

8 Best Low-Impact Workouts for Older Adults

Stay fit, strong, and injury-free with these exercise options.

High-impact, gut-busting workouts may have been effective in your twenties, but exercising for long-term health and wellness means being kinder to your body. That's not only true for the roughly 50 million Americans afflicted with some form of arthritis; it applies to everyone.

As the years pass, your bone density and joint support naturally start to wane. That doesn't mean you can't still enjoy a calorie-burning, muscle-building workout. Here are eight great options for staying fit, strong, and healthy without hammering your joints.

1. TRX Suspension Training: Also known as "total-body resistance exercise," TRX is a strap suspension system that uses gravity and your own body weight to develop strength, balance, and flexibility.

"Suspension training is a safe way to get your strength training in, and a great benefit is that it strengthens your core," says Dan Go, C.P.T., a Toronto-based personal trainer and founder of Go Girl Body Transformation. "Another big benefit of this type of training is that it provides more proprioception, or body awareness, allowing you to exert more control over your body."

The rope-like device can be intimidating at first, so it's a good idea to take a class or work with a trainer when you're just getting started. Once you're comfortable, you can simply hang a suspension trainer over any solid doorframe and use the attached handles to perform hundreds of exercises.

2. Swimming: Swimming has long been known as an excellent low-impact workout — and for good reason. Moving in water both supports your joints and provides resistance to strengthen your muscles and bones. Both swimming and water aerobics are great workouts for your heart and for increasing range of motion.

Another perk: You rarely (if ever) feel overheated in water. The downside is that this can make it harder to notice when you need more fluid, so play it safe by drinking plenty of water before you dive in.

3. Yoga: "Yoga is a great low-impact exercise that helps build a strong core, along with improving balance and muscular endurance," says Jake Boly, C.S.C.S., a personal trainer in New Jersey. "These are all essential as we age, so we can reduce the likelihood of serious injury from falls or other possible missteps."

A regular yoga practice can also improve bone density, according to a 10-year study published in *Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation*. Just 12 minutes of yoga every other day is enough to do the trick. Get started with a [SilverSneakers yoga class](#).

4. Walking: Walking is hard to beat when it comes to staying active every day. It gives continuous work to the muscles and connective tissues responsible for stabilizing your feet, ankles, knees, and hips while also burning calories. The faster you go and the more hills and steps you climb, the more you burn.

Studies have also shown that a regular walking habit—ideally 30 minutes per day, six days per week—can help prevent constipation and even erectile dysfunction.

5. Pilates: Pilates is often lumped in with yoga, but it's a different exercise system. Both emphasize gentle movement, the mind-body connection, flexibility, and breathing techniques—all of which can be excellent salves for creaky joints. But Pilates has a stronger emphasis on building core strength, and it's also free of the spiritual associations that can turn some people off of yoga.

"As we get older, it becomes more important to strengthen our core muscles to support our spine," Go says. "Pilates offers a low-impact but effective way to strengthen muscles and build a solid, functioning body at any age."

6. The Elliptical: Sorry, treadmill. The elliptical wins when it comes to putting less stress on those legs. "As the elliptical glides back and forth, it minimizes the impact on the lower extremities and back due to its ski-like motion," Boly says. So it's a great way to get your heart pumping without hurting your joints.

That said, the elliptical can put your body in a fixed position that may not be natural for your proper alignment. This can cause hip issues over time, so talk to a doctor or physical therapist before starting an elliptical routine.

If you're new to the elliptical, press the "quick start" button and let the machine guide you.

7. Tai Chi: Often described as "meditation in motion," tai chi is a particularly effective exercise for gently improving strength, balance, flexibility, and range of motion. "Tai chi is a traditional Chinese practice that involves both physical and mental exercise," Go says. There's growing evidence that it can help treat or prevent many health problems, including high blood pressure and depression.

Tai chi is adaptable and safe for people of all ages and stages of health. But it's especially beneficial for older people who may be limited from intense aerobic exercise as well as those who have joint stiffness or impaired balance. A study from the Oregon Research Institute found that doing tai chi three times per week can improve balance and reduce risk for falling by as much as 55 percent.

8. Indoor Cycling: Indoor cycling is an aerobic activity that helps improve endurance and heart health, lowers blood pressure and stress levels, and strengthens hip and leg muscles—all without stressing your joints. "It's a good way to prevent irritating knee, hip, and other lower-extremity pains," Boly says.

Many gyms offer indoor cycling classes specifically for seniors, with instructors who are familiar with modifications for older adults. But don't worry if you can't find one near you: Any class can (and should) be done at your own pace.

As with the elliptical, you can press the "quick start" button and let the machine guide you the first time you use it.