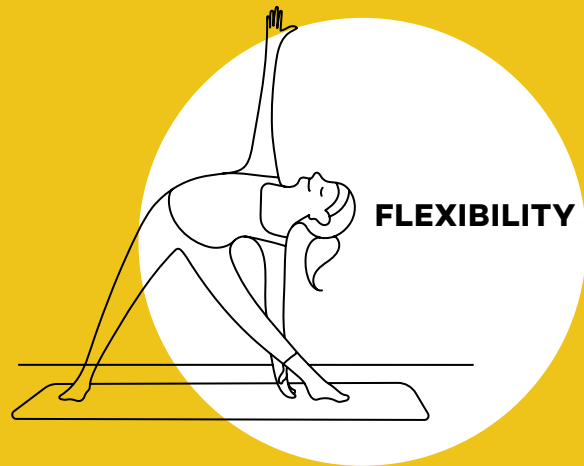


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# 4 types of exercises that are important over age 50



# Build a training program that keeps you active as you age

Regular exercise is vital for good health at all stages of life, but it's especially important if you want to stay active as you age. According to the National Institute on Aging, mixing four types of exercises — strength, aerobic, flexibility, and balance — can be especially beneficial if you're over 50.<sup>1</sup> This guide explores how each type of exercise has its own benefit but also builds on the foundations of the others.

**Jump to the end to find exercise log sheets to help you start your own program.**

## Strength training

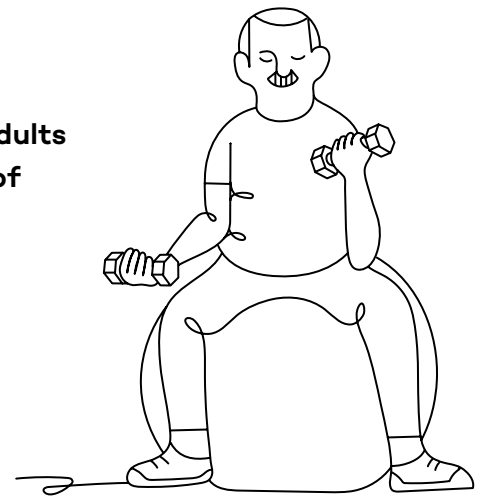
**Strength training is one of the essential exercises for older adults because it builds muscle that enables you to do other types of exercise.<sup>2</sup> Yet, if you're over 50, that's not the only reason to follow a strength training program.**

### **WHY IS STRENGTH TRAINING IMPORTANT OVER 50?**

The main reason to incorporate strength training into your routine is to counteract sarcopenia, the loss of muscle mass and strength that occurs with age.

After age 30, muscle mass decreases at a rate of 3–8% each decade.<sup>3</sup> Even more challenging, according to health and wellness expert Dr. Wayne Westcott, is that rate nearly doubles after we reach age 50.<sup>4</sup> This makes sarcopenia a top cause of functional decline in older adults. As many as 30% of older adults report trouble with basic tasks, like walking and climbing stairs, showing how sarcopenia can result in loss of independence.<sup>5</sup>

If you have yet to form a strength training program, you can easily get started with one that isn't time-intensive yet produces results.



## HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU WORK OUT AFTER 50?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends spending 20 to 30 minutes, two to three days per week, on strength training.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Westcott says programs such as these have resulted in three to four pounds of muscle gained in under four months.<sup>4</sup>

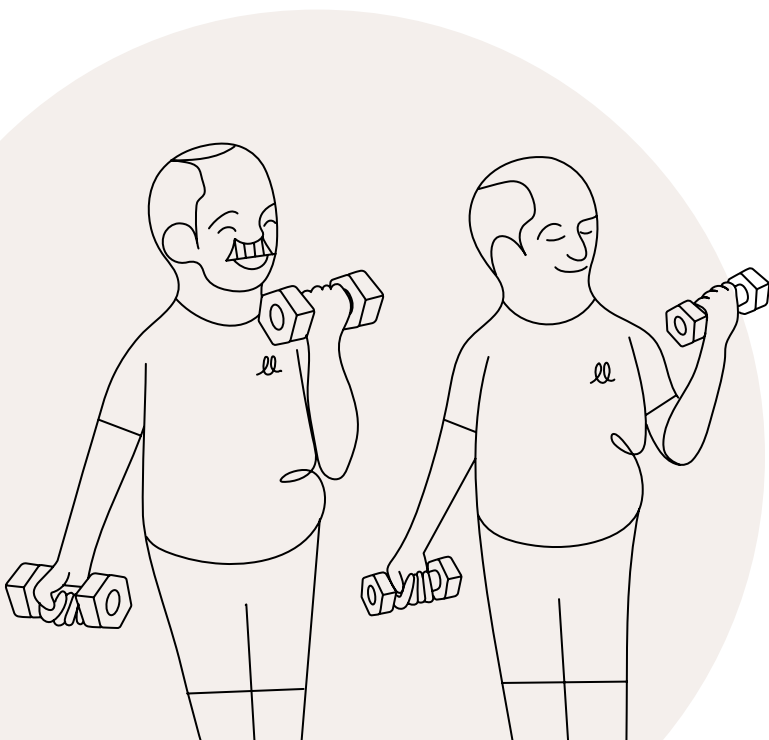
## HOW DOES STRENGTH TRAINING HELP OLDER ADULTS?

A focus on your muscles helps you not only maintain your independence but also live a better quality of life. This is because strength training can:<sup>7</sup>

- Reduce lower-back and joint pain
- Counteract bone loss and raise bone density
- Improve mental health issues, such as depression
- Lessen fatigue and boost energy levels
- Enhance your self-view and mood
- Provide cardio benefits

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STRENGTH TRAINING FOR CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH?

You'll also enjoy cardio benefits from strength training. Building muscle can burn calories, improve cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and control blood sugar.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, you can lose weight, decrease the risks of disease, and even reverse existing problems. This is especially true when eating a balanced diet with exercise.



## BEST EXERCISES WHEN STRENGTH TRAINING

The best strength training programs for older adults will always prioritize safety. Remember to check with your doctor before you start. Once you have the okay to begin, you can ease into strength training with low-impact exercises. The following arm and leg workouts let you use your body weight to build a foundation for strength training.

### Squats

Stand with your feet hip-distance apart, with your toes pointed forward. Your arms should be straight out in front of you. Keep your abdominal muscles tight while you bend your knees and push your hips back, moving to a near-seated position. Then, with your feet planted firmly, push through your heels to return to standing. If you need help staying balanced, you may lower into a chair, just barely touching it before pushing back up with your heels. Repeat 10 times, or as many times you feel is a safe number for you, to work muscles from your core down.

### Overhead press

You may do this arm, back, and shoulder exercise seated or standing. Yet, if you are getting started with strength training, you may opt for the latter. Sit tall in your chair with your knees above your ankles. Bend your elbows and bring your hands in front of your shoulders. Your palms should face out. Then, lift both arms above your head and bring them back down. Make it a habit to time your breathing with each movement. Inhale as your arms go up and exhale as they come down. Be sure to keep your shoulders back and relaxed and your stomach muscles engaged. Again, repeat 10 times or more, if you're able.

### Step-ups

For this move that works your legs and glutes, you will need a set of stairs. Holding on to the handrail for balance, bring your left foot to the first step. Push through your left leg to straighten it, while bringing your right leg up to meet it. Then, bend your left leg as you move your right leg back to its original position. Do this 10 times, or fewer if necessary, and then switch the position of your legs to exercise the other side of your body.

## HOW DO I COMBINE WORKOUTS WITH WEIGHTS?

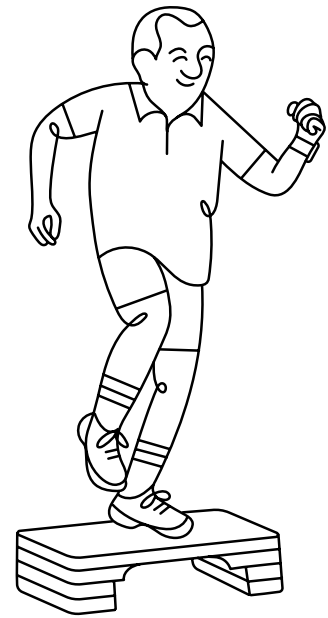
One way to further develop your strength training is to add free weights to your workouts. This allows you to increase resistance and further strengthen your muscles. If you don't have weights, such as dumbbells or a kettlebell, you can use items you have at home, like water bottles or canned foods.

You can integrate weights into each exercise above. When doing squats, for example, you may choose to hold one weight in both hands close to your chest. You may instead use two dumbbells, holding one in each hand at shoulder height. Please note, when using weights for any exercise, it's important to start light so you're able to maintain appropriate form to avoid injury. Then, you can slowly increase the weight as you feel stronger and more confident with the movements.

# Aerobic training

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Getting older may cause you to believe you need to “slow down” by decreasing your physical activity to avoid pain or injury. But keeping active as you age is very important to safeguard your well-being. Aerobic exercise, also known as endurance training or cardio exercise, can help protect your physical and mental health, especially from risks that grow as you approach and pass age 50.<sup>9</sup>



## WHY AEROBIC EXERCISE IS IMPORTANT OVER 50

Over 70% of Americans fail to get the recommended amount of exercise.<sup>10</sup> Without a wellness plan that includes exercise, a healthy diet, and good sleep, you become vulnerable to a host of issues, including:

- **Heart disease:** Most women who experience a heart attack do so after age 50, while the risk for men increases at 45.<sup>11</sup>
- **Type 2 diabetes:** Eleven million people are diagnosed between the ages of 45–64. That number nearly doubles for those 65 and older.<sup>12</sup>
- **Colon cancer:** It can occur at any age, but this cancer is more common after the age of 50, especially for those with diabetes.<sup>13</sup>
- **Breast cancer:** One in 43 women ages 50 to 60 are at risk for breast cancer.<sup>14</sup>

## HOW AEROBIC EXERCISE DECREASES HEALTH RISKS

Aerobic exercise can help you regulate hormones for better breast health.<sup>15</sup> It can burn fat and regulate blood sugar for a healthier weight, which reduces your risk of both diabetes and cancer.<sup>16</sup> It can also help your heart perform better by increasing your oxygen and blood flow and lowering your blood pressure.<sup>17</sup>

Through all these improvements, you may not only turn around existing physical health conditions and strengthen your immune system, but you may also boost your self-esteem, lower stress, and ease the symptoms of depression for enhanced mental health.<sup>18</sup>

## **AEROBIC EXERCISE: HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU WORK OUT AFTER 50**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends one of the following schedules:<sup>9</sup>

- A minimum of 150 minutes per week, or 30 minutes on five days, performing moderate aerobic activities (e.g., brisk walking)
- A minimum of 75 minutes a week, or 25 minutes on three days, performing vigorous activities (e.g., jogging or swimming)

You may also choose to do a combination of these each week.



## **WHAT ARE THE BEST AEROBIC EXERCISES FOR OLDER ADULTS?**

Before starting any exercise program, talk with your doctor to discuss the best aerobic activities for you.

If you're just getting started with aerobic exercise, begin slowly, and increase your intensity as you grow stronger to help ensure no injuries.

If you're experiencing issues with your balance, you may want to consider delaying aerobic exercise to first focus on strength training, which can build muscle and improve your stability.

The best aerobic exercises will always be based on your current fitness level and physical health.

## **TYPES OF AEROBIC ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS**

Is there a sport, like tennis or basketball, you love or have always wanted to try? The best aerobic activities combine fitness with something you enjoy.

Other health tips suggest group exercise classes, such as water aerobics or yoga, which can ease social isolation and further strengthen your well-being without stressing your joints.

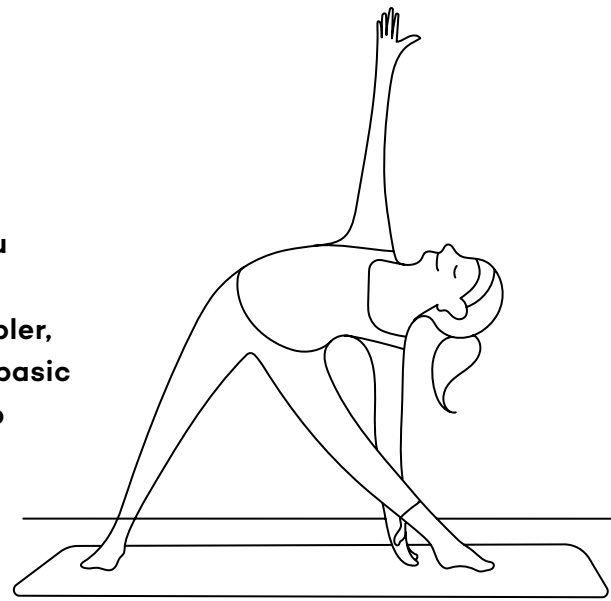
Cardio workouts can also be done at home with little or no equipment. Take a walk, jog, or ride a bike through your neighborhood. You may also stay inside, turn on music, and dance, or simply march in place.

When time is a barrier to aerobic activities, keep in mind house cleaning or yard work, such as raking, can also provide cardio benefits. Whatever gets your heart pumping qualifies as a type of aerobic activity.<sup>19</sup>

# Flexibility training

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When you were younger, your level of flexibility helped you excel in team sports, climb trees, or turn cartwheels in the grass. As you get older, the role of flexibility becomes simpler, yet much more crucial. You must be flexible enough to do basic tasks, like sitting or getting dressed, and your ability to do so diminishes earlier than you think. It can happen as early as your 50s.



## WHY FLEXIBILITY IS IMPORTANT OVER 50

At the age of 55, you may begin to experience a decrease in joint flexibility of nearly six degrees every 10 years.<sup>20</sup> This means, by the age of 75, you may have lost 12 degrees of flexibility in your hips. Plus, the challenges of less flexibility may cause you to be more sedentary, and your inactivity can compound the loss of flexibility.<sup>21</sup> That makes it important to stay as flexible as possible to combat the challenges of later years.

When you learn how to maintain flexibility as you age, you can improve your circulation, ease muscle stiffness, and lessen your risk of injury. You can also better maintain your balance, which helps safeguard your independence.

To ensure your overall wellness, it's a smart strategy to work on flexibility in your 50s or before, although it's never too late to get started.

## HOW TO IMPROVE FLEXIBILITY AS AN OLDER ADULT

Flexibility exercises help your joints maintain movement as you age.<sup>22</sup> You have options for flexibility training, such as group classes for yoga, tai chi, and Pilates. Strength training programs also help you be more flexible because lifting weights helps improve joint mobility.<sup>23</sup>

Flexibility training doesn't have to be complex if you're getting started with fitness. Stretching exercises can also increase flexibility.<sup>24</sup>

## WHAT TYPES OF STRETCHING ARE BEST FOR OLDER ADULTS?

You can do two types of stretches — static or dynamic stretches — although dynamic stretches are generally safer.

With static stretching, you hold one position for an extended period, which creates muscle tension and may cause pain. These are better performed when your muscles are already warmed up, such as after you complete aerobic exercise.

Dynamic stretches can be done anytime and are especially helpful as a warmup for exercise. These allow you to move your joints for flexibility training and improved mobility.



## STRETCHING EXERCISES OLDER ADULTS CAN DO AT HOME

As with any new exercise program, please consult your physician before attempting this list of important stretching exercises for older adults. These dynamic stretches work various areas for total body flexibility.

### Shoulders

Using good posture, you may stand or sit in a chair. Extend your right arm across the left side of your chest, pulling your inner elbow to your chest as much as possible. Bend your left arm up to support your right arm. Switch arms and repeat.

### Hips

If you have ever used a hula hoop, you know how to do this one. Stand with your hands on your hips and your feet together. Rotate your hips in a circular motion as if you were keeping a hula hoop moving. Move them in one direction and then the other.

### Back

This stretch requires you to lie on your back. Put your arms out to your side to form a “T” with your body. Bend your knees, keeping your feet together, and then lower your legs slowly to your right until they reach the floor. Hold this pose briefly before returning your knees to the center. Repeat on the other side.

### Knees and glutes

As you walk, bend your right knee high enough that you can grab it with your arms and pull it towards your chest. Lower that knee and then do the same with the left knee. If balance is an issue, you may position yourself beside a wall or even do this stretching exercise in place with a chair.



# Balance training

Did you know that falls are the leading cause of all injuries among older Americans?<sup>25</sup> More than 25% of people aged 65 and older fall every year, resulting in more than 3 million emergency room visits and 800,000 hospitalizations.<sup>26</sup> These injuries leave many with financial burdens and have devastating impacts on their physical and emotional well-being.

Prevention programs, such as balance training, can help you lessen the threat of falling. If you're over 50, or even approaching it, now is the time to empower yourself.



## WHY BALANCE EXERCISE IS IMPORTANT OVER 50

While you may believe your risk of falling at age 50 is low, a study finds it's actually the time your balance may start to decline.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, without prevention measures, midlife is when your ability to stand on one foot begins to diminish. People in their 30s and 40s are generally able to stand on one foot at least 1 minute. That time drops to 45 seconds at age 50; 28 seconds at 70; and 12 seconds at 80, showing a gradual, yet dramatic decline in our balance with age.

If you suffer from problems with sleep, you also increase your risk of falling. Another factor affecting your balance is sarcopenia. While strength training can combat this and has positive effects on balance, you may want to start by focusing on balance if you're new to exercise.

## HOW TO MAINTAIN OR REGAIN BALANCE AS YOU AGE

Before you start, remember, some factors outside of age affect balance. These include inner ear issues, nerve damage, neurological conditions, or medications.<sup>28</sup> That's why it's important to speak with your doctor before beginning any exercise program. Your physician may offer guidance on the best balance exercises for your condition.

## WHAT ARE THE BEST BALANCE EXERCISES FOR OLDER ADULTS?

Balance exercises can help you stay upright and maintain your mobility. Because most balance exercises are low impact, you can do them as many days per week that you want. The best exercises are those that target the parts of your body that help you stay balanced — from your core down.<sup>29</sup> Working on all these areas requires you to do multiple exercises.

## EXERCISE AND SOCIALIZE IN GROUP CLASSES

Balance training can be accomplished in group classes:

### Tai chi

Originally an ancient Chinese martial art, tai chi is a gentle practice focused on movement and proven to strengthen your upper and lower body. Studies show that practicing tai chi reduces not only your risk of falling but also the fear of falling.<sup>30</sup>

### Water aerobics

Aquatic exercises, or water aerobics, can strengthen muscles and increase flexibility in older adults while also improving balance.<sup>31</sup> Water provides a safe and supportive space to do so.

### Yoga

Like the other types of classes, yoga can benefit you in multiple ways — strengthening muscles in your core and legs while enhancing your balance and flexibility. Some yoga classes incorporate the use of chairs for stability and peace of mind as you get started. If you're unable to get to a class, no need to worry. Several YouTube channels are devoted to yoga workouts.

## BALANCING EXERCISE OLDER ADULTS CAN DO AT HOME

If you prefer to perform balance exercises in the comfort of your home, you can start with:

### Standing on one foot

Place your hand on a tabletop or the back of a heavy chair. Standing tall, bend one knee to lift one foot back into the air. Hold for 10 seconds, if you feel steady on your planted foot. Then switch to the other foot. Repeat each foot 10–15 times, if possible.

### Tapping your foot

Find a foot stool or set of stairs. You may also want to have a chair or tabletop nearby to hold onto for balance. With your shoulders back, tap one foot onto the step and then move it back to position. Repeat this movement, tapping the same foot, 15–20 times before moving on to the next foot.

### Walking heel to toe

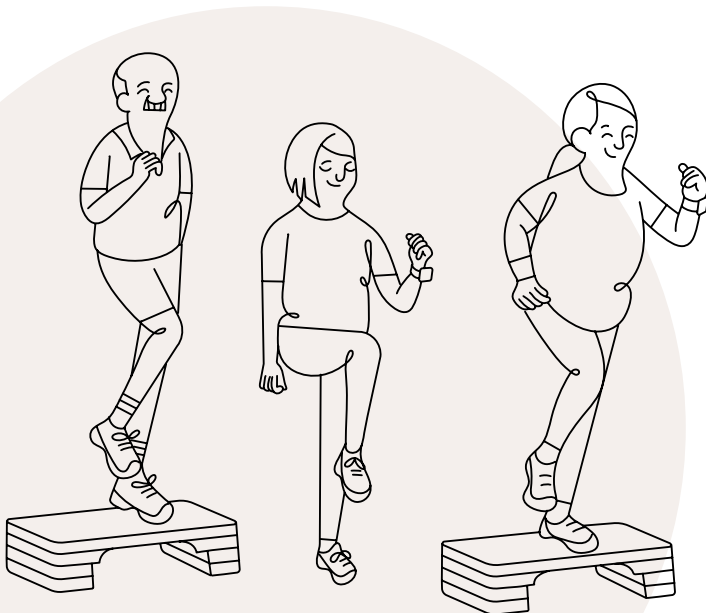
Be near a wall or the back of a couch to steady yourself, if needed. With your shoulders back and core tight, place the heel of one foot in front of the other foot. Then, walk forward, putting the other heel in front of the other foot. Continue this until you reach the end of the wall or couch, and repeat.

Once you feel comfortable doing these balance exercises, you can build on your efforts by no longer holding onto surfaces. You can also increase the number of repetitions or search online for other balancing exercises to add to your routine.

# Build your program

The National Institute on Aging suggests mixing and matching strength, aerobic, flexibility, and balance exercises to create a balanced program.<sup>1</sup> Keep in mind, some workouts, like yoga and water aerobics, can be classified under more than one category.

	Strength	Aerobic	Flexibility	Balance
<b>Duration</b>	20-30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30 minutes, moderate level (e.g., brisk walking)</li> <li>25 minutes, vigorous level (e.g., jogging or swimming)</li> </ul>	No limit	No limit
<b>Per week</b>	2-3 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 days, moderate</li> <li>3 days, vigorous</li> </ul>	No limit	No limit
<b>Exercises</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bodyweight movements, like squats</li> <li>Add resistance with dumbbells, kettlebells, bands, or household items, like canned goods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walking</li> <li>Jogging</li> <li>Biking</li> <li>Swimming</li> <li>Sport</li> <li>Group classes: water aerobics, yoga, or dance</li> <li>House cleaning</li> <li>Yard work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Static stretches</li> <li>Dynamic stretches</li> <li>Group classes: yoga, tai chi, and Pilates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target core strength</li> <li>Stand on one foot</li> <li>Walk heel to toe</li> <li>Group classes: tai chi, water aerobics, and yoga</li> </ul>



# Exercise log

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

	Date	Activity	Time	Distance	Sets	Reps	Weight
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