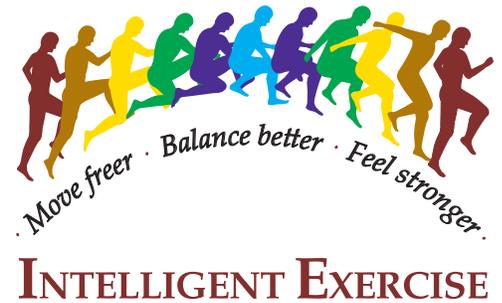


Daily Activity for Older Adults – A Guide for Caregivers

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from the NEWSLETTER, MAY 2007

While regular exercise sessions a couple of times a week play an important role in improving balance, strength, and quality of life for an older adult, the exercise that will make the biggest difference is the physical activity that's a normal part of everyday life.

Daily physical activity reduces stiffness and arthritis pain and encourages better circulation, digestion, sleep, mood, and mental sharpness. Research shows that seniors who do even a modest amount of physical activity every day reduce their vulnerability to the major diseases of aging and improve their quality of life.

Here are five activities you can do every day with the senior you are caring for to support mobility and mental function. Bring this list with you to the next doctor's visit and make sure they are appropriate in your situation. These activities may feel challenging or tiring to start – stop at the point of mild fatigue but be consistent, and after a few weeks they'll become much easier. They work best when seniors and caregivers do them together.

Stand and Sit

Most of the big muscles of the legs and hips can be strengthened by standing up from a chair. A couple of times a day, stand and sit 2-10 extra times in a row. Remember that everyone must lean forward in order to get their weight over their feet to stand – if this is difficult, encourage it by rocking forward and back a few times if necessary. Help by holding hands but not by pulling.

March with your Arms

Upper body movement is essential for walking ability and also for respiratory health, and it makes a valuable activity all by itself. Sit towards the front of a firm chair (preferably without arms) so that your back doesn't touch the back of the chair. Bend your elbows and swing your arms as if you are walking briskly, and encourage your whole upper body to move. Keep swinging until you're tired. Singing makes this more fun and also helps exercise the lungs, diaphragm, and vocal chords for a stronger voice and healthier lungs. Playing recorded music is another enjoyable option.

Walk Sideways

As we get older and walk slower and less, the muscles on the outside of the hips that support balance on one leg often go underused. Strengthen these muscles and practice shifting weight from leg to leg by holding hands facing each other and walking sideways. Take a few steps to one side (from 4 to

20 or more) and then the same amount of steps back to the other. Keep your toes, bodies, and faces pointed towards each other rather than turning towards the direction you're moving.

Walk Every Day

There is no better exercise for preserving strength, endurance, good mood, and cardiovascular health than walking. Walk every day. Go outdoors to walk whenever possible, and use a cane or a walker if needed. You can start with as little as five minutes and gradually work up to a half an hour or more. When the weather is bad or an outdoors walk is too difficult, take small walks indoors several times throughout the day. Taking several short walks is at least as good for your health as taking one long walk. One way to measure progress is to get a small pedometer (\$20 or less at a sporting goods store) to clip to the waistband to count the number of steps taken in a day. Use it to see how many steps are taken in a normal day, and then begin looking for ways to add a few steps each day. 10,000 steps equals about a 30-minute walk.

Balloon Volleyball

Opportunities to look upward, do quick movements, and challenge eye-hand coordination are often missing from seniors' lives. A great way to improve these abilities is to bat a balloon back and forth through the air. Start by doing it seated on the front portion of chairs facing each other. Take breaks as often as needed. As it becomes easier and more familiar, begin varying the game by hitting the balloon sometimes at waist height, sometimes high overhead, sometimes a little to the right or the left. If you notice you're getting competitive, try keeping score – a little competition really sharpens the mind. When it's very comfortable, you can try it with each of you standing right in front of a sturdy chair or sofa, so that anyone losing their balance backwards will fall right into a comfortable seat.

For individually-designed one-on-one functional fitness training for older adults, contact Jae Gruenke at 646-256-4414 or jae@intelligentexercise.com. Intelligent Exercise trainers make house calls in Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn.

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