

Exercise for Healthy Older Adults: Benefits

Exercise and physical activity benefit every area of your life. They can:

- Help maintain and improve your physical strength and fitness.
- Help improve your ability to do the things you want to do.
- Help improve your balance.
- Help manage and prevent diseases like diabetes, heart disease, breast and colon cancer, and osteoporosis.
- Help decrease feelings of depression, improve mood and overall well-being, and may improve your ability to shift quickly between tasks, plan an activity, and ignore irrelevant information.

What Kinds of Exercises and Physical Activities Improve Health and Physical Ability?

Exercises fall into four main categories: **endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility.**

Endurance

Endurance, or aerobic, activities increase your breathing and heart rate. These activities help keep you healthy, improve your fitness, and help you do the tasks you need to do every day. Endurance exercises improve the health of your heart, lungs, and circulatory system. They also delay or prevent many diseases that are common in older adults such as diabetes, colon and breast cancers, heart disease, and others. Physical activities that build endurance include:

- Brisk walking
- Dancing
- Biking
- Playing tennis
- Yard work (mowing, raking)
- Jogging
- Climbing stairs or hills
- Playing basketball
- Swimming

Strength

Even small increases in muscle strength can make a big difference in your ability to stay independent and carry out everyday activities such as climbing stairs and carrying groceries. Some people call using weight to improve your muscle strength “strength training” or “resistance training.” Strength exercises include:

- Lifting weights
- Using a resistance band

Balance

Balance exercises help prevent falls, a common problem in older adults. Many lower-body strength exercises also will improve your balance. Exercises to improve your balance include:

- Standing on one foot
- Heel-to-toe walk
- Tai Chi

Flexibility

Stretching can help your body stay flexible and limber, which gives you more freedom of movement for your regular physical activity as well as for your everyday activities. To increase your flexibility, try:

- Shoulder and upper arm stretches
- Calf stretches
- Yoga

Adapted from: Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging. Available at <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/default.htm> Accessed May 6, 2009.

