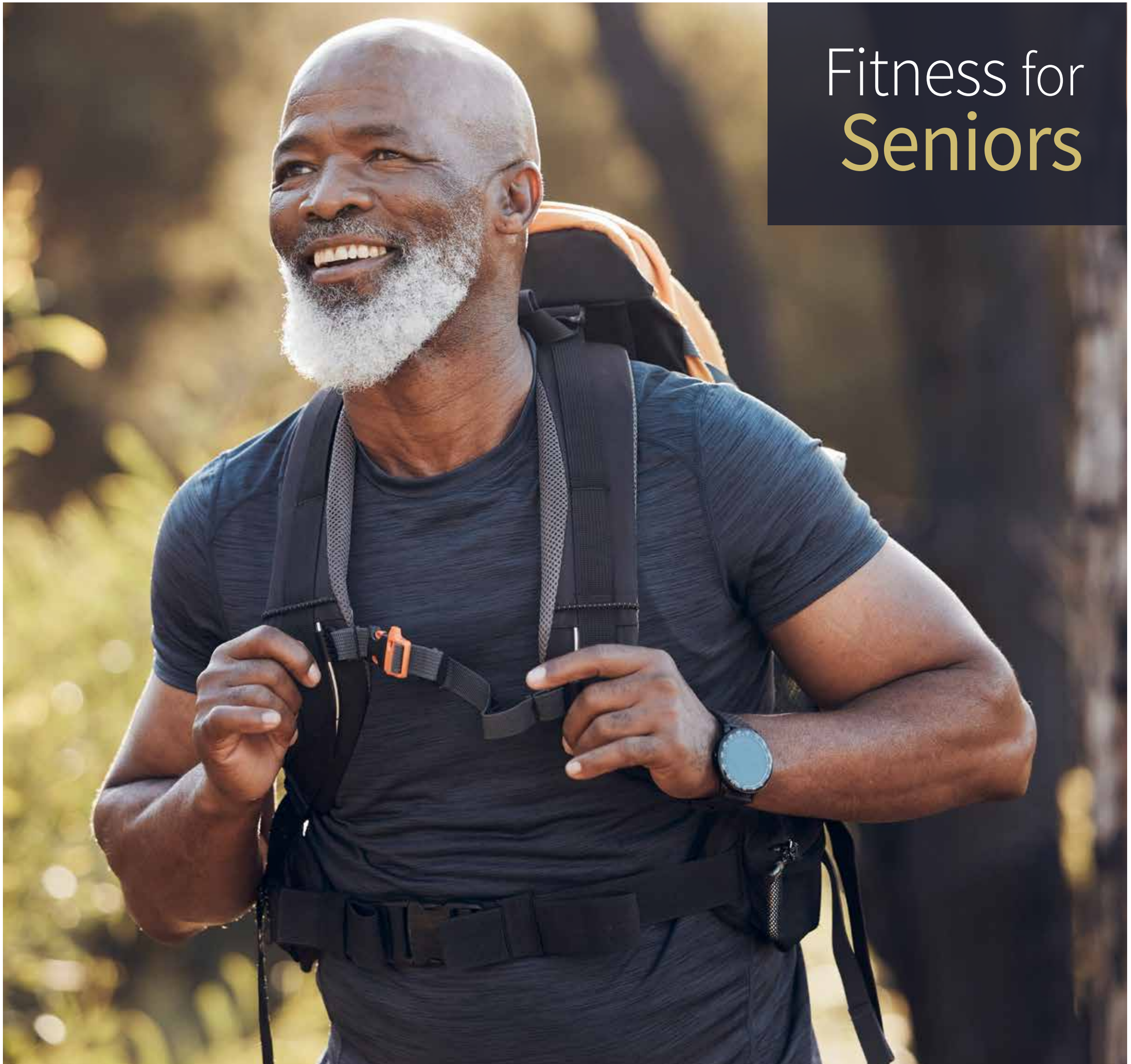


# Fitness for Seniors





# Talking to Your Doctor

The first step to tackling a new fitness plan for people of any age is to talk to their medical professional before they schedule the first gym session.

This is especially true for seniors, who may have preexisting conditions and other health concerns.

## **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT**

If you're not already scheduled to see your doctor, make an appointment. Make a list of the activities you plan to try and the frequency with which you plan to do them. Write down your fitness goals, along with any medications you take, including over-the-counter medications and supplements. Even though you may be excited to get started, wait until you've spoken to your doctor. You could trigger side effects and conditions you were unaware of.

## **MEDICATIONS**

Your doctor may have you adjust the times you take them depending on the types of medications, the effects you may feel, and the activity you're planning on doing. Some medications may lower your blood pressure or blood sugar, for instance, and when coupled with exercise, could cause negative health outcomes.



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## **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY**

Once you have the all-clear to begin exercising, remember to take it slow. Listen to your body and remember that exercise should never hurt or make you feel worse afterwards. Stop immediately if you have shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or break out in a cold sweat. If

you injure yourself, pay attention to your injury. Don't resume your workouts until you are pain-free.

## **EXERCISING WITH MOBILITY ISSUES**

It's not impossible, you just have to get creative. Find a facility or a trainer that specializes in helping people with

mobility issues. You may even find special classes just for seniors or for those who have trouble getting around. Working with someone who is mindful of your condition will make your exercise more productive and enjoyable. Your doctor may have recommendations for places, trainers and exercises for you.

## **EAT RIGHT**

Now that you're moving more, you may need to adjust your diet as well. Talk to your doctor about what you like to eat and drink and see whether you should make any adjustments before and after working out. You may need to add more protein, including lean proteins like poultry or fish.

# Finding the Right Gym for You

Once you've got the all-clear from your doctor, it's time to find the perfect place to get moving.

Here's how to pick the best gym for your lifestyle and your fitness goals.

## **LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

You want a gym to be convenient for you. This doesn't necessarily mean close to home, even though it could. You want a location that either has several options for you no matter where you are or a location along a route you regularly travel, such as to church or to the grocery store.

## **OPTIONS**

You want a gym that has equipment, trainers and classes that align with your goals. If you're a beginner, maybe don't choose a facility that caters to bodybuilders. Visit in person before you join to scope out the facility, the equipment and the staff. Consider making a list of your must-haves for a gym. Next, write down the like-to-haves and, finally, the avoids. Use your list to evaluate each gym you visit.

## **CHECK OUT SOCIAL MEDIA**

Your in-person visit provides some insight into how the gym works. Their social



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media channels can give you a broader look at how it runs day-to-day.

Consider checking reviews for the facility on sites such as Google or Yelp. If you're still unsure, ask the staff about signing up for a trial. It may even be free!

## **CLEANLINESS**

Look for signs that the gym is cleaned regularly. With all the noise and music, it can be easy to get distracted. Check out the bathrooms and the locker rooms to make sure they're spic-and-span. Also make sure the gym provides a

way to disinfect equipment after use. Usually, this is via a wipe or a spray bottle. If you don't see it, ask the staff how it's done.

## **DISCOUNTS**

Once you've picked a gym, ask whether there are any dis-

counts that may apply. This could include a discount for coming during off-peak hours or if you plan to take only group classes. Also make sure you completely understand how you will be billed, including for extras such as towels or classes.



# Podcasts for Your Workout

Some of us just need a little distraction to keep us from the realization that we're exercising.

You can try something like an audio book or a podcast to keep your brain occupied while you get your body more fit. Here's a playlist to get you started.

## STUFF YOU MISSED IN HISTORY CLASS

If you love history, this one's for you. There are seasons upon seasons of this pod built up, so it will take you a while to catch up while you work out. You can find just about any event or historical figure you care to hear about.

## AGING IN FULL BLOOM

This podcast with Lisa Stockdale will provide empowering insights and entertainment while you get moving. It's specifically geared toward seniors and toward helping them age on their own terms. Previous topics covered include smart homes, understanding arthritis and online scams.

## THIS AMERICAN LIFE

More than 2 million people download this popular pod every week. Ira Glass and company offer up stories about culture, society and just plain life in America. There are also hundreds of episodes built up of this long-running show.

## THE PERFECT SCAM

This podcast from AARP features people who have been affected by scams and scam artists. It discusses common tactics and arms you with information you need to protect yourself. There are more than 100 episodes in the show's archive and new ones

are released every Friday.

## LUX RADIO THEATRE

Get a blast from the past with the Lux Radio Theatre, one of the most popular radio shows from 1934-1955. There are more than 926 hour-long episodes that will take you back, and many are available as podcasts.

## EXCUSE MY GRANDMA

Stumped by millennials? You're not the only one. This podcast shares stories by Kim and her grandmother, Gail, as they delve into topics timely to life today. Each episode runs 30 minutes (perfect for cardio) and will tickle your funny bone and well as your brains.

## GOOD JOB, BRAIN!

Work out your brain cells while you build your muscles with this quirky trivia podcast. You can play along or just listen to the hosts for about an hour. There are more than 200 episodes ready to play, so you've got lots of time for walking on the treadmill.



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# Why It's Important to Stretch

Stretching before you work out can help protect your muscles and joints from injury, but it's especially important for seniors, whether you're about to work out or not.

As we age, our ability to build muscle strength and flexibility declines. You can combat this by stretching. Try to stretch all your major muscle groups for at least 10 minutes, two days per week.

## HOW TO STRETCH

Before you stretch, warm up by taking a short walk or otherwise moving around for a little bit. Then, take a deep breath. Slowly exhale as you stretch. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds to give it time to work on the muscle. Don't bounce or hold your breath, and only stretch until you feel tension. Dial it back if you feel pain.

## NECK STRETCHES

This is important for posture and for driving. Slowly bring your chin toward your chest and turn your head to the right. Hold for 15 seconds, then turn to the left. Hold for 15 seconds. Repeat as needed.

## SHOULDER STRETCHES

Hold a towel in one hand over your head and let it drape down your neck and back. Grab the free end with your



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other hand and gently pull down until you feel a stretch in the arm over your head. This stretch focuses on shoulder mobility, which is important when you get dressed or reach for items over your head.

## CHEST STRETCHES

This is another stretch designed to improve posture.

Extend both arms to the side with your palms facing forward. Reach back with your hands until you feel a stretch across your chest and in front of your arms. If you have a hard time holding your arms up, lean against a wall, stepping forward until you feel a gentle stretch in your chest. Switch it up and stretch both sides.

## ANKLE STRETCHES

Stiff ankles can cause poor balance. This stretch will help. Sit in a chair and slowly move your foot up and down and then side to side. Hold each position for 30 seconds, then repeat on the other foot. Make sure to do both feet each time.

## LOWER BACK STRETCHES

These stretches will help

maintain mobility in your spine, giving you better posture and balance. Lay down on your back with your knees bent and your feet together. Keep your feet flat on the floor. Keep your knees together and lower your legs to one side, twisting your torso until you feel a stretch in your lower back. Hold and repeat on the other side.

# Stay Hydrated, Stay Healthy

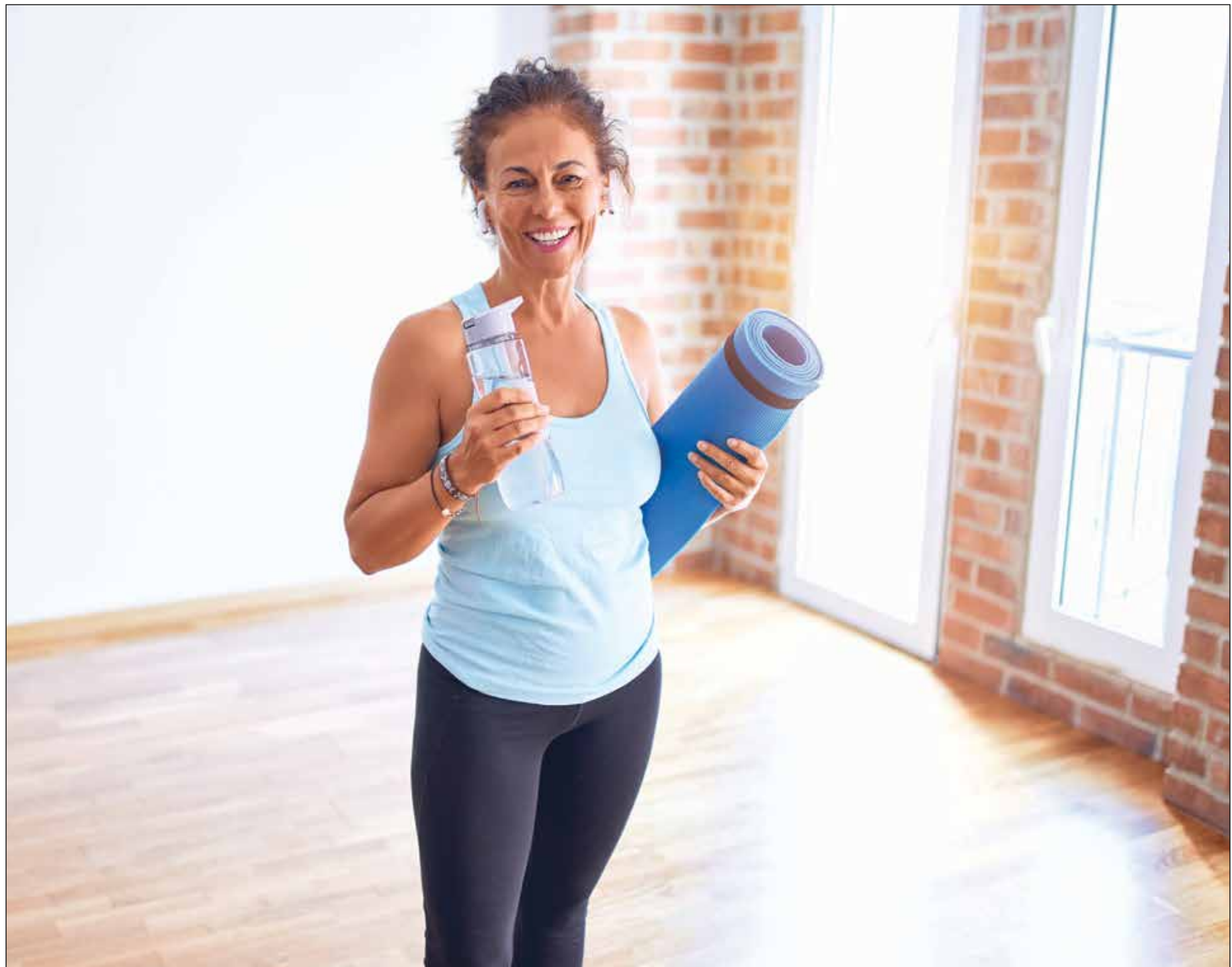
Water is essential for proper body function. Seniors are especially prone to dehydration because appetite and thirst diminish as we age.

Even when your body needs more to drink, you may not know it. Your body composition may have changed over time, leaving you with less water in your body than you once had. Lastly, seniors are more likely to take medications that increase the risk of dehydration.

## HOW MUCH WATER DO YOU NEED?

You should drink one-third of your body weight in fluid ounces, the National Council on Aging says. This means if you weigh 150 pounds, you should drink 50 ounces of water per day. Talk to your doctor or other medical professional about how much you should drink. Medical conditions and medications, including over-the-counter medications, could affect how much water you need.

Try to build hydration into your daily routine so that it becomes a habit. Take little sips of water throughout the day. If you can't stomach water, switch it up by infusing your water with sliced fruit or juices, provided you're not diabetic. Even if you are, talk to your medical professional about safer ways to stay hydrated.



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## SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION

Even a mild case of dehydration can lead to uncomfortable symptoms. One sign is less frequent urination and, when you do go, producing a dark-colored or smelly urine.

You may feel tired or weak,

be more irritable than usual, or experience dizziness and headaches. You could also have a dry mouth, muscle cramps or confusion. Dehydration symptoms can easily lead to falls and more serious injuries, so pay attention to the early symptoms.

## STAYING HYDRATED

Keep water with you all the time. Today, there are a variety of refillable bottles available and filling stations are frequently built into public places. If you have trouble drinking fluids, include water-rich foods in your diet such as cucumbers,

watermelon, lettuce, tomatoes and celery. You can include foods such as soups and broths, provided you monitor your salt intake. Avoid caffeinated beverages such as tea and coffee. Caffeine is a diuretic, meaning you'll pee more and lose fluids your body needs to stay healthy.



# Improving Balance

Falls can become increasingly serious as you age.

Johns Hopkins says that each year more than 25% of adults over the age of 65 fall. More than 3 million are treated in emergency rooms for fall injuries.

## WHY SENIORS FALL MORE

Seniors are at an increased risk of falling because, as we age, we tend to experience problems with vision and sensation in the feet, both of which can lead to falls. Seniors are more prone to vestibular problems, which can cause balance issues. Medications may be to blame, as well as low blood pressure and footwear issues.

## PREVENTING FALLS

Exercises that focus on balance and strength can reduce the risk of falls, Johns Hopkins says. Always talk to your medical professional before starting an exercise routine, but once you get the all-clear, try these:

**Sitting to standing.** Start by sitting in a sturdy, standard-height chair. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the ground. Have a sturdy support in front of you, such as a countertop or table, so that you can grab it if you start to feel unsteady. Scoot forward so your buttocks are at the front of the seat. Lean your chest forward over your toes, shifting your body weight forward. Squeeze your butt muscles and slowly



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rise to a standing position. Slowly sit back down and repeat 10 times. If you need to, place your hands or arms on the seat of the chair and push through your hands to help you stand and sit. The goal is not to use your hands at all.

**Balance exercises.** Try to have someone with you for this one, just in case you lose your balance. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your eyes open. Hold steady for 10 seconds, working your way up to 30 seconds. If you find your-

self swaying or reaching for the wall or other support, keep working on it. Once you can hold it for 30 seconds, stand with your feet together and your eyes open. Hold it for 10 seconds, working your way up to 30. Once you can do that,

stand on one foot, eyes open and ... well, you know the drill. The next exercise has you close your eyes and try each exercise. The goal for each one is to progress from 10 to 30 seconds, with five repetitions per leg, two times per day.

# Weight Training for Seniors

Strength training — or good, old-fashioned lifting weights — can help defend your body against age-related muscle loss, keep your bones strong, help you stay mobile and balanced, and even fight depression and cognitive decline.

## STAYING SAFE

First, talk to your doctor. Once you're cleared for strength training, learn the proper form to keep yourself injury-free. Consider hiring a trainer to help you until you can get it right. Start with just using your body weight, no additional weights. Perform three sets of 10-15 reps and, when it starts feeling easy, progress to weighted workouts.

## HOW MUCH WEIGHT TO USE

Start with the smallest amount of weight available. Try to perform three sets of 8-12 reps, keeping your form as best as you can. When those reps start to feel easy, consider increasing the load as you feel comfortable.

## WHEN TO STRENGTH TRAIN

Add weight training to your routine three or four days per



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week on nonconsecutive days to give your muscles time to recover. Alternate weight training or resistance training with cardio days. Remember that it may take you longer to recover from exercise nowadays. Give yourself plenty of time to recover between training sessions.

## SOME EXERCISES TO TRY

Becoming stronger can help you live more freely. Try some

of these exercises to get you started.

**Incline pushup.** Stand facing a table, dresser or wall. The more upright you are, the easier the move. Place your hands on the surface or the edge of the object, slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Move your feet back until you're at a comfortable angle, keeping your arms straight and perpendicular to

your body. Bend your elbows and slowly lower your chest toward the wall or object, pause, then press back to straighten up. Make sure you engage your abs and squeeze your buttocks. Try to do 10-15 reps.

**Stationary lunge.** Stand tall with your arms by your side. Step back with your right foot, placing your toes on the ground and keeping your heel

lifted. Then, bend your front (left) knee to slowly lower your body as far as you can comfortably. Allow your back knee to bend until it hovers just above the floor, but keep your weight in your front heel. Draw your lower belly in and lift your chest. Pause, then press through the front foot to raise your body back to standing. Aim for 10-15 reps per side.