

Support Your Immune System

Regular physical activity can support your immune system by decreasing inflammation, and boosting antibodies and white blood cells that are responsible for fighting disease.

Focus on four types of exercise: Balance, strength, flexibility and endurance.

They don't all need to be done every day, but variety helps keep the body fit and healthy, and makes exercise interesting.

Balance:

- See how long you can stand on one foot, or try holding for 10 seconds on each side. Use support when needed.
- Walk heel to toe for 20 steps. Steady yourself with a wall if you need a little extra support.
- Walk normally in as straight a line as you can.
- If you find standing on one foot very challenging at first, try this progression to improve your balance:
 - Hold on to a wall or sturdy chair with both hands to support yourself.
 - Next, hold on with only one hand.
 - Then support yourself with only one finger.
 - When you are steady on your feet, try balancing with no support at all.

Strength:

- You may wish to consult with a certified fitness professional to learn safe technique before beginning a strength-training program.
- One set of eight to 12 repetitions, working the muscles to the point of fatigue, is usually sufficient for each muscle group.
- Aim to exercise each muscle group at least two times per week, with a minimum of two days of rest between workouts.



Strengthening and stability exercises:

- Plank and side plank
- Pushups
- Sit-ups or crunches
- Hip lift or bridge position
- Tricep dips on a chair
- Lunges
- Squats or chair position
- Wall sits

Flexibility:

Exercises stretch your muscles and can help your body stay flexible. It may help you avoid discomfort when confined in a space for a long period of time.

- The best time to do flexibility exercises is when your muscles are already warm so they can stretch farther without tightness or pain.
- If you're doing only stretching exercises, warm up with a few minutes of easy walking first to warm up your muscles. If you're doing endurance or strength exercises, stretch after, not before.
- It's good to do each stretching exercise 3 to 5 times during each session. Always stretch slowly and smoothly into the desired position, as far as is comfortable for you without pain.
- If you're not used to stretching, hold the stretch for about 10 seconds. The more often you stretch, the easier it will become. Eventually, you will be able to hold each stretch for 30 seconds comfortably.

Tips for safe stretching:

- Relax and breathe normally while stretching.
- Count to 10 slowly or time yourself for 10-30 seconds.
- A stretch should always be smooth and slow, never jerky or bouncy.
- Hold the stretch for 10-30 seconds and repeat each stretch 3-5 times.
- Sharp or stabbing pain means you should stop, you're stretching too far.
- Always keep your joints slightly bent, never "locked" in a straight position. This can cause injury.

Examples of flexibility exercises:

- Abductor (inner thigh) stretch: Keeping your torso upright, lunge to one side with a bent knee over the toe. Keep your other leg straight. Push your weight to the “bent knee” side until you feel a stretch in the inner thigh of your straight leg. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.
- Calf Stretch: Stand facing a wall with both hands on it. Position one foot forward (knee bent) and the other leg back with the leg straight, toes pointing at the wall. With your stomach tight, lean in toward the wall until you feel a stretch in the lower part of the back leg. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.
- Chest stretch: Place your fingertips lightly on the back of your head. Push your elbows back while squeezing with your upper back until you feel a stretch in your chest near your underarms. Hold for 20–30 seconds. Option: Another option is to stand in a corner with one hand or elbow on each wall. Your feet should be 1½–2 feet away from the corner in a split stance. Keeping your back straight and tummy pulled in, lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in your chest near your underarms. Hold for 20–30 seconds. (Keep feet staggered, one behind the other.)
- Hamstring Stretch: Prop one foot up on a low, secure bench or stair step. Stand tall. Keeping your chest high, hips square and tailbone lifted, bend forward from your hips. Feel a stretch in the back of your thigh or knee. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.
- Hip Flexor Stretch: Lunge forward with one leg, knee bent. The back leg can stay straight or bent slightly. Push your hips forward until you feel a stretch in front of your back thigh near the groin. Keep your torso upright and your front knee behind your toes. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.
- Palm Touch: Bend your knees slightly. Try to touch the floor by bending from the waist, but don’t bounce. Hold the position for 10 seconds, then repeat 1–2 times. If you have lower back problems, do the same thing, but with your legs crossed.

- Shoulder Rolls: Lift your shoulders up toward your ears, then down and backwards in a circular motion. Repeat 5–10 times.
- Toe Touch: Place your right leg on a chair or railing, making a 90-degree angle with the other leg. Keep your left leg straight and lean forward, touching the toes of your right leg. Don't bounce. Switch legs and do the same thing. Repeat the entire exercise 1–2 times.
- Wall Push: Stand 18 inches away from a wall. Lean forward, pushing against the wall with your hands and keeping your heels flat on the ground. Hold it for 10 seconds, then relax. Repeat 1–2 times.

Endurance

Alternate cardio and strength exercises in short bursts of 30 seconds and 3 minutes, then repeat the circuit two to three times.

Cardio and Endurance exercises:

- Jumping jacks
- Jogging or marching in place
- Stair-climbing or step-ups
- High knees
- Mountain climbers
- Burpees
- Walking briskly
- Running / jogging
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Biking
- Climbing stairs at work

Sources: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness>, <https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/fitness>

https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/fitness/documents/NHS_sitting_exercise.pdf

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-exercises/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/balance-exercises/>