



### Foster Flexibility

**Present:** Throughout this lifestyle intervention, we have talked about the health and fitness benefits of regular physical activity. Another important part of regular physical activity is **flexibility**.

#### What is flexibility?

- Flexibility refers to a joint's ability to move through its full range of motion.
- We use flexibility in everyday activities, such as bending to tie our shoes, reaching in the pantry for an ingredient, or twisting around to see who is calling our name.

#### Why is flexibility important?

- Flexibility is an important component of fitness that is often ignored. Flexibility is not just for people practicing ballet, gymnastics, or martial arts; rather, it is an important part of fitness for everyone regardless of age, gender, goals, or experience.
- Poor flexibility of the lower back and hamstrings (back of the upper leg) has been shown to contribute to low back pain.
- Having good flexibility may help to reduce stiffness, prevent injuries, and maintain good range of motion in the joints.

#### How can I improve (or maintain) my flexibility?

- The best way to maintain flexibility is to stretch regularly, at least once a day.
- Perform basic stretches using the upper and lower body.



### Safety Guidelines for Stretching

Remember these guidelines while performing stretching exercises:

- ✓ Do a short warm-up *before* stretching. A warm-up loosens the muscles to prevent injuries.
- ✓ Wear comfortable clothing, nothing which limits movement.
- ✓ Move slowly until you feel the muscle stretch. A safe stretch is gentle and relaxing.
- ✓ Hold the stretch steady for 10 to 30 seconds. **Do NOT bounce.** Bouncing can lead to torn muscles.
- ✓ Relax. Then repeat two to three times.
- ✓ Be careful to stretch both sides of your body – **stay in balance.**
- ✓ Stretch within your own limits. Don't compete.
- ✓ Never stretch if you have pain before you begin.
- ✓ If a particular stretch causes pain, stop doing it.
- ✓ Breathe slowly and naturally. **Do NOT hold your breath.**
- ✓ **Always stay in control.** Jerky, unstable movements can lead to injury. Don't let gravity be the boss!

**Listen to your Body!**



### Simple Stretching Exercises

Here are some basic stretching exercises most people can do. Use a chair to sit on or to assist you during each stretch.

- **Overhead stretch (shoulders):** Extend your arms overhead with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Keep your back and neck straight.
- **Mid-back stretch:** Extend your arms in front of you with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Gently pull forward, separating your shoulder blades.
- **Chest stretch:** Extend your arms behind you with elbows straight; interlock your fingers if possible. Gently lift your elbows upward.
- **Side bends:** Extend one arm up overhead and gently lean to the opposite side. Repeat with the other arm.
- **Trunk (middle) rotation:** Sit in a chair and gently rotate your middle and shoulders to one side, using your arms to help you rotate. Repeat in opposite direction. You should feel a stretch in your **middle**.
- **Hamstrings:** Sit in a chair and extend one leg forward, with the back of your heel resting on the ground. Keep your knee straight and gently lean forward to your toes. Repeat on other leg.
- **Calf stretch (ankle and calf):** Hold onto a chair or countertop. Place one ankle behind the body with knee straight and the foot flat on the floor. Put the other leg slightly forward and bend. Lean forward to feel the stretch. Repeat on the other side.

*Source: National Center on Physical Activity and Disability*



### Better Balance

#### What is balance?

- Balance is the ability to control and maintain your body's position as it moves. Your brain, muscles, and bones work together to keep you steady and to keep you from falling.
- You use balance in everyday activities, such as rising from a chair, going up or down stairs, getting out of a car, or walking.

#### Why is balance important?

- Balance training helps the muscles work together and it strengthens the body's ability to correct itself when balance is lost. This is helpful when you are doing activities, like walking or bike riding, as well as in all your daily activities (getting in and out of cars, carrying groceries, playing with children).
- Having good balance is also one of the best ways to **prevent yourself from falling**.

#### Can I improve (or maintain) my balance?

- Balance is a skill that almost everyone can preserve throughout life. If you have become a little "unbalanced," it is possible to improve your balance. In addition to normal aging, your balance can be affected by injury, illness, nervous system disease, and medications.
- If you have concerns about your balance, **please consult your health care provider before trying any exercises**.



### Simple Balance Exercises

**Present: First and foremost, stay safe.** If you know that you have balance problems, then you should consult a professional for guidance on how you should practice balancing. When preparing for balance exercises, wear loose, comfortable clothing and shoes with good support. Make sure you perform balance exercises on firm, hard surfaces (such as a wood floor).

**Here are some basic balance exercises most people can do:**

- ✓ Start with proper posture, which you can practice anywhere, anytime.
- ✓ Walk. It is a good form of physical activity and it helps you maintain your balance.
- ✓ Stand in a doorway or near a table or chair (so you can steady yourself at any time). Try **standing on one leg** for 30 seconds. You could even do this while washing dishes or brushing your teeth, as long as you have the counter to hold onto (or grab if you start to lose your balance). You can modify this exercise by:
  - **Standing hip raise:** Lift one knee forward so that it is parallel to the hip and bent at a ninety degree angle
  - **Standing knee bend:** Bend the knee backwards, so that the shin is parallel to the floor
  - **Standing kick:** Keeping the leg straight, lift one leg out in front of you, with the foot in a “kick” position
  - **Standing side kick:** Keeping the leg straight, lift the leg out to the side
  - **Tandem standing:** Place one foot directly in front of the other, touching heel to toe
- ✓ Practice **side-stepping or braiding** (walking sideways crossing one leg over the other) at the kitchen counter. Start by holding onto the counter and progress to letting go as your balance improves.