



# Healthy Aging Through Movement: Your Exercise Guide



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**Everyone's fitness journey is different. Use this table of contents to find the topics that speak to your needs and interests.**

# What's Inside?

This booklet is designed to help you understand the benefits of staying active and to give you practical tools to build an exercise routine that works for your life. Whether you're looking to improve your strength, manage a health condition, or simply feel better day-to-day, you'll find guidance tailored to your needs.

Here's what you'll learn:

## **Why Movement Matters**

Discover how physical activity strengthens your body, protects your independence, reduces your risk of disease, and boosts your mental health and mood.

## **Three Keys to Fitness**

Learn about aerobic activity, muscle strengthening, balance training, and flexibility—plus safety tips for each type of exercise to help you move with confidence.

## **Exercising with Health Conditions**

Find practical advice for staying active when managing arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, COPD, osteoporosis, chronic pain, Alzheimer's, dementia, or obesity. You'll discover how exercise can actually help improve these conditions.

## **Making It Work for You**

Learn how to build sustainable habits: setting realistic goals, finding your support system, trying new activities to keep things interesting, and overcoming the barriers that might get in your way.

This booklet puts you in control. Use it as a reference guide to explore topics that matter most to you, and remember—every step counts toward a healthier, more active life.



# The Importance of Physical Activity for Older Adults

Physical activity is one of the most powerful tools you have to support your health and quality of life—at any age. Staying active isn't just about exercise; it's an opportunity to do the things you love, spend meaningful time with people who matter to you, get outdoors, and feel your best. And here's the good news: active older adults tend to live longer and enjoy more vibrant, independent lives.

## Functional Ability and Fall Prevention

One of the greatest gifts of staying active is the ability to do the everyday things that matter most. Regular movement makes it easier to handle household tasks, get in and out of bed or chairs, and move freely around your home. That independence is precious—and it's something physical activity helps you maintain.

Exercise also strengthens your bones and muscles in ways that protect you as you age. It helps guard against osteoporosis and the gradual muscle loss that can happen over time. Since falls become a greater concern for older adults, building strength and balance through activity is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of falling and protect yourself from serious injury.

## Disease Risk and Chronic Health Conditions

Staying physically active can help prevent many of the health conditions that are common in older adulthood. People who move regularly have significantly lower risk of:

- Heart disease, stroke
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- and certain cancers.

Physical activity may also help protect mental health and reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

If you're already managing a chronic condition, that's not a reason to sit still—it's actually a reason to move. Regular exercise can help slow disease progression, improve your quality of life, and reduce the chance of developing new health problems. Movement is medicine, and it works best when you use it.



## Mental and Emotional Health

The benefits of staying active go far beyond your physical body. Exercise is a natural mood booster that can ease feelings of depression and anxiety, help you sleep better, and support your overall emotional well-being. It can also help keep your mind sharp by supporting memory, focus, and the ability to think clearly.

And there's something special about moving with others. When you exercise alongside friends, family, or a group, you get the added gift of connection and community—something that's just as important to your health as the movement itself.

The path to better health doesn't require perfection. It simply requires showing up for yourself, one day at a time, in ways that feel good to you.



## Four Essential Types of Exercise

Your body thrives on variety. The best fitness routine includes three key types of movement— aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening, and balance training. When you combine all three, you get better results than any one type alone. Plus, mixing things up keeps exercise interesting and helps prevent injury. The good news? There are countless ways to get all three types of activity, whether it's through yoga, dancing, water aerobics, or activities you already love doing. No matter your fitness level, you can find movements that work for you and support your overall health.

### Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity—sometimes called endurance or cardio—gets your heart pumping and your lungs working. It involves moving your body's large muscles for extended periods, which increases your breathing and heart rate. When you do aerobic activity regularly, you build endurance and strengthen your heart, lungs, and circulatory system. This type of activity is especially powerful for reducing your risk of diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and other conditions common in older adulthood.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week—that might be brisk walking, yard work, dancing, or swimming. A helpful way to gauge your intensity: if you're breathing harder but can still hold a conversation easily, you're likely at the right level. If you can only say a few words before catching your breath, that's vigorous-intensity activity.

## Examples of Moderate-Intensity Aerobic Activities:

- Brisk Walking
- Yard Work (raking leaves, pushing a lawn mower)
- Housework (mopping, vacuuming)
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Bicycling
- Climbing Stairs or Hills
- Playing Pickleball, Golf or Tennis

## Safety Tips for Aerobic Activity

- Listen to your body—aerobic activity should never cause dizziness, chest pain, or nausea.
- Always warm up with light activity like easy walking before you start, and cool down afterward.
- Stay hydrated (unless your doctor has advised you to limit fluids)
- Be aware of weather and your surroundings if exercising outdoors, and wear proper footwear and safety gear like a helmet when bicycling.
- If you're unsure about a particular activity, talk with your health care provider.



## **Muscle-Strengthening Activity**

Muscle-strengthening exercises—also called strength training or resistance training—help your muscles contract against resistance, which builds strength over time. When you gradually increase the weight, repetitions, or frequency of these exercises, your muscles grow stronger. This type of movement is essential for maintaining independence, making everyday tasks easier (like getting up from a chair, climbing stairs, or carrying groceries), and preventing falls and fall-related injuries.

Aim to do muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week, working all your major muscle groups: legs, hips, chest, back, abdomen, shoulders, and arms. Rest those muscles between sessions to allow for recovery. Start with one set of 8 to 12 repetitions, and if you're new to strength training, begin without weights or resistance bands until you feel comfortable with the movements.

## Examples of Muscle-Strengthening Activities:

- Using Resistance Bands
- Weight Machines or Hand-Held Weights
- Bodyweight Exercises (arm circles, leg raises, pushups, planks, squats or lunges)
- Carrying Heavy Items like Groceries
- Gardening that Involves Digging and Lifting

## Safety Tips for Muscle-Strengthening Activity

- Listen to your body and avoid overdoing it—too much too soon can lead to exhaustion and sore joints.
- Warm up with lighter weights or no weight before you begin.
- Remember to breathe—exhale during the effort and inhale as you relax.
- Never lock your joints in a straight position. If you're unsure about proper form, consider a session with a personal trainer, check out a group class at a local gym or senior center, or look for free online videos that demonstrate the movements.
- Your health care provider can also offer guidance.

## **Balance-Training Activity**

Balance is your body's ability to stay stable, whether you're standing still or moving. Balance exercises are one of your best tools for preventing falls and fall-related injuries. Aim for about three sessions of balance exercises each week. These can be as simple as standing on one foot or as enjoyable as yoga or tai chi.

## **Examples of Balance Exercises:**

- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Standing on One Foot
- Walking Backward or Sideways
- Practicing Standing from a Sitting Position
- Using a Wobble Board

## **Safety Tips for Balance-Training Activity:**

- Move slowly and mindfully, and keep a sturdy chair, person, or wall nearby to hold onto for support.
- Wear comfortable, stable shoes or go barefoot for better grip.
- If you feel unsteady, take action to steady yourself.
- And as always, talk with your health care provider if you're unsure about any movements.



## Flexibility and Range of Motion

Flexibility is the ability of your joints to move through their full range of motion. Stretching helps maintain and improve flexibility, making it easier to reach, bend, and move freely throughout your day—whether you're tying your shoes or unloading the dishwasher. Stretch after your muscles are warmed up, especially following aerobic or strength exercises. Breathe deeply as you stretch, and never stretch so far that it causes pain.





## eternalHealth is Making Fitness Accessible for You

Getting active shouldn't be complicated or expensive. As an eternalHealth member, you have access to fitness resources designed to fit your life and your budget.

**OnePass Fitness Membership:** All eternalHealth members have access to a \$0 fitness membership through OnePass, giving you free access to in-network national and boutique fitness facilities. Whether you prefer a traditional gym, yoga studio, or specialty fitness center, you can find what works for you at no cost.

To find an in-network gym or get your access code visit:

[eternalHealth.com/FitnessBenefit](https://eternalHealth.com/FitnessBenefit)

**Fitness Flex Allowance:** Some eternalHealth plans include a Fitness Flex Allowance you can use toward activities you love—like golf green fees, pickleball and tennis fees, bowling, or home fitness equipment.

To find out what fitness benefits are included with your plan, review your Summary of Benefits at:

[eternalHealth.com/Forms-Documents](https://eternalHealth.com/Forms-Documents)

or call Member Services:

**1-800-680-4568 (TTY 711)**

October 1st - March 31st, 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week  
April 1st - September 30th, 8am to 8pm, Monday - Friday

# Exercising with Chronic Conditions

If you're managing a chronic condition, you might worry that exercise isn't for you. The truth is, almost anyone—at any age—can benefit from physical activity, even with a health condition. In fact, for most people, moderate-intensity activities like brisk walking, biking, swimming, or gardening are safe and beneficial, especially when you build up slowly over time.

The key is working with your health care provider to create a physical activity plan that's right for your specific situation. Below, you'll find guidance for staying active with some of the most common chronic conditions among older adults.

## Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias

Physical activity is powerful medicine for cognitive health. It can reduce the risk of conditions that contribute to cognitive decline and may help slow or delay memory loss. For people living with Alzheimer's or related dementias, regular movement can improve mental processing, boost mood, help maintain a healthy weight, and support healthy sleep and digestive habits.

If you're in the early stages with mild cognitive impairment, you may be able to exercise the same way as someone without cognitive changes. However, people with more advanced dementia may benefit from the support and companionship of a caregiver. If you're a caregiver, try exercising together and adapting activities to make them enjoyable and manageable. Remember that several short "mini workouts" throughout the day may work better than one longer session.

Talk with your doctor about what approach would work best for your situation.

## Arthritis

Living with arthritis doesn't mean living less. In fact, older adults with arthritis who stay physically active experience less pain, better physical function, and improved quality of life. Both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities contribute to these benefits.

The key is choosing low-impact activities that put less stress on your joints—such as swimming, walking, tai chi, or water aerobics. When done safely, being active with arthritis won't make your condition or pain worse. It actually helps. Talk with your health care provider about which exercises are the best fit for your needs.

## Chronic Pain

Living with chronic pain doesn't mean you can't move. In fact, most people with chronic pain can exercise safely, and physical activity is an important part of pain management. Being inactive can actually create a cycle where pain increases and your ability to function decreases.

The secret is listening to your body. On "good days," resist the urge to overdo it. If you experience pain, swelling, or inflammation in a specific area, focus on other parts of your body or take a rest day. Work with your doctor to find exercises and activities that feel right for you and help you manage your pain effectively.



## **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)**

If you have COPD, your health care provider or pulmonary therapist can help you find the right approach to exercise. You may be able to learn strengthening exercises for your arms and legs, as well as breathing exercises that strengthen the muscles you use to breathe.

Consider asking about pulmonary rehabilitation programs in your area. These programs combine physical activity with counseling and education to help you exercise safely and manage your disease. They're designed to help you stay active and continue doing the things that matter in your daily life.

## **High Blood Pressure**

Physical activity is one of the most effective tools for managing high blood pressure. Regular, moderate-intensity activity can help lower your blood pressure, reduce your risk of it continuing to rise, and protect you against heart disease and stroke. Both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities are beneficial.

As you increase your physical activity, work closely with your health care provider. They may need to adjust your blood pressure medication as your fitness improves—which is a good thing! The goal is finding the right balance for your individual health.

## **Obesity**

If you're carrying extra weight, don't let that be a reason to stay inactive. Any movement is a healthy start—even a few minutes a day to begin with. Slowly build up from there at a pace that feels manageable for you.

If you have difficulty with certain movements or feel self-conscious, explore different activities until you find what works for you: walking, water exercises, dancing, or weightlifting. There's an activity out there that fits your body and your comfort level. Talk with your health care provider about what's right for you.

## **Osteoporosis**

If you have osteoporosis, work with your health care provider to find physical activities that are safe and good for your bone health. A mix of different types of exercise works best: weight-bearing activities like walking, climbing stairs, or dancing create force on your bones that makes them stronger. Adding muscle-strengthening and balance

exercises creates a powerful combination that builds bone density, prevents falls, and reduces fracture risk.

## **Type 2 Diabetes**

Physical activity is one of your most powerful tools for managing type 2 diabetes and living a longer, healthier life. Regular movement improves blood glucose levels, can slow or prevent the disease from progressing, and protects your heart—the leading cause of death among people with diabetes.

Aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, plus two days a week of muscle-strengthening exercise. Try to be active most days of the week. Work with your health care team to create a plan that fits into your life.

If you exercise with diabetes, pay special attention to monitoring your blood glucose levels, wearing appropriate footwear, and preventing foot injuries. These steps are essential parts of staying safe and healthy.

## **The Most Important Step**

No matter what chronic condition you're managing, the most important thing is to talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine. Together, you can create a plan that's safe, effective, and tailored to your unique health needs. Your health care provider knows your situation best and can help you get the most benefit from physical activity while protecting your health.

# Tips For an Active Lifestyle

Starting to move more—and staying consistent—can feel challenging. The good news is that every bit of activity counts. Even small amounts of movement throughout your day add up toward the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and two days of muscle-strengthening activity each week. The key is finding what works for you and making it sustainable. Here are practical strategies to help you get active and stay active.

## **Take It Slow**

The best fitness journey is one you can sustain over time. Increase your physical activity gradually over weeks and months, not days. Start with lower-intensity activities that match your current fitness level, then gradually build up the frequency, intensity, and duration as you feel stronger and more confident.

Moving slowly and steadily has another benefit: it helps build motivation and creates a routine that feels natural. If your routine gets interrupted by illness or travel, that's okay—just ease back into it gradually rather than jumping back in at full intensity.

If you don't have an existing injury or chronic condition, and you plan to increase activity gradually, you generally don't need to check with your doctor before starting. Of course, if you have any concerns, it never hurts to ask.

## **Set Goals and Monitor Progress**

Having a goal gives you direction and something to work toward. The most powerful goals are specific and realistic. Instead of a vague goal like “exercise more,” try something measurable like “take a 10-minute walk three times a week” or “do strength training on Mondays and Thursdays.”

Tracking your activity helps you see progress and stay motivated. You can use a step counter, keep a simple written log, or even share your progress with a friend, doctor, or trainer for accountability and encouragement. And don't forget to celebrate your wins—big and small. Every milestone matters.

## **Identify and Overcome Barriers**

Most people face obstacles to staying active. The first step is identifying what your specific barriers are. Common challenges include bad weather, cost, low energy, or lack of motivation. Once you know what's stopping you, you can problem-solve solutions.

### **Common Barriers and Solutions**

#### **Bad Weather or Poor Air Quality**

Find ways to move indoors—walk at a mall, grocery store, or community center. Look for online fitness programs you can do from home.

Don't forget, as an eternalHealth member, you have access to a \$0 fitness membership through OnePass, giving you free access to at-home work out videos and in-network national and boutique fitness facilities where you can exercise year-round, regardless of the weather.

#### **Cost and Equipment Concerns**

You don't need expensive equipment to get fit. Try free online videos, use items around your house (books or water jugs work for strength training), or add movement to activities you already do—gardening, dancing, playing with grandchildren, or doing household chores.

Plus, as an eternalHealth member, your OnePass fitness membership is completely free, so you have access to gyms and fitness studios at no cost. Some eternalHealth plans also offer a Fitness Flex Allowance you can use toward activities like golf, pickleball, tennis, bowling, or home fitness equipment.

Check your Summary of Benefits to see what's included with your plan.

## Feeling Too Tired or Low Energy

Move during times of day when you naturally feel most energetic. Many people are surprised to find that physical activity actually boosts their energy rather than draining it.

## Lack of Motivation or Confidence

Consider working with a personal trainer—even just a session or two to learn proper form—or find an exercise buddy to keep you accountable.

Joining a group class, walking group, or online fitness community can also spark motivation and make activity more enjoyable.



## Build Social Support

One of the most powerful tools for staying active is doing it with others. Group fitness classes, walking groups, or working out with a buddy provides more than just exercise—it offers friendship, encouragement, and accountability. Social support from friends and family can be the difference between starting an exercise routine and sticking with it long-term.

The social connection is just as important as the movement itself. Having people cheering you on and sharing the experience with you makes activity something you look forward to, not something you dread.

## Engage in a Variety of Activities

Physical activity doesn't have to mean going to the gym. Movement happens through exercise classes, yes, but also through everyday activities: household chores, gardening, running errands, walking or biking for transportation, and leisure activities you enjoy. The more ways you can weave activity into your life, the more sustainable it becomes.

Try mixing indoor and outdoor activities, different types of exercise, and different social settings. Finding activities you genuinely enjoy—whether that's dancing, water aerobics, pickleball, or something else entirely—is the secret to staying active as you age. When you like what you're doing, you'll keep doing it.

## **Remember! Small Steps Lead to Big Changes**

You don't have to overhaul your life to get the benefits of physical activity. Start where you are, move at your own pace, and build gradually. The goal isn't perfection—it's consistency. Every walk, every stretch, every moment of movement is an investment in your health and independence.

You've got this.

# Key Points to Remember

Your journey to better health through physical activity is deeply personal—and it's never too late to start. As you move forward, keep these important points in mind.

## ✓ **Movement at any age is powerful**

Whether you're just beginning or returning to activity after a break, deciding to move your body is one of the best investments you can make in your health and independence.

## ✓ **Balance is key**

The most effective fitness routine combines three types of activity: aerobic exercise, muscle-strengthening, and balance training. Together, they create a foundation for strength, endurance, and confidence.

## ✓ **Everything counts**

You don't need a gym membership or fancy workout clothes to be active. Walking to the store, gardening, dancing, doing household chores—all of these activities add up toward your weekly goals of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and two days of muscle-strengthening movement.

## ✓ **Your health is unique**

If you're managing a chronic condition, talk with your doctor about what types of physical activity are right for you. Being honest about your current abilities and health concerns helps your care team support you better. Do what you can, when you can—even light activity is beneficial.

## ✓ **Consistency builds lasting change**

The goal isn't perfection or intensity; it's making physical activity a regular part of your life. Small, consistent steps create big changes over time and help you build habits that support your health for years to come.

# You Don't Have to Do This Alone

As an eternalHealth member, you have resources and support to help you stay active:

## ✓ OnePass Fitness Membership (\$0 cost)

Access thousands of in-network gyms, fitness studios, and boutique fitness facilities nationwide at no cost to you. Whether you prefer a traditional gym, yoga class, or specialty fitness center, you have options. Plus, you get access to thousands of on-demand workout videos you can do in the comfort of your own home!

## ✓ Fitness Flex Allowance (Select plans)

Some eternalHealth plans include an allowance on an easy-to-use prepaid Mastercard, called the eternalPlus Benefits Card, you can use toward activities you love—golf green fees, pickleball and tennis fees, bowling, or home fitness equipment.

## ✓ Your Health Care Team

Your doctor and care team are your partners in building an active lifestyle. They can help you set realistic goals, monitor your progress, and adjust your plan as your health changes.

## ✓ eternalHealth Care Management Team

If you have questions about your fitness benefits or need support, our team is here to help. Call us at 1 (800) 787-5076 (TTY 711), 8am to 5pm EST, Monday - Friday.



## Your Next Steps

**1. Choose one activity** you enjoy – it could be as simple as a daily walk.

**2. Start small** and build gradually. Remember, consistency matters more than intensity.

**3. Find your support** whether it's a friend, family member, fitness class or online community.

**4. Review your benefits** at [eternalHealth.com/Forms-Documents](https://eternalhealth.com/Forms-Documents) or call Member Services at **1 (800) 680-4568 (TTY 711)** to learn about your OnePass membership and Fitness Flex Allowance.

**5. Talk with your doctor** before starting any new exercise program, especially if you have a chronic condition.

Remember: This is your journey. Move at your pace, celebrate your progress, and know that every step forward toward a healthier, more independent you.





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