

Flexible and feeling fabulous! Healthy advice for those 55+

According to the U.S. National Institute on Aging there are four components to good physical health: aerobic capacity, strength, balance and flexibility. It's no surprise that they have included flexibility. As we age, our muscles and connective tissues begin to tighten which begins to limit movement. This can be from any combination of factors including past or current injuries, repetitive motions from work or other activities, health issues such as arthritis or bursitis, genetics, diet and other lifestyle factors.

Without flexibility, even everyday activities like bending over to tie shoes, zipping up a dress or climbing stairs can be difficult. And activities like golf, tennis or bicycling may become so challenging and painful that they are out of the question entirely. The less flexibility you have, the fewer choices there are for enjoying life.

The good news is that flexibility is relatively easy to improve and the benefits of flexibility training are many: improves range of motion, enhances physical performance and coordination, decreases muscle soreness, prevents injuries, improves circulation, relieves and prevents many causes of back pain, and helps build the mind/body connection – reducing stress. Stretching also helps you feel better in your body and enhances your sense of well being. All of this adds up to more options for movement and activity which means greater satisfaction from life.

A few simple exercises that take only 10-15 minutes a few days a week can make all the difference in the way you experience life! They can be done almost anytime and anywhere and require no special equipment. What could be simpler?

Here are 4 flexibility exercises to help you get started. They are easy to do and at

the same time offer tremendous benefit. As you do these exercises remember to breathe consciously when you practice them. Most importantly don't do anything hurts and don't force yourself to do anything that doesn't feel right. While these are gentle exercises that are suitable for most people, if you have been away from activity for many years or have any limiting injuries you may want to consult with your physician before trying them.

Side stretch on back



Lie on your back with your legs extended. Walk both of your legs a little to the left until you feel a stretch in the right side of your torso. Take your right arm up overhead behind you and stretch through your right arm and out through your finger tips. Take 5-10 deep breaths and then do the other side. Benefits: Stretches the arms, shoulders, sides of torso, lower back and muscles and connective tissues along the outside of the legs.

Cat tuck and dog tilt



Come onto all fours with your arms directly under your shoulder and your knees under your hips. As you exhale, bring your head and hips towards each other arching like a cat. Lift your belly button up towards your spine, holding for a few seconds. This is cat tuck. Release, inhale and turn your tail bone up towards the sky, rotating your hips over the tops of your thighs. Lift your chest and your head. This is dog tilt. Go back and forth from cat tuck to dog tilt several times. Go slowly and use your breath. Benefits: Improves flexibility in the shoulders, hips, spine and back.

Dog on chair



Place a chair against a wall or on a yoga mat as shown in photo. Standing in front of the chair, place your palms on the chair seat and walk your feet back until they are a little behind your hips. Make sure your arms are in line with your shoulders and your feet are hip width apart. Press your palms into the chair seat and lengthen through your arms and the sides of your torso. Take your hips back a little more. Take 5-10 breaths. Walk your feet towards the chair to come up. Benefits: Stretches arms, shoulders, chest, spine, hips, hamstrings, and calves. Great for lower back.

Chest & arm stretch – standing at wall



Stand with the right side of your body parallel to a wall. Be arms length from the wall. Bring your finger tips onto the wall at shoulder height and turn your hand clockwise approximately 5 minutes on a clock face. Slowly turn your feet to the left until you feel a good stretch in your chest, front of shoulders or arm. If you want more stretch continue to walk your feet to the left. If you want less stretch turn your feet back towards the wall. Take a 5-10 breaths and then do the other side. Benefits: Stretches front of chest, front of shoulders, biceps, forearms and wrists.

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