



# 7 Exercises That Make Your Day Easier

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Learn how to train  
your body to move  
with less pain and  
more confidence



Working out has big benefits no matter what your age, reports the National Institute on Aging. But when you're older, maintaining strength and mobility has an added bonus that younger people take for granted: You're able to keep doing everyday tasks — like reaching something on a shelf — independently and with more ease.

Luckily, there's a fitness concept designed just for that: functional fitness. Unlike traditional strength training, where each move targets one or maybe two specific muscles (think biceps curls or classic situps), functional exercises involve multiple muscle groups from top to bottom — including your brain.

“Functional exercises help to train a neurological pattern,” says Liz Davis, an exercise physiologist in Toledo, Ohio. “For example, sitting up and down repetitively in a chair while holding a gallon jug will fatigue your muscles, but it also trains your brain to recognize — and feel more confident in — the movement.”

Why does this matter? When it comes time to bend down and pick up a package on the porch, for example, your body is automatically poised to execute the movement using the correct muscles (in this case, your hamstrings and buttocks muscles) versus the wrong ones (your lower back) that could lead to injury.

## TRAINING FOR YOUR LIFE

The beauty of functional fitness, says Davis, is that there's always a real-life application that you're training for. Bending and twisting to move grocery bags from the cart to your car, pushing a lawnmower, or getting out of bed with greater ease — these things are incredibly important to older adults. And they require strength and



mobility to complete safely, without risk of injury, Davis points out. In fact, they're so important that the fitness community has given them a name: activities of daily living, or ADLs.

“No two people's ADLs will look the same,” she says. “Functional fitness is personalized fitness. You're essentially training for your life.”

On the following pages, Davis offers seven of her favorite functional exercises to help train for those moments. Do each one at least twice a week. If you opt to add weight to any of the exercises, first make sure you can complete the move with proper form for 15 reps. Get your provider's OK before trying any new exercise.



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## 1. ONE-ARM OVERHEAD PRESS

**Why:** Make it easier to reach something on a high shelf.

**Muscles worked:** shoulders, biceps, triceps, wrist

■ While seated or standing, bring your hands in line with your shoulders, palms facing the ceiling.

■ Extend your right hand vertically as high as you can.

■ Slowly return to the starting position. Do 10 to 15 reps; repeat with your left arm.

**Make it harder:** Hold a soup can or light weight in your hand.



## 2. CHAIR SQUAT

**Why:** Make it easier to pick something up off the floor.

**Muscles worked:** butt, legs, core

■ Stand with your back to a chair, feet apart. Tighten your abs.

■ Lower yourself into the chair, bending

forward from your hips (not your waist). Keep your chest high.

■ Once seated, brace your core and return to standing. Do 10 to 15 reps.

**Make it harder:** Hold a stuffed duffel bag near your chest.



## 3. MARCH IN PLACE

**Why:** Make it easier to use the stairs.

**Muscles worked:** glutes, legs, core

■ Place your right hand on a wall for support. Bend your left arm 90 degrees, push your shoulders down and tighten your abdominals.

■ Drive your left knee upward to form a 90-degree angle. Hold for two seconds, then lower. Repeat with your right leg. That's one rep. Do 30 reps (15 per leg).

**Make it harder:** Try removing your hand from the wall.



## 4. GENTLE SPINAL TWIST

**Why:** Make it easier to rake, do laundry and unload groceries.

**Muscles worked:** lower back, core

■ While seated, plant your feet hip-width apart. Rest your hands on your lap or the armrests. Keep your spine erect.

■ Gently twist your torso to the right about 30 degrees.

■ Slowly return to your starting position. Repeat on the left. Do 30 total twists.

**Make it harder:** Hold a hardcover book near your chest.



## 6. SUITCASE CARRY

**Why:** Make it easier to lift, carry, push, pull and hold things.

**Muscles worked:** Core, upper back, shoulders, lower body

- Hold a dumbbell (or a bag with one or two books inside) in your right hand.

- Stand tall and keep your shoulders back.

- Walk for 30 seconds (60 steps), taking short strides.

- Put the weight down. Pause, then pick it up with your left hand and repeat.



## 7. INCLINE PLANK

**Why:** Make it easier to stand or complete errands without tiring

**Muscles worked:** Core, upper and lower body

- Place your hands on a wall, shoulder-width apart. Walk your feet back until

your body is in a straight line from your neck to your ankles.

- Turn your hands out and squeeze your glutes and thighs.

- Hold for 30 seconds, or for as long as you can.

# Easy Fixes for Better Posture

Your spine muscles are always working. Why not give them a hand?



Your mother was right: Good posture is important for lots of reasons, including a healthy back. Here are three tips to check your own position.

## 1 Don't slouch.

Ideally, you should lean back slightly in your chair. Draw your shoulder muscles back, keep your feet flat on the floor and check that your butt is touching the back of the chair. Equally important: Get up and walk around every hour.

## 2 Stand in a line.

The key to good posture is to maintain a neutral spine, reports the National Spine Health Foundation. Each time you stand up, think about lifting your chin slightly and keeping your ears, shoulders, hips and knees in one neat line.

## 3 Avoid the "iHunch."

Leaning over to look at your smartphone can throw your back out of alignment, especially if you're on your phone for long periods of time. Instead, lift your device to eye level.