DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

Family and Consumer Sciences

FSFCS71

YOU-fit Exercises for EveryBODY

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Introduction

As we grow older, our bodies age with us. Healthy lifestyle habits, like regular exercise, can slow the aging process. In addition to regular aerobic exercise, the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend muscle-strengthening activities and exercises to improve or maintain balance. Similar guidelines were jointly released by the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine, with the addition of flexibility exercises. Research shows a regular exercise program can improve mobility and balance, reduce fall risk and help maintain functional fitness and quality of life. A well-rounded exercise program will include aerobic, muscle-strengthening, balance and flexibility exercises.

This publication focuses on non-impact exercises, specifically chair yoga, to help improve balance, posture, muscular strength and ability to perform daily living activities. Studies focused on benefits of yoga practice suggest an improvement in joint health, physical function and emotional well-being. Yoga is a safe and appropriate form of exercise for most people. However, it is always important to talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise plan.

A core concept of yoga is to respect your body: be mindful of how your body feels when practicing yoga and accept your physical limitations. Focus on how a pose feels and discern between discomfort and pain. Stop doing any pose that feels painful.

ExtensionGetFit

Be gentle with the movements when beginning a yoga practice. Gradually increase intensity after a few sessions if your body allows.

Osteoporosis

Those with osteoporosis or osteopenia should follow some precautions to protect the spine. Osteoporosis weakens bone structure, increasing fracture risk primarily in the upper (thoracic) spine. Two movements in particular can be harmful for those with osteoporosis: spinal flexion (forward bending) and rotation (twisting the spine). The following chair yoga routine was designed to place minimal pressure on the spine.

Some precautions for osteoporosis:

- Avoid bending forward from the waist. Bend forward from the hips, keeping the back straight.
- Avoid extreme spinal twists.
- Avoid sit-ups, abdominal crunches and toe-touches.

Safety Tips

General safety tips include the following:

- Breathe. Inhaling and exhaling with movement encourages muscles and joints to relax.
- Sit upright with your shoulders pulled down away from your ears and your head in line with your spine.
- Align the knee over your ankle to avoid putting too much pressure on the front of the knee.

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- Keep your feet flat on the floor for stability.
- Avoid straining.
- Avoid "jerking" or bouncing.

Follow the chair yoga routine included here to increase strength, flexibility and balance. Read the instructions for general guidelines on how long to hold each pose. Yoga can be performed daily. It is recommended to rest one day each week if engaging in strenuous exercises.

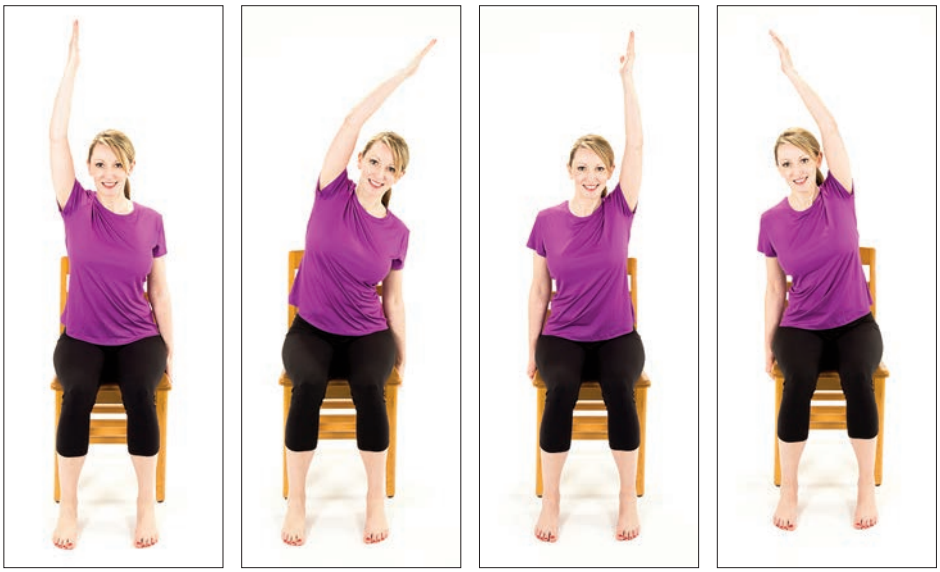
See Publication MP545 YOU-fit: Exercises for EveryBODY at www.uaex.uada.edu for a poster of a ll poses included here.

Exercise Instructions

Mountain

1. Sit upright in a chair with your shoulders rolled down and back away from your ears. Keep your head in line with the spine.
2. Plant your feet on the floor directly under your knees.
3. Place your palms on your thighs or down by your side, palms facing forward.
4. Take long slow breaths. Inhale for a count of 3 to 5, then exhale slowly until all air is expelled.

Side Bend



1. From Mountain Pose, inhale and raise your right arm overhead with the palm facing inward and fingers pointed upward.
2. Rest your left hand on the chair seat for stability.
3. Slowly exhale and gently lean to the left. Keep a slight bend in both elbows.
4. Inhale and return to center.
5. Exhale and lower your right arm.
6. Repeat on the other side.

Knee Hug

1. From Mountain Pose, bring your right knee toward your chest and place your hands just below the right knee.
2. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
3. Repeat on the other side.

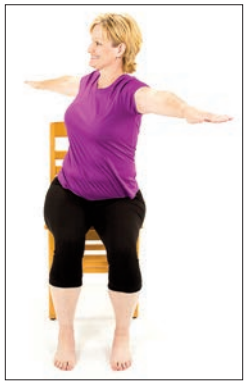
*For a more intense move, lower the hands down to your sides.

Cow/Cat

1. From Mountain Pose, place both hands on your thighs.
2. Inhale, lift your chest and slightly arch your back. Roll your shoulders down and away from your ears.
3. Exhale, pull your belly-button inward and round through the upper back and shoulders. Tuck your chin in toward the chest.
4. Repeat the sequence 3-5 times.

Helicopter

1. From Mountain Pose, inhale and raise your arms parallel to the floor with palms facing downward.
2. Exhale and gently twist at the waist to the right.
3. Inhale and return to center.
4. Exhale and gently twist at the waist to the left.
5. Inhale and return to center.
6. Repeat the sequence 3-5 times.

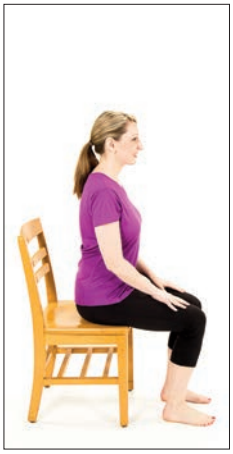


Half Forward Fold

1. From Mountain Pose, inhale and raise both arms overhead with palms facing inward and fingers pointed upward.
2. Exhale and lean forward from the hips until your torso and thighs form a 45° angle.
3. Keep your back straight and head in line with the spine.
4. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
5. Inhale and return your torso to an upright position.
6. Exhale and lower your arms.

Reverse Chair

1. From Mountain Pose, slide toward the front of the chair with your hands resting on the thighs.
2. Inhale and raise both arms overhead with palms facing inward and fingers pointed upward.
3. Exhale and push through your heels to stand into a high squat position. Keep the back straight and head in line with the spine.
4. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
5. Slowly lower back into Mountain Pose.



Warrior I

1. From Mountain Pose, turn to sit sideways on the chair; face the right with both feet flat on the floor.
2. Keeping the right foot planted, straighten the left leg out to the side. Try to keep the left foot flat on the floor with both hips pointed toward your right knee.
3. Inhale and raise both arms overhead with palms facing inward and fingers pointed upward.
4. Keeping your hips pointed toward your right knee, exhale and slide your left leg behind you as far as it is comfortable. If it is too difficult to keep your left foot flat, turn your toes toward the chair and raise the left heel off the floor.
5. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
6. Slowly return to Mountain Pose and repeat on the other side.

Warrior II

1. From Warrior I, inhale and rotate your torso to open the hips toward the front of the chair.
2. Exhale and lower your arms until they are parallel to the floor with palms facing downward.
3. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
4. Slowly return to Mountain Pose and repeat on the other side.

Hamstring Stretch

1. From Mountain Pose, move forward to sit near the front edge of the chair.
2. Keeping your left knee bent and your left foot flat on the floor, extend your right leg out in front of you. Place your right heel on the floor, flex your right foot and point your right toes upward.
3. Place both hands on your left thigh and lean forward slightly from the hips. Keep your head above your heart.
4. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
5. Repeat on the other side.

* Avoid placing hands on the straight leg to protect the knee from overextending. For a more intense stretch, use a strap or towel around the ball of your right foot and lift the right leg.

Gluteal Stretch

1. From Mountain Pose, place your right ankle on top of your left thigh just behind your knee.
2. Rest your right hand on your right knee and your left hand on your right ankle.
3. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
4. Repeat on the other side.

*If this is too difficult, keep both feet on the floor and cross your ankles.
For a more intense stretch, lean slightly forward. Keep the back straight.

Quadriceps Stretch

1. From Mountain Pose, turn to sit sideways on the chair, facing the right with both feet flat on the floor. Place your right arm on the back of the chair for support.
2. Keep the right thigh on the chair and adjust so the left thigh is off the chair by sliding toward the front edge of the chair.
3. Slowly lower the left knee and shin toward the floor. Point your toes behind you and rest the top of your foot on the floor.
4. Hold for 3-5 breaths.
5. Return to Mountain Pose and repeat on the other side.

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The poster – MP545, *YOU-fit: Exercises for EveryBODY* – is available to order from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service web site at www.uaex.uada.edu (click the "Publications" link).

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FSFCS71-PD-6-2017N

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