are plenty of non-food rewards that can serve as incentives. Consider indulging in a massage, a manicure, a facial or a leisurely spa day.

Purchase a small gift for yourself, even something as simple as a visit to the hairstylist. After rewarding yourself, continue to pursue your health goals with renewed enthusiasm.



# Finding a Gym

The ideal gym is nearby and provides plenty of options. The space should be clean, with a welcoming, helpful staff.

Talk to your healthcare provider to get the go-ahead and then follow these helpful hints on finding a new gym.

## LOCATION MATTERS

It sounds obvious, but choosing a gym in a convenient location is crucial. Ideally, your new space would be near your place of work or residence. National and local chains with multiple facilities provide still more options, since you might be able to pair a trip to the gym with still more everyday destinations like the grocery stores and church.

## GYM OPTIONS

Look for a gym that provides equipment, classes and personal trainers who can boost your fitness goals. For instance, it may be wise for beginners to avoid facilities primarily geared toward body-builders. Visit the gym in person to evaluate the environment, the professionalism of the staff and the available equipment before committing. Bring along a checklist of essential features and any factors you wish to avoid. This will help you organize your thoughts about each gym you visit.



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## CHECK CLEANLINESS

Pay close attention to the level of cleanliness in the gym, since that reflects the facility's commitment to hygiene. In a bustling environment, it's easy to overlook regular maintenance, so inspect the condition of the bathrooms and locker rooms to ensure they are well-maintained. Confirm that

the gym provides disinfecting options for equipment, such as wipes or spray bottles. If these are not readily available, don't hesitate to ask the staff about their disinfection procedures.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Check their social media channels to complete your comprehensive view of daily

activities. Review customer feedback on platforms such as Google or Yelp to gauge the facility's reputation. If you still have reservations, ask about the possibility of a trial membership. Some are offered at no cost.

## DISCOUNT OPTIONS

The last stop before

selecting a gym is to inquire about any applicable discounts.

These may include reductions for visits during off-peak hours or for opting into group classes. Know the billing process, including any additional charges for amenities such as towel services or specialized classes.

# Staying Motivated

Exercise has plenty of advantages, both for our physical and mental well-being. But you've got to complete the schedule regimen to reap those rewards — and motivation can sometimes be a problem.

As we age, finding the energy for a workout may also become more difficult, but that's just the moment in life when it becomes so essential to remain active.

## MONITORING RESULTS

One effective strategy for staying motivated is to monitor your progress and share it with your peers. Take advantage of smart device applications to log your meals, weight loss achievements and exercise sessions. A big part of succeeding on the journey toward improved fitness is not just establishing clear goals but acknowledging your milestones: Treat yourself to rewarding experiences or desired items.

## MAKE IT ENJOYABLE

The National Institute on Aging recommends varying your routine. Following a fixed routine with the same exercises can quickly become monotonous. You want to focus on improving endurance, balance, strength and



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flexibility — the four essential categories for seniors — but you don't have to do the same exact exercises to achieve those goals. You can involve family in your pursuit of better health. Invite children, grandchildren and friends to join in activities such as walking, jumping rope, swimming or playing catch. This

approach fosters a supportive environment that will keep you focused on fitness.

## CREATE A DAILY ROUTINE

You do not necessarily need a designated time or place to exercise. Just integrate physical activity into your everyday life. For example, if you walk a dog, increase the intensity by

speed walking, jogging or lengthening the duration of your walk. When visiting the grocery store, park farther from the entrance to incorporate additional cardio and strength training as you push the cart back to your vehicle.

## MAKE AN INVESTMENT

Reward yourself with new

workout apparel, equipment or fitness gadgets when you achieve a fitness milestone. Anticipating the opportunity to use these new items can bolster your motivation for future workouts. You'll be strengthening your exercise habits while nurturing your commitment to a healthier lifestyle.



# The Importance of Stretching

Safeguard muscles and joints from injury by developing a pre-exercise routine.

Stretching prior to getting into any exercise routine is important, but that's particularly true for seniors. The capacity to build maintain flexibility and muscle strength often diminishes as we age. But regular stretching can effectively counteract this decline. Aim to stretch all major muscle groups for a minimum of 10 minutes, at least two days per week.

Before starting to stretch warm up with a brief walk or some light movement. Next, take a deep breath and exhale slowly as you proceed to stretch. Maintain each stretch for 30 seconds to allow adequate time for the muscle to adjust. Avoid bouncing or holding your breath, and stretch only until you feel a gentle tension. If you experience pain, quickly ease back.

Here are a few key stretches:

## NECK STRETCHES

Neck stretches are crucial for maintaining good posture and are beneficial for driving. Bring your chin slowly toward your chest and then turn your head to the right. Hold this position for 15 seconds before turning to the left for another 15 seconds. Repeat as necessary.

## SHOULDER STRETCHES

Grasp a towel with one hand

and hold it above your head, allowing it to drape down your neck and back. With your other hand, gently pull down the free end of the towel until you feel a stretch in the arm that's extended overhead. This exercise enhances shoulder mobility, which is essential for activities such as dressing and reaching for items positioned

above you.

## LOWER BACK STRETCHES

Lower back stretches preserve spine mobility, which in turn enhances posture and balance. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together, keeping them flat on the floor. Lower your legs to one side while keeping your

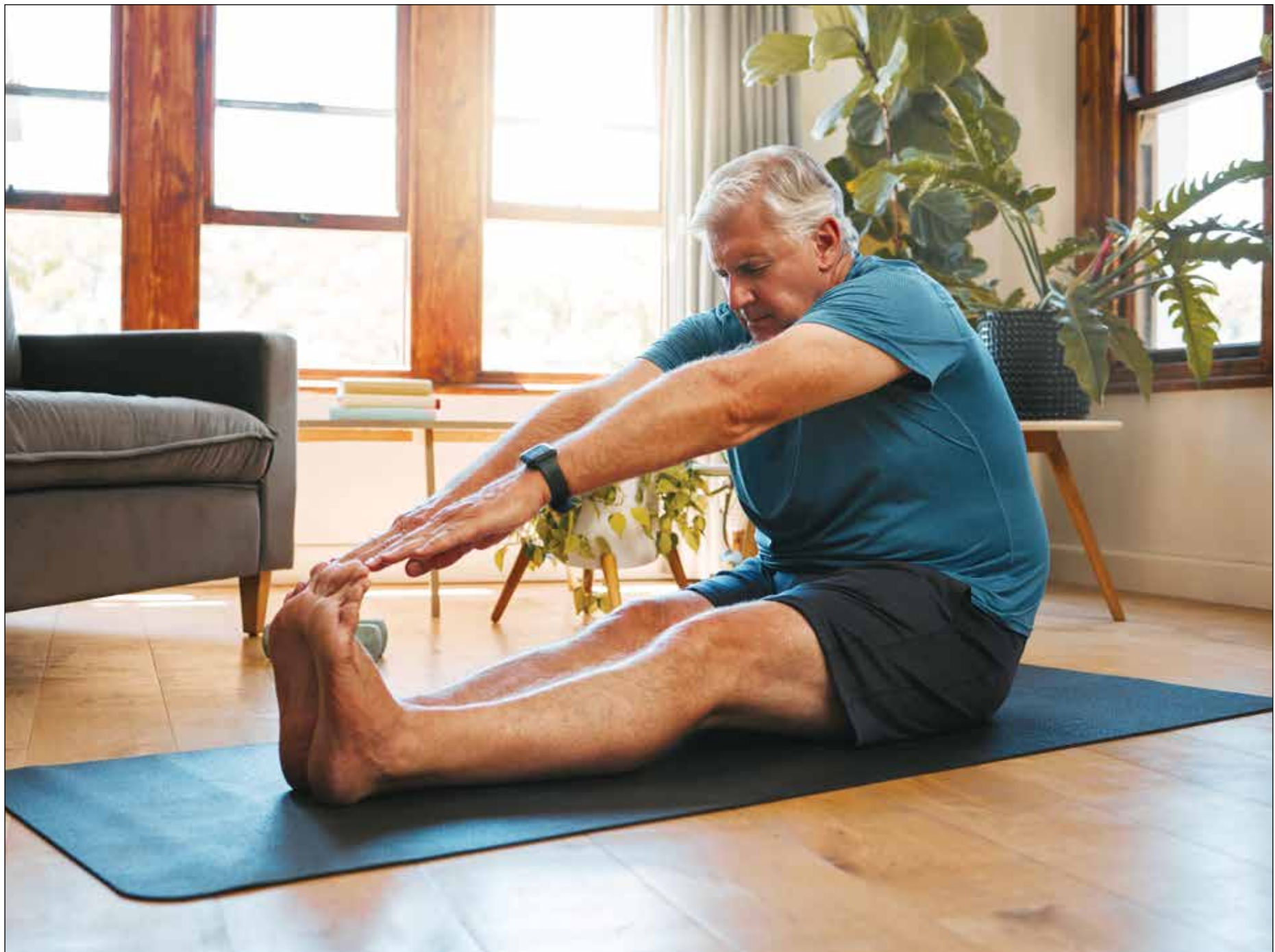
knees together, and twist your torso until you feel a stretch in your lower back. Hold the position and then repeat on the opposite side.

## CHEST STRETCHES

Chest stretches also contribute to improved posture. Extend your arms outward to the sides with your palms

facing forward. Carefully reach back with your hands until you feel a stretch across your chest and in front of your arms.

If raising your arms is difficult, lean against a wall and step forward until you experience a gentle stretch in your chest. Alternate and stretch both sides.



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