

# Balance and flexibility for improved and ongoing mobility



There are many ways to improve your fitness. By moving your body just minutes each day, you can improve your overall health. But not all exercise provides the same benefits.

Focusing on flexibility and balance builds a foundation of fitness that will positively affect almost all elements of your life. Especially as you grow older, keeping joints flexible and your balance intact allows you to:



**Work**



**Travel**



**Exercise**



**Lower your risk for injuries**

## Stretch it out

It is recommended that you stretch at least two to three times each week. This will allow you to maintain your range of motion. All major muscle-tendon groups should be stretched, including:<sup>1</sup>

- Neck
- Chest
- Lower back
- Legs
- Shoulders
- Trunk
- Hips
- Ankles

Look for stretching classes at your local gym or community center or from reputable online sources. A qualified instructor, athletic trainer, physical therapist or healthcare provider can help you create a personalized stretching routine. Don't forget that when doing any kind of physical activity, it is recommended that you warm up and cool down to avoid injury.

## A balancing act

Having good balance is important for everyday activities, including walking and going up and down stairs. Maintaining balance can help prevent falls, a common problem in older adults. Try these exercises you can do anywhere:<sup>2</sup>

- Stand on one foot, alternating each side for 10 seconds. Steady yourself with a wall if you need support.
- Walk heel to toe for 20 steps. Steady yourself with a wall if you need support.
- Walk normally in as straight a line as you can.

## Tying it together

Tai chi combines stretching, strength and balance while working on mindfulness.<sup>3</sup> It's often called "meditation in motion." Tai chi is gathering fans of all ages because:

- Movements are circular and never forced.
- Muscles are relaxed rather than tensed.
- Joints are not fully extended or bent.
- Connective tissues are not stretched.
- Almost anyone, at any level of fitness, can do it.

Plus, the movements have great, descriptive names. Try "Gathering the stars" or "Crane takes flight."<sup>4</sup>

### Gathering the stars

- Start with feet evenly spaced, standing straight upright.
- Position arms as if holding a large ball.
- Turn to the side and open arms to gather the stars (or give a hug).
- Repeat on the opposite side.



### Crane takes flight

- Start with feet evenly spaced, standing straight upright.
- Slowly bend your knees.
- As you rise, inhale and raise your hands, wrists leading the movement.
- As you sink back to bent knees, let your arms come back to your sides as you exhale.



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Before starting any new exercise routine, talk to your doctor to make sure it's safe for you.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-ideal-stretching-routine>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/balance-exercise>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-health-benefits-of-tai-chi#>

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Tai-Chi-Fundamentals-Basic-Moves-7-Source-Jail-Jan-Betty-Driessen-and-C-2004\\_fig1\\_347225592](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Tai-Chi-Fundamentals-Basic-Moves-7-Source-Jail-Jan-Betty-Driessen-and-C-2004_fig1_347225592)

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