Lifeline

14 Exercises for Seniors to Improve Strength and Balance

In Canada and around North America, falls are one of the leading causes of injury and death for senior citizens. However, you don't have to fall prey to slips and falls. By exercising, you can improve your balance and your strength, so you can stand tall and feel more confident when walking.

Read on to find 14 exercises seniors can do to improve their balance.

14 Exercises for Seniors to Improve Strength and Balance

Exercise 1: **Single Limb Stance**

It's best to start off with a simple balance exercise for seniors. Here's how you do this one: stand behind a steady, solid chair (not one with wheels), and hold on to the back of it. Lift up your right foot and balance on your left foot. Hold that position for as long as you can, then switch feet.

The goal should be to stand on one foot without holding onto the chair and hold that pose for up to a minute.

Exercise 2: **Walking Heel to Toe**

You might read this and wonder, "How is walking an exercise to improve balance?" This exercise makes your legs stronger, which enables you to walk without falling.

Put your right foot in front of your left foot so that the heel of your right foot touches the top of the toes of your left foot. Move your left foot in front of your right, putting your weight on your heel. Then, shift your weight to your toes. Repeat the step with your left foot. Walk this way for 20 steps.

Exercise 3: **Rock the Boat**

Stand with your feet apart, so that the space between them is the same width as your hips. Make sure both feet are pressed into the ground firmly. Stand straight, with your head level. Then, transfer your weight to your right foot and slowly lift your left leg off the ground. Hold that position for as long as possible (but no more than 30 seconds).

Slowly put your foot back onto the ground, then transfer your weight to that foot. Slowly lift your opposite leg. Start by doing this exercise for balance five times per side, then work your way up to more repetitions.

Exercise 4: **Clock Reach**

You'll need a chair for this exercise.

Imagine that you are standing in the centre of a clock. The number 12 is directly in front of you and the number 6 is directly behind you. Hold the chair with your left hand.

Lift your right leg and extend your right arm so it's pointing to the number 12. Next, point your arm towards the number three, and finally, point it behind you at the number 6. Bring your arm back to the number three, and then to the number 12. Look straight ahead the whole time.

Repeat this exercise twice per side.

Exercise 5: **Back Leg Raises**

This strength training exercise for seniors makes your bottom and your lower back stronger.

Stand behind a chair. Slowly lift your right leg straight back – don't bend your knees or point your toes. Hold that position for one second, then gently bring your leg back down. Repeat this ten to 15 times per leg.

Exercise 6: **Single Limb Stance with Arm**

This balance exercise for seniors improves your physical coordination.

Stand with your feet together and arms at your side next to a chair. Lift your left hand over your head. Then, slowly raise your left foot off the floor. Hold that position for ten seconds. Repeat the same action on the right side.

Exercise 7: **Side Leg Raise**

You'll need a chair for this exercise to improve balance.

Stand behind the chair with your feet slightly apart. Slowly lift your right leg to the side. Keep your back straight, your toe facing forward, and stare straight ahead. Lower your right leg slowly. Repeat this exercise 10 to 15 times per leg

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Exercise 8: **Balancing Wand**

This balance exercise for seniors can be performed while seated. You'll need a cane or some kind of stick. A broomstick works well for this – just remove the broom's head before you start.

Hold the bottom of the stick so that it's flat on the palm of your hand. The goal of this exercise is to keep the stick upright for as long as possible. Change hands so that you work on your balance skills on both sides of your body.

Exercise 9: **Wall Pushups**

As long as you've got a wall, you can do this strength training exercise for seniors.

Stand an arm's length in front of a wall that doesn't have any paintings, decorations, windows or doors. Lean forward slightly and put your palms flat on the wall at the height and width of your shoulders. Keep your feet planted as you slowly bring your body towards the wall. Gently push yourself back so that your arms are straight. Do twenty of these.

Exercise 10: **Marching in Place**

Marching is a great balance exercise for seniors. If you need to hold onto something, do this exercise in front of a counter.

Standing straight, lift your right knee as high as you can. Lower it, then lift the left leg. Lift and lower your legs 20 times.

Exercise 11: **Toe Lifts**

This strength training exercise for seniors also improves balance. You'll need a chair or a counter.

Stand straight and put your arms in front of you. Raise yourself up on your toes as high as you can go, then gently lower yourself. Don't lean too far forward on the chair or counter. Lift and lower yourself 20 times.

Exercise 12: **Shoulder Rolls**

This is a simple exercise for seniors. You can do it seated or standing.

Rotate your shoulders gently up to the ceiling, then back and down. Next, do the same thing, but roll them forwards and then down.

Exercise 13: **Hand and Finger Exercises**

The following are exercises to improve flexibility. You don't need to stand for these.

In the first exercise, pretend there's a wall in front of you. Your fingers will climb the wall until they're above your head. While holding your arms above your head, wiggle your fingers for ten seconds. Then, walk them back down.

During the second exercise, touch your hands while they're behind your back. Reach for your left hand while your right hand is behind your back. Hold that position for ten seconds, then try with your other arm

Exercise 14: **Calf Stretches**

These strength training exercises for seniors can be performed sitting or standing.

To do calf stretches while standing, find a wall with nothing on it. Stand facing the wall with your hands at eye level. Place your left leg behind your right leg. Keep your left heel on the floor and bend your right knee. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat two to four times per leg.

If you want to stretch your calves while sitting, you'll need a towel. Sit on the floor with your legs straight. Put the towel around the soles of your right foot and hold both ends. Pull the towel towards you while keeping your knee straight and hold it for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat the exercise two to four times per leg.

Lifeline has been helping Canadians for decades, but remember that before embarking on an exercise regimen, please consult your doctor. Falls don't have to be a fact of life – exercising can make you stronger and fitter. You don't need fancy equipment, either – just pull up a chair!

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1. Equipment may not detect all falls. Undetectable falls can include slow falls, falls from low heights and slides from seated positions. If able, users should always push their button when they need help.
2. GoSafe coverage outside the home and wireless service in the home provided with sufficient access to/coverage by the applicable third party wireless network. Certain limitations subject to third party cellular provider availability and coverage. Signal range may vary.