

Fitness for Seniors



Improving Your Balance

You may have noticed that, as you age, you become more unsteady. It's not just you.

Every second of every day, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, an adult over the age of 65 suffers a fall. One out of four older adults will fall each year in the U.S. and one out of every five falls causes an injury, such as broken bones or head trauma.

PREVENTING FALLS

Fortunately, balance issues can be prevented. Talk to your health care provider about your concerns, including any medications you take that may cause balance issues. The CDC recommends talking to your doctor about taking vitamin D supplements to improve bone, muscle and nerve health.

Once a year, you should talk to your health care provider about your eyes and feet. Update your glasses or other eyewear, if needed, and closely monitor conditions such as glaucoma or cataracts which may limit your vision. Also discuss your footwear and whether you should see a specialist.

In the home, you should make sure to pick up things you can trip on, such as books, clothes and shoes, especially from stairs. Remove any rugs or use double-sided



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tape to keep them from moving. Move things you use regularly to shelves that you don't have to use a step stool to reach. You can also have grab bars installed in the bathroom and use nonslip mats to keep you from falling on wet surfaces. Upgrade lighting so that you can see

where you're going and use light draperies or shades to reduce glare.

EXERCISES

Also talk to your doctor about starting an exercise routine that includes specific habits to improve your strength and balance. The

CDC recommends Tai Chi, which can work on your balance while improving strength in your legs, making you feel more confident. A lack of exercise can lead to weakness and increase your chances of falling.

The Mayo Clinic says that just about any activity that

keeps you on your feet and moving can help with balance, but there are specific things you can do, such as standing on one foot or walking heel-to-toe, to improve your balance. Always get clearance from your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

Foot Health

Over your lifetime, your feet will carry you more than 216 million steps, or more than 100,000 miles.

That's a lot of time spent on your feet and, as you age, it becomes more important than ever to take good care of them.

“People unable to move about suffer numerous physical, psychological and social afflictions as a direct or indirect result of foot dysfunction,” podiatrist Michael J. Trepal told Healthline. “It is not simply how they look but how they work that matters most.”

TIPS FOR TIP-TOP FEET

Healthline offers these tips for keeping your feet ready for walking:

- Don't wear too-tight shoes.
- Don't share shoes (or the bacteria that can live in them).
- Don't share pedicure utensils.
- Don't cover discolored nails with polish.
- Don't shave calluses.
- Don't DIY an ingrown nail.

Wearing poorly fitting shoes can cause corns, calluses, blisters, ingrown nails and even sprains and strains.

“Corns and calluses are areas of thickened skin resulting from abnormal pressure or rubbing,” Trepal said. “They are not the problem but rather the result of abnormal foot



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structure or function.”

Some things you should do include:

- After a long day, try the legs-up-the-wall yoga pose to give your feet and legs a break.
- Give yourself a foot massage regularly.
- Roll a tennis ball under

your feet.

- Soothe any irritation with a vinegar foot soak.

CHECK YOUR SHOES

Most people have one foot that's larger than the other. You should always fit your shoes to the larger foot and always buy the shoes with the

best fit, not the ones that look the best. The American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society says that properly fitting shoes should hold the ball of your foot comfortably in the widest part of the shoe. You should have enough depth that your toes don't rub on the top of the shoe, and,

while standing up, you should have a finger's width between your longest toe and the front of the shoe. Walk around while trying shoes on to make sure you don't have any rubbing or slipping. Wear heels sparingly because they can cause chronic knee, hip or back pain.

Arthritis and Exercise

Almost a quarter of Americans have arthritis, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

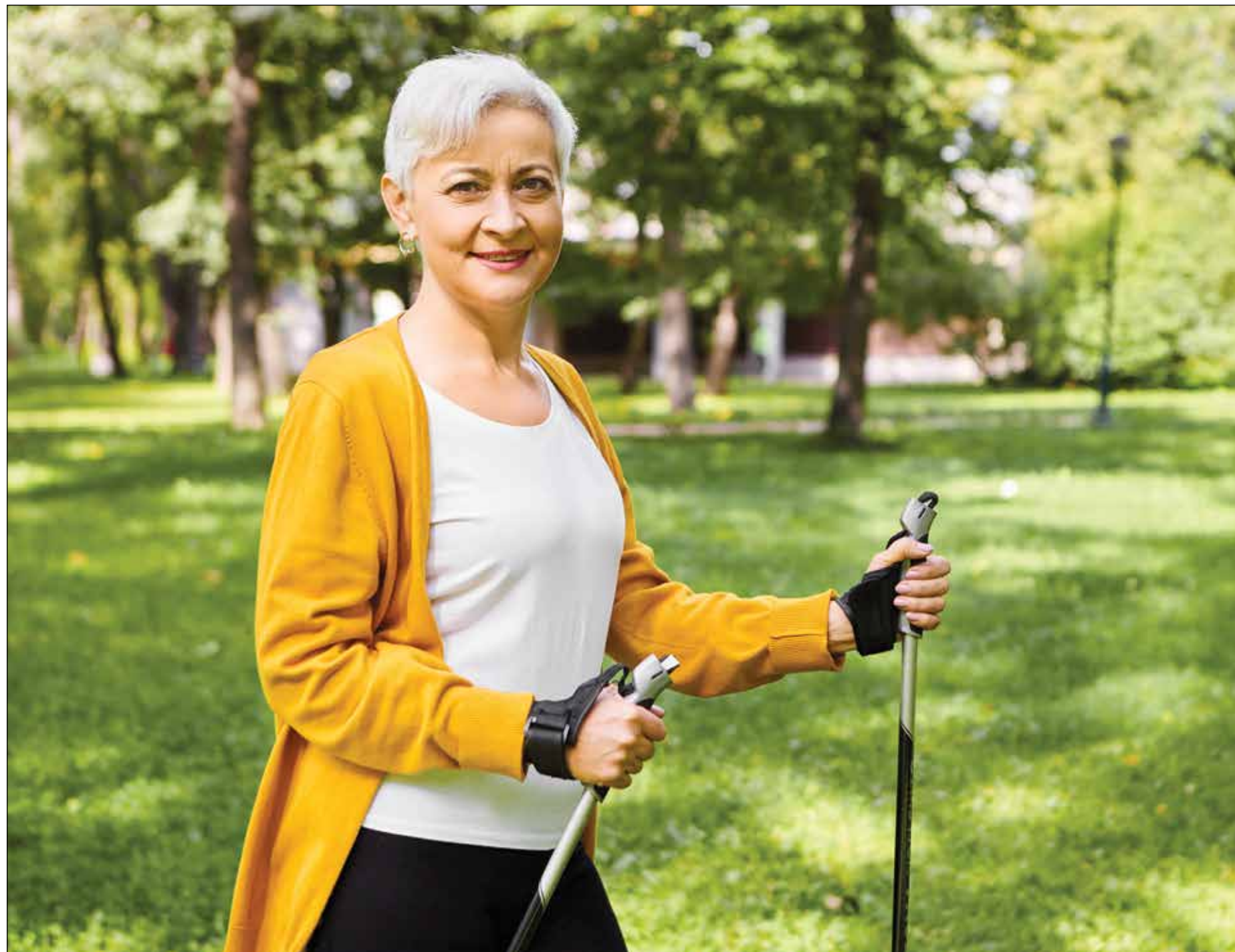
That's about 54 million people. And around half of those are limited in their activities because of arthritis and more than one in four adults with arthritis say they have severe joint pain.

The most common form of arthritis is osteoarthritis, but there are other forms, too, including rheumatoid arthritis, gout and lupus. Symptoms of arthritis include pain, aching, joint stiffness and swelling.

WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

There are more than 100 types of arthritis. Most of those cause pain and stiffness around affected joints, but some types can also affect other organs. People with inflammatory arthritis can also develop complications with other illnesses because they have weakened immune systems from the arthritis or the medications used to manage it.

Arthritis is usually diagnosed by taking a thorough medical history, conducting a physical examination, taking X-rays and blood tests. You can have more than one form of arthritis at a time, but with all of them, early diagnosis and treatment is critical.



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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Exercise such as walking, biking or swimming can actually decrease arthritis pain, the CDC says, and it also improves your mood and quality of life. The CDC recognizes several programs as being beneficial for arthritis sufferers, including the Arthritis Foundation

Aquatic Program, the Active Living Everyday program, EnhanceFitness, Fit & Strong!, Walk with Ease-Group and more.

Getting enough exercise can also help you maintain a healthy weight, which can reduce your risk of osteoarthritis, particularly in your

hips, knees and ankles. You should talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program and particularly if you suffer from inflammatory arthritis, which is helped by early treatment and learning to manage the condition.

See your medical professional if you experience pain

that is sharp, stabbing or constant; pain that causes you to limp; pain that lasts more than two hours after exercise or gets worse at night; pain or swelling that does not improve with rest, medication and hot or cold treatments; increases in swelling or your joints feeling hot.

Strength Training

Senior exercise programs focus a lot on balance and flexibility, but strength training is important for older bodies, too.

Strength training can help you keep muscle mass as you age, keep your bones strong and promote mobility, balance and good mental health. Silver Sneakers offers these tips for hitting the weight room in your golden years.

GET STARTED

The best way to start with strength training is to, at least initially, skip the weights. Yes, you read that correctly. Instead, Silver Sneakers says, focus on your form first, using only your bodyweight to perform the exercises. This will reduce your risk of injury and get you better results. Work up to performing three sets of 10-15 repetitions each. When that feels easy, start adding weight starting with the smallest amount available at your facility.

KEEP IT GOING

Work your way up through the weight as it's comfortable for you. You should do strength training three to four days per week on non consecutive days to give your muscles time to recover. Focus on cardio in between strength workouts. Wait until any sore-



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ness is gone before working those muscles again. You may also opt to work with a trainer at your gym or facility for some one-on-one lessons and perfecting your form.

HOW IT HELPS

While strength training — or resistance training as it's sometimes called — focuses on the muscles, it can do so much more. The U.S. Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention says that strength training can improve glycemic control for diabetics, improve lipid profiles in patients with heart disease, increase your metabolism and reduce pain from conditions such as back pain and arthritis.

Studies also show that people who exercise regularly get better sleep, boost self-confi-

dence and improve your sense of well-being, the CDC says.

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Of course, you should always talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise program. Stop exercising and talk to your health care professional if you have any of these things:

- A cold, flu or infection with fever.
- More fatigue than usual.
- A swollen or painful muscle or joint.
- Chest pain or irregular, rapid or fluttery heartbeat.
- Shortness of breath.
- A hernia.

Listen to your body, the CDC says, and take time to adjust to your new exercise program.

Recovering from an Injury

As you may have already discovered, as we age, it's not as easy to bounce back from an injury as it once was.

Especially if that injury forces you to sit out from your regular activities for any length of time. If you injure yourself while exercising, it can be tempting to abandon your new health routine. But stick with it. Here are some tips for recovering from injury from Helen Branthwaite, a senior lecturer in clinical biomechanics at Staffordshire University in Great Britain.

GO SLOW

Just like when you started your exercise routine, you want to take your return to working out slowly, allowing your muscles to completely recover between each session. Gradually increase the number and type of exercises you do so that you don't get too tired and sabotage the good form that helps keep you from getting injured in the first place.

STAND UP

Part of restarting your exercise regimen is just getting back on your feet, literally. Long periods of sitting significantly reduces muscle activity and muscle mass. Stretch well and move around as often as you can, even if you've taken to working from home during the pandemic. Focus on improving



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your posture and balance while you move.

SWITCH IT UP

Don't just work on the same exercises every time, even though you may be comfortable with them. This can lead to repetitive strain injuries. Challenging yourself works both your brain and your mus-

cles, improving not just your strength but also your balance, mobility and overall wellbeing.

Make sure you're not working the same muscle groups, either. Small, postural muscles like the tiny ones in your feet, play just as much of a role in keeping you healthy as the big muscles in your glutes. Use activation and control exercises

— small muscles, small movements — to help prevent injury.

TALK TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

As always, talk to your doctor before starting or restarting an exercise routine. This is especially true if you sought treatment for your injury or

changed medications during your time off. You need to make sure it's safe for you to exercise before you get started again, and follow your doctor's recommendations about how much you tackle at a time. Keep them posted as you progress and have them recheck the injury at the first sign of trouble.

Keep Nutrition in Mind

We all know we need to eat a healthy and balanced diet, but you may be surprised to learn that our nutritional needs change as we get older.

Older adults need fewer calories but generally need more protein and other vitamins and minerals. Keep reading to learn how to eat well even as you get older.

EATING HEALTHIER

As you get older, you may not need as many calories as you did even in middle age. What you do still need are nutrients. So choose foods that are nutrient-dense and avoid empty calories such as those you get from chips, candy, soda and alcohol. I

Instead, the U.S. National Library of Medicine says seniors should reach for fruits and vegetables in a variety of types and colors, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, seafood, lean meats, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds.

Your diet should also be low in cholesterol and fat, especially saturated fats and trans fats from processed foods. Make sure you also drink enough liquids. Some people can lose their sense of thirst as they get older and some medications can affect your hydration. So make sure to



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drink enough to keep you adequately hydrated.

TROUBLESHOOTING

As your life changes, you may find it more difficult to eat at all, much less to eat healthfully. Try jazzing up your diet and your routine by organizing potluck meals or

cooking with friends. See your health care professionals regularly to stay ahead of medical issues that can make it more difficult for you to eat well, such as dental problems or issues with swallowing. Add color and texture to your food to make it more interesting if you're having trouble

smelling and tasting your food and plan healthy snacks through the day to make sure you're getting enough nutrients and calories.

If an illness or disability is making it more difficult for you to eat well, your health care professional may be able to recommend an occupa-

tional therapist to work through ways to make it easier for you to eat healthfully.

You may lose your sense of hunger as you age as well; regular exercise can make you hungry and give you an overall sense of wellbeing that can lead to making better health decisions.

Get Out and Play

Hitting the gym or the walking trail at a local park isn't the only way to get in your exercise.

Local senior centers, recreational facilities and other organizations may offer recreational sports that you can get involved in. Recreational sports not only get you out and moving, they also introduce important social connections and even opportunities to travel.

Here are some sports to consider trying:

SWIMMING

Swimming strengthens muscles and builds endurance in a low-impact environment that's easy on aching joints and backs. And it's more than swimming laps. Also consider joining water aerobics classes or even a team sport such as water polo.

BIKING

Bike riding is another low-impact sport that's easy on your joints. It's also relaxing and a great family activity that people of all ages can enjoy. If you want to dip your toe in without the expense of a new bike, consider renting a bike in your hometown or even on vacation so that you can get an idea of you enjoy it.

BOWLING

Bowling is an indoor sport that also promotes social



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aspects. Look into joining a bowling league at a local alley. Leagues and teams often have set times to meet. Bring your friends or make some new ones.

PICKLE BALL

This is another indoor activity. Pickle ball is a net game sim-

ilar to tennis or ping-pong. It's played with a net, racket and a ball like a large whiffle ball. It's a team sport that's easy to learn and less stressful on the joints than volleyball or other net sports.

GOLF

Yeah, it's a stereotype, but it's

like that for a reason. Golf is a great way to get in some physical exercise, sunshine and meet friends. While clubs and gear may seem expensive, bear in mind that there's plenty of used gear out there looking for a good home. Look into second-hand shops or garage sales to find great deals.

DANCING

Dancing of all sorts — ballroom, Zumba, salsa and otherwise — is a great way to get in your steps and to reconnect with your partner or with other friends. Consider group lessons or just get started watching videos and cutting a rug in your living room.