



Low Impact Exercises

Walking

The king of all low-impact workouts? Walking. But watch out, as it can get stale, and fast. Try to mix things up a bit with either your speed -- working in intervals -- or your route -- adding hills.

If you're just starting out, hit the treadmill first. It's actually lower impact than walking outside, plus you can control your speed and incline completely.

Cycling

While it might not seem like a low-impact exercise, cycling is actually very easy on the joints since your body absorbs minimal shock from pedaling. You can ride a stationary bike at the gym or invest in a road bike to pedal around your neighborhood. If an upright bicycle is too hard on your back, neck and shoulders, try a recumbent bike instead. Unlike an upright bike, where you're bent over the handlebars, a recumbent bike allows you to sit back with the pedals and handlebars right in front of you. Planning to ride a recumbent bike outdoors? Since this style of bike is much lower to the ground than an upright, it's a good idea to invest in a flag to make you more visible to drivers.

Stretching

No matter what your workout routine, adding some gentle stretches will improve your flexibility and range of motion. You'll want to do stretches that focus on muscles you're working during the rest of your routine, but some general stretches in the morning and evening can be especially beneficial, since our muscles tend to lose flexibility as we age.

The National Institute on Aging recommends regularly stretching your neck, shoulders, upper arms, upper body, chest, back, ankles, legs, hips and calves. This might sound like a lot of stretching, but if you do a few stretching exercises each day, you can hit all of these areas fairly quickly.

You want to make sure you're doing stretches properly to avoid injury. Take it slowly, and never push yourself to the point of pain. You just want to feel a gentle pull on your muscle, and focus on taking slow, deep breaths as you hold your stretch

Yoga

When you picture a yoga class, you probably envision a room full of people contorted into impossible positions that your body would never abide. While there are definitely some intense classes out there, you don't need to be left out of yoga's benefits. In fact, yoga fulfills all of the categories of good exercise, combining endurance with stretches, strength training and balance.

More and more gyms are offering all aged yoga classes, but if you can't find a class geared toward your age group, a beginner yoga class will do just as well. A good yoga instructor will offer alternative positions to poses that you have trouble with, so don't fret if you can't touch your toes or have

trouble getting up and down. There are even some yoga instructors who drop in to senior centers & Community Centers to offer specialized classes.

It's tempting to try to save money by picking up a yoga DVD or following a yoga program on TV, but beginners should invest in at least a few classes before trying yoga alone. An instructor can help make sure you have the proper alignment, which is critical for avoiding injury

Gardening

Spending time in the garden is an enjoyable, beneficial way to get in your daily exercise. Digging in the dirt, watering plants, weeding and other gardening activities work your muscles, and you can watch your efforts pay off with beautiful flowers and vegetables along with better health.

If bending and squatting to pull weeds or dig is too much for you, a gardening stool can help make the ground more accessible and help you avoid injuring your back or knees. Choosing the right tools can go a long way, as well. You want tools with a good grip and long handles that help you avoid stooping over when possible. You can also make your garden more accessible by planting in containers, raised beds or on a trellis, so you'll be doing less kneeling on the ground

Tai Chi

Tai chi is a meditative exercise that flows slowly from pose to pose. Like yoga, tai chi is low impact, and it improves balance, strength and flexibility. It doesn't require any special equipment or clothing, but you'll need to take classes to learn the basics before doing tai chi on your own. You can find classes at gyms, community centers or dedicated tai chi studios.

The focus on breathing helps improve concentration and reduce stress while the slow, flowing movements tone and stretch muscles, making tai chi an excellent low-impact workout. Tai chi's biggest benefit is probably the improved balance.

Body Weight Training

Though many traditional body-weight moves could be seen as high impact, there's usually a modification that reduces the impact significantly. So with a push-up, start by pushing off your kitchen counter, working towards pushing off the table and then a chair as you get stronger.

You can also try a class, like Pilates. It's great for strengthening your muscles and increasing your range of motion.

Swimming

Swimming is one of the ultimate low-impact workouts, but form is key. If you're rusty or haven't been swimming in a while, there's no shame in taking a few lessons so your technique is up to par.

After you're caught up, alternate a slower lap and a faster lap for 20-30 minutes.

Weight Training

Weight training is a great way to work for endurance and power. Start a weight training routine with machines to master form and technique, then moving on to free weights. You can try using free-weights at home: go for adjustable dumbbells to create a custom program. Start with a weight where you can comfortably do eight to 15 reps. When the 12-15 repetition range starts to get easy, add more weight. Low impact weight training can also help maintain bone mass

Water Exercises

There are many, many other water-based ways to work out besides swimming. One of the best things to do is to get a buoyancy belt and go deep-water walking, jogging or biking.

After you've mastered the deep end, you can move on to the shallow end, where the impact does increase, she notes.

If that's not your thing, group water exercise classes are fabulous. They even have water Zumba now if you like dancing!

Cardio Machines

Most cardio machines (like the elliptical and stair stepper) are good low-impact choices. But both our experts particularly liked the stationary bike. The recumbent bike can be a really comfortable choice to build lower body strength.

If you can't put pressure on your legs, we like the ergometers, which allow you to just work your arms.

Circuit Training

The winner, according to our experts, is the circuit workout. You really work the whole body, and you don't work any group of joints or muscles too much.

Try 10 minutes of biking, 10 minutes of walking and 10 minutes of rowing. Or add strengthening moves between bouts of cardio.

Another useful tool of the circuit is measuring your progress. For example, a 60-year-old woman could add sit-to-stand exercises into a circuit, and she should be able to do 10 of them in about 18 seconds. Once you've mastered it, you can easily track your progress and increases in speed.