

16 Chair Exercises for Seniors & How to Get Started

[HEALTH & WELLNESS](#)

by Jessica Hegg June 21, 2017



We all know exercise is important for leading an active, healthy, happy life. And when we think "exercise," we think "get up and go." But with chair exercises for seniors, you can perform seated chair exercises that rival any you've ever done on your feet!

Forget scaling mountains and running marathons. Seniors or older adults with mobility and balance issues, those recovering from an injury, surgery, or are just looking to take it slow...these workouts are for you!

16 Chair Exercises for Seniors

A seated workout encompasses far more than mobility movements. Chair based exercises will develop your cardio fitness, muscular strength, and flexibility. Here are some of the best chair exercises for seniors. Practice these basic movements, and choose one or two exercises from each category for a well-rounded seated workout.

Warm Up Chair Exercises for Seniors

Like any other workout, we want to begin with a warm-up. Loosening and warming the muscles prepares them for the movements they're about to do and greatly reduces the risk of injury. Try these warm-up chair exercises for seniors.

1. Neck Stretch

Sit up straight, and slowly tilt your head toward your right shoulder until you feel a stretch. Hold this position, and slowly extend your left arm down and to the side. You should feel a stretch on the left side of your neck. Release, and then repeat on the other side. Perform two to five repetitions per side. This stretch will warm up your neck and traps and prepare you for arm exercises.

2. Shoulder Circles

Seated, place your fingertips on your shoulders. Circle your shoulders forward for fifteen repetitions. Reverse the movement, and circle backward for fifteen repetitions. This exercise will warm up your shoulder muscles and reduce the risk of strain.

Chair Exercises for Arms

Stronger muscles means greater balance and stability, which means a drastically reduced risk of falling. Being stronger also makes daily life easier. Getting around goes from a challenge to a pleasure, and lifting bags that used to weigh you down serves as a reminder of your improved fitness and health.

3. Seated Row

Sit on the edge of your seat with your feet flat on the floor. Hold your arms in front of you, with your thumbs pointed toward the ceiling and your elbows slightly bent. Draw back your elbows, squeezing your shoulder blades together, until your upper arms are in line with your body. Extend your arms again, and repeat eight to ten times. This exercise strengthens your shoulders, chest, and upper back, while placing little stress on your joints.

4. Shoulder Rolls

Sit tall with your feet flat on the ground. Shrug your shoulders up toward your ears, and slowly rotate your shoulders in a circle—back, down, forward, and back to the top. When you reach the top, reverse the movement. Roll your shoulders forward, down, back, and to the top again. Perform ten repetitions in each direction, for a total of twenty reps. This movement engages your shoulders and traps, which are essential for lifting and carrying objects.

Chair Exercises for Legs

It may seem impossible to strengthen your legs while sitting down, but you absolutely can! Here are a few chair exercises for legs to work your quads, glutes, and calves.

5. Toe Taps

Sit up straight with your feet flat on the ground. Bend your toes toward the ceiling and back to the floor. To increase the difficulty of this exercise, sit on the edge of your seat with your legs straight. Keep your heels on the ground as you bend your toes upward and then back down. This variation increases the range of motion. Perform eight to ten repetitions. This exercise

strengthens your calves and the muscles running alongside your shins. You use these muscles to climb stairs and perform daily activities.

6. Knee Lifts

Sit up straight with your feet flat. Slowly lift your right knee toward your chest, and then lower your foot back to the floor. Repeat with your left leg. Perform ten repetitions per leg, for a total of twenty reps. For an added challenge, pause for a five-count at the top of the movement. This exercise strengthens your quads, which is the largest muscle group in your body. You use your quads in nearly everything you do, and strengthening them will make you feel stronger overall.

Chair Core Exercises for Seniors

Strengthening your core and abs is crucial for improving balance and stability. Perform these chair core exercises for seniors to strengthen your muscular foundation and protect yourself from accidental falls. The seated exercises are great for lower back, abs, and glutes. Build a strong foundation!

7. Tummy Twists for Abs

Sit up straight with your feet flat on the ground. Hold your arms at a ninety-degree angle with your elbows at your sides and your forearms extended in front of you. Rotate your upper torso to the left through a full range of motion. Keep your lower body still, and brace your core by imagining you're sucking your belly button toward your spine. Return to the middle and twist to the right. Perform ten repetitions on each side, for a total of twenty. This exercise strengthens your obliques, abdominal muscles used for trunk rotation, and will help you maintain good posture. Also, check out the [best back braces to improve poor posture](#).

8. Captain's Chair

Be sure your chair is sturdy. Sit up straight and grasp the edges of your seat. Slowly lift your feet off the floor. Move your knees toward your chest. Squeeze your abs at the top, and slowly lower your feet back to the floor. Do not try to

move past a comfortable position. If you can only raise your feet a few inches off the floor, that's fine. This exercise will strengthen your abs and other core muscles, such as your glutes.

Chair Aerobics for Cardio

Improved cardiovascular health is massive for reducing the risk of heart attacks and for improving your overall quality of life. Chair cardio exercises for seniors is one of the best ways to make daily life easier. Tired of feeling winded after climbing the stairs? Chair aerobics will strengthen your lungs and your heart so you're ready to face the world.

9. Seated Jumping Jacks

Sit up straight, on the edge of your seat. Extend your arms to the sides and then above your head, as you would with a normal jumping jack. Return them to your sides before raising them again. Start slow, and then increase your speed until you're moving your arms as fast as you can. Perform three sets of twenty repetitions. If you're exercising in a chair with arms, be careful that you don't strike the armrests during the movement.

10. Skater Switch

Sitting on the edge of your chair, bend your right knee and place your toe on the floor. Extend your left leg straight out to the side with your toes pointed. Extend your arms straight in front of you, and bend forward. Reach your left arm to the insole of your right foot, raising your right arm behind your body and twisting at your waist. Return your arms in front of you, and straighten your back. Repeat the movement ten times, and then switch your legs and reverse the movement for another ten reps. For added difficulty, alternate left and right, quickly switching your leg position between reps.

11. Chair Running

Sit with your legs extended, toes pointed, and arms bent by your sides. Lean back slightly so that your shoulder blades barely touch the back of your chair. Gently lift your feet from the floor. Pull one knee toward you while the other is

extended, and then switch, mimicking a running motion. If necessary, grip the armrests or sides of your seat for balance.

12. Seated Tap Dance

Sit with your knees bent and your toes resting lightly on the floor. Extend one leg, and gently tap your heel to the floor. With your leg still extended, point your toes and tap them to the floor. Flex your foot, and tap your heel again. Return to the starting position, and repeat with the opposite leg. Perform the “tap dancing” for three to five minutes. Set a timer, and try to go a little longer each time you exercise.

Seated Chair Exercises for Flexibility

Being flexible, with a full range of motion, makes everything feel better—reaching down to tie your shoe, stretching for the top shelf. It reduces stiffness and pain, allowing you to perform your daily activities. Do these exercises at the end of your workout to stretch your warmed muscles.

13. Seated Forward Bend

Widen your legs, and place your feet flat on the floor. Slowly lean forward, dropping your torso toward your thighs. Relax your neck, and lower your hands toward your feet. When you feel a stretch, hold the position for thirty seconds, and then slowly return to the starting position. Repeat three times. This movement stretches your lower and upper back.

14. Knee to Chest

Sit up straight with your left foot firmly on the ground. Grasp the back of your right knee, and slowly pull it toward your chest until you feel a stretch. Hold the position for thirty seconds, and then repeat with your left leg. Perform three reps per side. This exercise stretches your hamstrings and glutes—big muscles that need to be flexible in order to prevent injury.

15. Ankle Rotations

Sit up straight, and rest your ankle on the opposite knee. Rotate your ankle in circles. Perform ten rotations clockwise and ten rotations counterclockwise. Point your toes for an additional stretch.

16. Sit and Reach

Sit with your knees together and your back straight. Extend one arm straight toward the ceiling. Stretch your body upward, feeling the stretch along your torso. Look toward your hand to get a stretch in your neck and shoulders. Hold the position for five to ten seconds, and then switch to the other side. Repeat three times per side.

Get Started with Fun Chair Exercises for Seniors

Ready to get started with seated exercise? All you need is a chair and a positive attitude! It's easy to get started, and there are plenty of resources available to point you in the right direction.

- **Ideal Chair**

Pick out a good chair. The ideal chair will have a straight back and will be stable. Please, no wheels. Leave the rolling chairs in the office. You'll want something with a comfortable cushion, but not a deep armchair you'll disappear into. A sturdy kitchen chair is a good option.

- **Learn from Videos**

YouTube is a wealth of exercise information. It's easier to understand an exercise when you can actually see it being performed. Go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and type in the search bar "chair exercises" or "seated exercises." You'll find instructional videos to teach you some basic movements. Remember to perform these fun chair exercises in a safe environment, with someone nearby in case of emergency.

- **Take Classes**

Yes, seated exercise classes exist! Ask your local gym or community center if they offer chair exercise classes, likely developed specifically for seniors. If not, express your interest in such a class and ask if they'll offer one in the future. There are infinite variations of chair workouts, even chair yoga! [Discover why yoga is a great, low-impact form of exercises for seniors.](#)

When to Consider Chair Exercises for Seniors

As we get older, exercising becomes difficult and can place a strain on joints and muscles, which can lead to pain and injury. Of course, staying fit is imperative for preventing the very pain and injury overly intense exercise can cause. For an older adult who struggles with this dilemma, chair exercises for seniors are the perfect solution. They help you stay fit and healthy, without placing undue stress on your body. If any of the below descriptions fit you, chair exercises may be just what you're looking for.

- Those with poor balance, and higher risk of falling during exercise.
- Those who suffer from joint pain that makes standing painful and difficult.
- Those who have a limited range of motion or poor mobility.
- If you're recovering from a surgery or an injury.
- Beginners who want to start slow and work up to standing exercises.
- If you just want to try something new and shake up your fitness routine!

Benefits of Chair Exercises for Seniors

Seated exercise offers all the benefits of standing exercise, without the risk. Chair exercises will keep your joints flexible, improving your range of motion and mobility. They also strengthen and stabilize your muscles, resulting in improved balance, which is key for preventing falls and injuries. After a few weeks of regular chair exercise, you can expect to see an improvement in your overall health and fitness. You'll feel better, and your daily routine will be easier. A few benefits of chair exercises for seniors:

- Improved flexibility and range of motion

- Decreased joint pain and stiffness.
- Improved muscle strength and balance
- Improved blood circulation
- Improved mood and concentration
- Stress relief

Sit down and Get Fit!



Chair exercises improve strength, cardiovascular health, and flexibility—all while having a good time! ([Image Reference](#))

Chair exercises may be the holy grail of fitness for seniors. They allow older adults who otherwise would not be able to exercise consistently to improve

their strength, cardiovascular fitness, and mobility—without the high risk of injury present during traditional exercise routines. Seated exercises are gentler on the joints and will reduce pain, not add to it. Seniors can expect the same benefits from seated exercise that they would from standing exercise, and chair exercises can be a lifesaver for someone recovering from surgery or an injury. All you need is a sturdy chair and a desire to become stronger and healthier!