

Fitness for Seniors: Home programme

General considerations

Make sure you are cleared by your GP to engage in physical activity.

Being specifically designed to decrease the risk of falling, this programme consists of strength, stability and mobility exercises for the trunk and legs. You can always add exercises for the arms if you wish. It can be easily performed at home. The only equipment you need is a chair and a step/stair.

Try to perform this programme at least 2x/week. Combine with ≥ 150 min/week low to moderate endurance exercise (easy jogging/cycling/swimming).

Always listen to your body! Never force yourself and allow your body the rest it needs. The sensation of some discomfort, mild fatigue or stiffness is normal, but you shouldn't feel any pain during or after the workout.

If you have difficulties with or questions about performing certain exercises, or you are in need of more personal coaching, please contact me:

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Success!

Warming up

5 min walking, jogging or cycling with arm movements at low to moderate intensity

Weighted stance

Stand straight, feet slightly apart with toes pointing forward, engage your core, if necessary take support with your hands on a chair in front of you

- While keeping your trunk vertical, sink slightly downward bending your hips, knees and ankles; take firm support with your feet on the floor (esp. with



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the ball of your feet): it should feel like you push down to earth and the earth is pushing back.

- Using a clock, hold this posture for as long as possible. Gradually extend this time.
- Making the weighted stance a habit will increase your stability considerably.

Dynamic strength exercises

The following exercises should be done in 2-3 sets of repetitions, with 1 min of rest between sets. To know the number of reps you should do in one set, you will first have to do a **test of maximal performance**. This means that you perform the exercise once until failure (stop when you feel fatigue or you cannot perform the movement fluently anymore). Count your numbers. Deduct 20% of this number. This will be the number of reps you will do in each set. (E.g., max test: 10 -> 2-3 sets of 8 reps)

It is advisable that you repeat this test of maximal performance from time to time (e.g. after 5 training sessions). You will see that your numbers are increasing.

- **Sitting to standing:** sit on a chair, engage your core, use arm supports if needed

- Stand up and down in a fluent manner. Sitting down should be in a slower pace than standing up.

- **Up and down a step:** stand before a step or a stair, engage your core, take support if needed

- Step up and down alternatively with your left and right foot. Look forward, not at your feet.

- **Forward-sideward-backward lunges:** stand on both legs, engage your core

- Lunge fluently forward and back with one leg. Make sure you keep your trunk upward. Then other side.
- Do the same sideways, left and right.
- Do the same backwards, left and right.
- You can gradually increase the length of the lunges.



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- **Squat:** stand straight, feet slightly apart with toes pointing forward, engage your core, if necessary take support with your hands on a chair in front of you

- Squat slowly down on your two legs lowering the body as far as possible keeping the feet flat on the floor. Make sure you keep your trunk vertical. Stop as soon as you feel it starts moving forward. Go back upward.
- With time you will feel that you will be able to go lower without tilting your trunk forward.
- As an *advanced level* you can perform this exercise on one leg. Support on one leg and lift up the other leg until the thigh is as high as the waist (90° angle in hip). Do both sides. Only perform this one-sided exercise if you don't have any knee issues.

Balance exercises

- **Tandem stance:** stand in front of a chair, look forward, engage your core, take support on the chair if needed

- Put one foot in front of the other and slightly bend your knees.
- Stay in this position for as long as possible. Then change feet. As soon as you can stay in this position for 20 seconds on each foot without arm support, you can progress to the next exercise.

- **Single leg stance:** stand in front of a chair, look forward, engage your core, take support on the chair if needed

- Lift up one foot and support on the other one while shifting your weight. Slightly bend the knee of your supporting leg.
- Stay in this position for as long as possible. Then change feet.

- **Walk forward heel to toe:** stand next to something you can take support on (table, countertop,..), look forward, engage your core

- Walk forward while putting one foot in front of the other (heel to toe). Take support if needed. As soon as you can walk this way for about 3 meters without having to take support, you can start combining this exercise with the next one.



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- **Walk backwards:** stand next to something you can take support on (table, countertop,..), look forward, engage your core

- Walk backwards while putting one foot back to the other. This shouldn't be heel to toe but try to keep your foot base as narrow as possible. Take support if needed.

Mobility exercises (cooling down)

- **Chin tuck:** sit straight on a chair without back support, engage your core, arms at sides or supported on thighs

- Tuck in your chin (this should give the feel of stretch at the back of your neck) and release. Repeat 5x in a slow pace.

- **Rotation of neck:** sit straight on a chair without back support, engage your core, keep your chin slightly tucked in, arms at sides or supported on thighs

- Turn your head slowly to the left and then to the right. Stay within your comfort zone and focus your attention on the spinal column of your neck. Feel the rotation movement within. The slower you perform the movement, the better. Repeat 5x.

- **Stretch of knee flexors:** stand in front of a chair

- Put one foot on top of the chair and keep your knee straight. Lean toward that leg until you feel a gentle stretch at the back of your thigh (hamstrings). Stay in this position for ≥ 1 min. No bouncing. Then do the same for the other leg.
- If this position is too difficult for you, you can perform the same stretch while sitting on a chair. Extend one knee, keep your ankle bent and lean toward that leg until you feel a gentle stretch at the back of your thigh (hamstrings). Stay in this position for ≥ 1 min. No bouncing. Then do the same for the other leg.



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- **Stretch of hip flexors:** stand in front of a chair

- Put one foot on top of the chair, keep your trunk straight and gently lean forward until you feel a stretch in the groin of the standing leg. Keep this position for ≥ 1 min. No bouncing. Then do the same for the other leg.

- **Stretch of calf muscles:** stand on the lowest step of a stair, engage your core, take support if needed

- Put one foot backwards halfway the step, so you are still supporting on the front part of your foot. Lower the back part of your foot (heel) until you feel a gentle stretch in your calf. Stay in this position for ≥ 1 min. No bouncing. Then do the same for the other leg.

Sources

Avers, D., Wong, R.A. (eds). Guccione's Geriatric Physical Therapy. Elsevier, 2020.

Locker, G. Falling is not an option. Amazon, 2020.

Neurolastic Institute. 4 Best Balance Exercises for Seniors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6w-R2OBuig>



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