

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Gentle Exercise for Older Adults

A simple home activity guide

Six straightforward movements using a sturdy chair and light household weights

This guide offers general exercise ideas. It is not physiotherapy or medical advice.

Originally developed by Rainbow Action Group
Revised by Brighter Futures - August 2026

Before you start

These exercises are intended as simple movement ideas for older adults who are able to exercise safely at home. People have different levels of mobility, balance and health, so not every exercise will be suitable for everyone.

Please check first

If you have not exercised for some time, or if you have a medical condition, injury or concern about whether exercise is suitable for you, speak to a GP, physiotherapist or another health professional involved in your care before starting.

A few practical points

- Use a solid, stable chair that will not move. Avoid a chair with wheels.
- Wear comfortable clothing and supportive footwear, and make sure the space around you is clear.
- Keep some water nearby and build up gradually rather than trying to do too much at once.
- Move slowly and with control. Stop if an exercise causes pain, dizziness or makes you feel unwell.
- Where a movement uses a light weight, a small bottle of water or similar light object may be enough to begin with.

How much activity?

Current NHS guidance says adults aged 65 and over should try to be active every day and include activities that improve strength, balance and flexibility on at least two days each week. The wider weekly target is at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity, or an equivalent combination. This short guide is only one small part of that picture.

Source: NHS physical activity guidelines for older adults, checked August 2026.

Six simple movements

1. Supported squat

A controlled sit-back movement for the legs and hips.

1. Stand behind or just in front of a sturdy chair, with your feet about shoulder-width apart.
2. Keeping your chest lifted, gently bend at the knees and hips as though beginning to sit down.
3. Only lower as far as feels comfortable and controlled.
4. Press through your feet to return to standing. Use the chair for support if needed.
5. Repeat a small number of times, rest, and build up gradually if the movement feels comfortable.

2. Standing leg curl

A gentle movement for the back of the thigh.

1. Stand behind a sturdy chair and hold it with both hands for balance.
2. Bend one knee and slowly bring your heel towards your bottom as far as is comfortable.
3. Pause briefly, then lower the foot back to the floor with control.
4. Repeat on the same side, then change legs.

3. Heel raise

A simple calf-strengthening and balance exercise.

1. Stand behind a sturdy chair and hold it securely.
2. Keeping your body upright, slowly lift your heels so that you rise onto the balls of your feet.
3. Pause briefly, then lower your heels back to the floor with control.
4. Repeat only while you feel steady and comfortable.

4. Bicep curl

A simple arm-strengthening movement using very light weights if appropriate.

1. Sit or stand tall with your arms by your sides and a light weight in each hand.
2. Keeping your upper arms close to your body, bend your elbows and bring the weights towards your shoulders.
3. Lower them slowly to the starting position.
4. Keep the movement smooth and avoid swinging the weights.

5. Knee extension

A seated movement for the front of the thigh.

1. Sit upright in a sturdy chair with both feet on the floor.
2. Slowly straighten one knee, lifting the foot until the leg is as straight as is comfortable.
3. Pause briefly, then lower the foot with control.
4. Repeat on the other leg.

6. Overhead press

A shoulder and arm movement using light weights only if this is comfortable for you.

1. Sit upright with a light weight in each hand, held around shoulder height.
2. Slowly press the weights upwards without locking your elbows.
3. Lower them back to shoulder height with control.
4. If you have shoulder pain or restricted shoulder movement, leave this exercise out and seek individual advice.

The aim is regular, comfortable movement

There is no need to complete every exercise or a fixed number of repetitions. Start with what feels manageable and build gradually. If you are unsure what is appropriate for you, ask a physiotherapist or other health professional for individual advice.

Further information

For current guidance and additional exercise ideas, search the NHS website for “physical activity guidelines for older adults” and “sitting exercises”.

Reviewed against NHS guidance in August 2026. Brighter Futures does not provide medical treatment or physiotherapy through this publication.