



10-Foot Exercises for Balance and Stability

Keep your feet strong to help prevent falls.

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Feet are often underappreciated. We don't think much about them until they hurt or give us problems. But they are of course crucial to getting us around and keeping us balanced.

“Your feet carry your body through life. They are often neglected because they are mostly packed away in socks and shoes,” said Melissa Burgard, a certified yoga teacher at Yoga Racoon in Germany, who specializes in teaching adults above 50. “But taking proper care of your feet will bring very many benefits.”

“Foot mobility is especially important for older adults to help preserve a full range of motion in the feet,” said Samantha Deutchman, a certified personal trainer at Shop Yoga Strong. “Since the feet are anchors for our entire body ... having adequate foot mobility is key to maintaining full-body health.”

Why feet become weaker

There are many reasons why foot mobility naturally declines in older adults. For instance, as you get older, the tissues in your feet become stiffer, which results in a [decreased range of motion](#).

Also, joint mobility often lessens with age, which affects the amount of force that propels you forward as you walk. Unfortunately, these developments can result in foot pain and reduce your overall foot strength, which increases your chances of falling.

But here's the good news – with the right exercises, you can improve your foot mobility, balance and coordination, which reduces your risk of falling.

Below, Deutchman and Burgard describe 10 super-efficient foot mobility exercises. So grab a chair or mat and boost your balance and foot strength with these moves.

Try these 10 foot mobility exercises



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1. Ankle circles

Ankle circles are a great way of improving your ankle mobility. Here's how to do them:

Step 1: While sitting, perform slow and controlled ankle circles in the clockwise direction.

Step 2: Repeat the move on the same feet in the counterclockwise direction.

Step 3: Perform the move five times in each direction.



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2. Toe pulls

Toe pulls are an excellent way of building foot control and stabilizing your pace when walking. Here's how to do them:

Step 1: Standing or sitting, try lifting only your big toe off the ground while keeping your other four toes on the ground.

Step 2: Now try repeating the move with each of your other toes.

Step 3: Aim to lift each toe five times.



To strengthen calves, start by raising both feet at once. Once you become stronger, try this more advanced version with one foot at a time.

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3. Calf raises

Calf raises primarily strengthen your calf muscles (on the back of your lower leg), which support your weight and activity. Here's how to do them:

Step 1: Stand near a wall for support.

Step 2: Lift your heels off the ground and stand on your toes to engage your calf muscles. Start with both feet on the ground. As you get stronger, try keeping only one foot on the ground at a time.

Step 3: Return to starting position.

Step 4: Aim for 10 repetitions on each leg.



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4. Straight leg calf stretch

This stretch works your gastrocnemius – the large muscle in your calf.

Step 1: Stand facing a wall with your hands against the wall for support.

Step 2: Keeping a bend in your left knee, step back approximately 12-24 inches with your right leg.

Step 3: Straighten your left knee to feel a stretch in your large calf muscle.

Step 4: Hold for 30 seconds and switch sides.



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5. Bent leg calf stretch

This stretch affects your soleus muscle – located at the back of your lower leg. Here's how to do it:

Step 1: Stand facing a wall with your hands against the wall for support.

Step 2: Keeping a bend in your left knee, step back approximately 12-24 inches with your right leg.

Step 3: Bend your knee to feel a stretch in your lower calf muscle.

Step 4: Hold for 30 seconds and switch sides.



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6. Single leg balance

This exercise aids in proprioception – a sense that lets you keep track of the movements happening in your body parts. Here's how to do it:

Step 1: Lift your left leg off the ground to hip height so you are balancing on your right leg.

Step 2: Hold for 30 seconds and switch sides.



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7. Towel curl

Towel curls mobilize and strengthen the plantar fascia muscles located in the soles of your feet. Here's how to do them:

Step 1: Sitting in a chair, place a long towel under your right foot.

Step 2: Using your toes and keeping your heel on the ground, curl the towel toward you until it is bunched up.

Step 3: Perform five repetitions for each foot.



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8. Ball roll

Ball rolls help to loosen up the muscles in the arch – or the curved part – of your feet. This helps to increase your range of motion and reduce tension in these muscles. Here's how to do them:

Step 1: Standing or sitting, take a golf or lacrosse ball and roll it under your foot, massaging the plantar fascia on the bottom of your foot.

Step 2: Roll up to one minute and switch feet.



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9. Down dog walk

The [down dog walk](#) is an excellent way of stretching and activating your entire body, from your feet to your calves, thighs, hips, abs, shoulders, arms and neck. Here's how to do it:

Step 1: From the tabletop position (facing downward by resting on your knees and palms) press yourself back into a downward-facing dog with a generous bend in the knee.

Step 2: Now begin to “walk out your dog”, reaching one heel back to the mat and then the other, alternating between left and right. Don't forget to breathe.

Step 3: If the floor version doesn't work for you, try the wall variation: hands flat on the wall, walk your legs back until your heel can't reach the floor. This is easier on your upper back but can be more intense on the ankles.

Step 4: Aim to perform three sets with 10 repetitions each.



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10. Happy baby

Happy baby is a great way to improve your foot and hip flexibility. Here's how to do it:

Step 1: Lay flat on your back on an exercise mat or carpet. If you have trouble getting up from a floor, you can do this exercise in your bed.

Step 2: Bend your knees and clasp the outside edges of the feet with your hands.

Step 3: Bring your knees down beside your ribs and begin to stack the ankles over the knees.

Step 4: If you have trouble holding onto your feet, simply hold onto the backs of the thighs and work toward bringing the ankles over the knees. If your head lifts off the mat in order to hold onto your feet, simply hold onto the backs of the thighs so that you can rest your head on the mat and relax your neck and shoulders. Find a way to practice this pose with as little strain as possible.

Step 5: Now begin to curl and extend your toes, feeling the activation in the feet and maybe even in the legs.

Step 6: If you are not that flexible, you can do a half baby pose, keeping one leg straight or knee bent, with your foot flat on the mat.

Step 7: Aim for at least 10 deep breaths while holding this form.