



Exercise for seniors: 5 tips for staying active during the COVID pandemic

By Provision CARES Proton Therapy

Exercise is an important part of healthy aging, but seniors are facing new challenges when it comes to staying active during the coronavirus pandemic. Social distancing and “Safer-at-home” guidelines make it more difficult to stick to your typical exercise routine, like going to a gym or your community center. And the fact that you’re staying at home more often means there’s a good chance you’re moving less.

The National Council on Aging says daily movement can help improve many aspects of your overall health, including blood pressure, weight management, back pain and even your emotional health. So how much exercise should seniors get? The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend healthy older adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week. Older adults with chronic health conditions who may not be able to meet that guideline should still do their best to maintain regular physical activity.

150 minutes of exercise might sound intimidating, maybe even overwhelming, especially given the obstacles posed by the pandemic. We hope the following tips will offer you some motivation and make it easier for seniors to stay active while at home.

1. Sit Less

Staying at home naturally means you’re not getting out as much. That means you’re probably not moving as much either. A great way to stay active while at home is simply remembering to sit less.

Turning off the television will give you one less reason to sit. Keep the TV off and work

on those home projects you've been meaning to finish. Find some fun activities like gardening or just taking a walk around the block.

When you do watch TV, take advantage of the commercial breaks and take a lap around the house. You can even use those 2-3 minutes to get some chores done like doing the laundry or emptying the dishwasher.

If walking or standing is difficult for you, there are many exercises you can do while seated. Here's an article from Silver Sneakers with four effective chair exercises. It even includes video demonstrations to help you do them.

2. Make a “Move List”

Planning out your daily exercises makes it much easier for seniors to stick to their goals. To make your “Move List,” ask yourself how you plan to get moving today. The list can include things like:

- Get the mail
- Take a walk
- Yard work
- Put on some music and dance

Build those activities into your daily schedule. Will you take a 20-minute walk before breakfast to get the day going? Maybe you'll get the mail after lunch.

3. Mix It Up

Variety is very important to avoid your exercise routine becoming mundane. There are four types of exercise on which seniors should focus: endurance, strength, balance and flexibility. The NIA offers some great ideas to work on each of these areas, along with important safety tips.

Improving your health in each of these areas comes with many benefits:

- **Endurance:** Makes things like climbing stairs or dancing easier
- **Strength:** Makes lifting groceries or carrying grandchildren easier
- **Balance:** Helps prevent falls and related injuries
- **Flexibility:** Makes common tasks like getting dressed and driving easier

4. Develop an exercise routine

If you have fallen out of your exercise routine, getting back into the habit can be difficult even in normal times. The new challenges brought on by the coronavirus pandemic don't make it any easier, but there are a few things you can do to get the ball rolling. As a first step, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) recommends speaking with your doctor before increasing your activity level. They even offer some important questions seniors should ask to help tailor an exercise routine to their needs and abilities.

Once you're ready to begin, make a list of fitness goals. Goals can be short-term, like finding an exercise buddy or getting more comfortable walking shoes. You should also set

some long-term goals like lowering your blood pressure or losing weight. A great way to start making progress toward your goals is to write out your exercise plan. This will help keep you accountable and give you a clear roadmap to maintaining an active lifestyle. Try this interactive Activity Planner from the Department of Health and Human Services to help you get going.

5. Overcome Excuses

At some point, you're bound to have one of those days where you just don't feel like exercising. Here are some of the most common excuses and ways you can overcome them.

- **I don't have time.** If you find yourself feeling too busy to get moving, make it part of your day. Scheduling your daily exercise means you are making time for it, helping to hold you accountable.
- **It's boring.** Try to find physical activities that you enjoy. It might be dancing, gardening, or taking a walk with your neighbor. Just be sure to practice safe social distancing when exercising with others.
- **It costs too much.** You don't necessarily need expensive equipment to stay active. If you're strength training, use household items like water bottles or soup cans as weights. There are also plenty of free workout videos available online. Check out this playlist from the NCHPAD for ideas for home workouts, both seated and standing.
- **I'm too tired.** Once you get moving, you may actually feel less tired. Physical activity can help reduce fatigue. Exercising can even help you feel less anxious and stressed.