

Stay Strong, Stay Safe

A Complete Chair-Based Workout & Fall Prevention Guide for Seniors

Presented by SDIPP — San Diego Injury Prevention Program

Fall Prevention Starts at Home: Safety You Can Control

Many falls happen at home — but most are preventable. Begin by removing tripping hazards. Clear clutter from floors, and make sure electrical cords and phone chargers are tucked away from walkways. If you use throw rugs, secure them with double-sided tape or non-slip backing, or consider removing them altogether. Repair any loose floorboards or bumpy carpeting.

To avoid reaching or climbing, keep everyday items within easy arm's reach. Use a safety grabber instead of a step stool. Place often-used items on lower shelves or counters to reduce the risk of falls.

Lighting is also crucial. Keep your home well lit, especially in hallways, stairways, and bathrooms. Use bright bulbs in your lamps and avoid heavy curtains that block light. Install motion sensor lights for nighttime visibility — particularly near the bed or bathroom — and place a small lamp within reach of your bed for nighttime use.

Fall Prevention Through Better Vision and Hearing

Clear sight and sound are essential for maintaining balance. Regular eye exams help detect vision problems early, including cataracts and glaucoma, which can interfere with depth perception. Wearing an outdated eyeglass prescription can be just as dangerous as not wearing glasses at all.

When walking outdoors or climbing stairs, bifocals and progressive lenses can cause the ground to look blurry. To avoid this, tuck your chin slightly and look through the upper part of your glasses. If needed, ask your optometrist about getting a pair of single-vision lenses specifically for walking and driving.

On the hearing side, regular checkups can catch hearing loss before it affects your spatial awareness. Difficulty hearing warning sounds — like oncoming traffic, alarms, or other people — can raise your fall risk. If you use hearing aids, wear them consistently and ensure they're fitted properly. Lower background noise (like TV or radio) when walking through your home so you

can better focus on your environment. If you have hearing loss, make sure smoke alarms and doorbells have visual signals or connect to devices that vibrate or flash.

Why This Guide Matters

Aging doesn't have to mean slowing down. Staying active, mobile, and safe is one of the best ways to maintain independence and prevent injuries. This guide offers a low-impact, chair-based workout designed specifically to reduce your risk of falling, strengthen your body, and improve balance — all from the comfort and stability of a sturdy chair.

No kneeling or floor work is involved, and you don't need any fancy equipment — just a little space, a chair with no wheels, and the motivation to take care of yourself.

We recommend doing this workout 3 to 5 times per week at your own pace. Each session includes a warm-up, optional yoga, a main workout (done twice through), cooldown stretches, and expert guidance on staying safe at home.

Gentle Chair Yoga for Fall Prevention

Build balance, flexibility, and relaxation with our guided chair yoga section — no standing or floor work required. It's a simple, calming way to support your body and reduce fall risk, all while staying comfortably seated.

These poses can be practiced daily or as a calming warm-up. Each should be held for 3–5 breaths or about 20–30 seconds unless otherwise noted. Stay seated, move slowly, and never push into discomfort.

1. Seated Tree Pose

Cross one ankle over the opposite foot. Sit tall, place palms together in front of your chest, and breathe slowly. Focus on your posture and balance.

2. Seated Cat-Cow Stretch

On an inhale, arch your back and lift your chest (cow). On the exhale, round your back and bring your chin toward your chest (cat). Repeat for several breaths to improve spine mobility.

3. Seated Forward Fold

From an upright position, slowly fold forward over your thighs with arms hanging toward the floor. Let your head relax. This decompresses the spine and stretches the back.

4. Seated Eagle Arms

Extend arms forward, then wrap one arm under the other and press palms or backs of hands together. Lift elbows slightly and breathe deeply to stretch the shoulders. Switch sides after 30 seconds.

5. Seated Twist

Place your right hand on the outside of your left thigh. Gently twist your torso to the left, keeping your spine tall. Hold and breathe, then switch sides.

6. Seated Warrior Arms

Extend one leg slightly out to the side for support. Reach both arms straight overhead like you're holding a sword. This engages the shoulders and encourages strong posture.

7. Seated Side Bend

Raise one arm overhead and gently lean to the opposite side, keeping your hips grounded. Switch sides.

8. Seated Ankle-to-Knee Stretch (Figure 4)

Cross one ankle over the opposite knee. Flex the lifted foot and lean forward slightly to stretch the outer hip. Switch legs.

9. Seated Shoulder Rolls

Roll shoulders forward 10 times, then backward 10 times to release tension.

10. Seated Breath Work (Box Breathing)

Inhale for a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, and pause for 4. Repeat 4–5 cycles. Helps calm the nervous system and improve breath control.

Warm-Up (5–7 Minutes)

Perform each of the following for about 1 minute unless otherwise noted:

- **Marching in Place with Arm Circles**

March your feet in place while gently circling your arms. Switch direction halfway through.

- **Arm Swings + Front Punches**

Swing both arms forward and back to loosen your shoulders, then slowly punch forward one arm at a time.

- **Seated Heel and Toe Taps**

Tap your heels and toes to the floor in alternating rhythm to activate your ankles and calves.

- **Seated Windshield Wipers**

Keep your feet flat on the ground and gently rock your knees side to side to warm up your hips and lower back.

Main Chair Workout (Repeat Circuit Twice)

Perform any exercise for 30–45 seconds or 10–15 reps. Move at a comfortable pace and rest as needed:

1. **Extended Leg Pulses**

Sit tall and extend one leg straight out in front. Pulse the leg slightly up and down for 15–20 reps, then switch legs.

2. **Side-to-Side Reaches**

Raise one arm overhead and reach across to the opposite side while tapping the foot outward. Alternate sides.

3. **Toe Touch to Scarecrow**

Reach forward toward your toes, then sit up tall and raise arms to shoulder height with bent elbows (scarecrow pose).

4. Sitting Lateral Raises

Raise both arms out to the sides to shoulder height, then slowly lower.

5. Seated Dead Bug

Extend your right arm and left leg, then switch sides. Alternate for 10–15 reps.

6. Seated Mountain Climbers

Lean back slightly and alternate lifting knees toward your chest in a steady rhythm.

7. Chest Opener and Reach

Open arms wide and squeeze shoulder blades together, then return to center and repeat.

8. Seated Pelvic Tilt

Gently rock your pelvis forward and backward while seated to strengthen core and reduce spinal pressure.

9. Seated Knee Extensions

Straighten one leg and hold it parallel to the floor for 2 seconds, then lower. Repeat 10–15 times per leg.

10. Seated Figure 4 Stretch

Cross one ankle over the opposite knee. Lean forward slightly to deepen the stretch.

11. Seated Heel Slides

Slide one foot forward and back along the floor for 10–12 reps per leg.

12. Seated Spinal Twist

Sit sideways and hold the back of the chair while gently twisting your torso.

Cooldown & Stretch (5–7 Minutes)

Hold each stretch for 20–30 seconds:

- Seated Lower Back Stretch

Lean forward and reach toward the floor, letting your head relax.

- Seated Hamstring Stretch

Extend one leg and hinge forward at the hips. Switch legs after holding.

- Ankle Circles & Flexion

Slowly rotate the ankle and flex the foot. Repeat both sides.

- Seated Side Stretch

Raise one arm and lean gently to the opposite side. Switch arms.

- Seated Neck Stretch

Tilt your head toward one shoulder and hold. Switch sides after a few breaths.

Common Questions About Falls & Exercise

“What if I fall sideways or backward?”

That’s a common concern — and part of why we’ve included core-focused exercises like the Dead Bug and Side-to-Side Reaches. These help train your body to respond better to sudden shifts in balance. Always practice near a sturdy surface like a wall or countertop for added safety.

“What should I do if I fall and I’m alone?”

If you fall and aren’t hurt, take a few deep breaths. Roll to your side, then slowly rise to a seated position. Use a stable surface (like a couch or sturdy chair) to help you stand. If you’re hurt or can’t get up, call 911 or press your medical alert button if you have one. Try to stay warm while you wait for help.

“What if my dog pulls me while walking?”

This is a real risk — strong legs and quick reactions help. Exercises like Mountain Climbers and Extended Leg Pulses can improve your strength and stability. When walking, use a short, secure leash, and wear slip-resistant shoes.

“Do I have to do all these exercises every day?”

No. Doing this routine 3–5 times per week is enough. You can even break it into smaller sections — like yoga in the morning and strength training later. The key is consistency, not perfection.

“What if I can’t kneel or get on the floor?”

You’re not alone — and this guide was built exactly for you. Every movement is done fully seated, with no kneeling or floor work required.

“What if I live alone?”

You can still exercise safely. Keep a phone nearby, and let a neighbor or family member know when you plan to work out. If possible, exercise on a video call with a friend, or use a wearable fall alert device for extra peace of mind.

Need Help? We’re Here for You

Our team at SDIPP — San Diego Injury Prevention Program is here to help you stay independent, safe, and confident. Whether you need a personalized fall prevention plan, a home safety walkthrough, or guidance on exercises, we’re happy to support you.

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