

Hip health for older people



Why is hip health important?

Your hips provide you with strength and stability to support movement and maintain balance. Fun fact, the hip joint is the largest joint in the human body. We use our hips to complete a variety of daily activities like standing, walking, sitting, using the stairs, and bending to pick something up.

If the muscles around the hip become weak, it can lead to an increased risk of injury. In turn, this can put the surrounding joints like the knee and lower back at greater risk. This is why keeping your hips healthy is so important.

Some common conditions include:

- Arthritis affects the hips of many people as they age. This can result in pain, stiffness, and restricted movement in the hip joint.
- Fractures and dislocation of the hip is common because bones become less dense as we age and we are more at risk of falling.
- Muscle injury and referred pain in the hip can be a result of injury or inflammation to the muscles and tendons that surround the hip.
- Pinched or irritated nerves and lower back problems can also impact the hips.

Prevention is always better than cure. The best way to do this is by staying active and continuing to do the activities you do every day for as long as you can.



How is hip pain treated?

A doctor or physiotherapist can work out what is causing pain in your hips. They might talk to you and examine how you stand, how you walk, and what movements cause you pain.

The treatment for hip pain might include:

- Physiotherapy, exercise physiology, or occupational therapy
- Exercise, stretching, strength training, or hydrotherapy
- Anti-inflammatory creams or pain relief medicines
- Antibiotics and steroid injections
- Advice about weight loss.

What can I do to keep my hips healthy?

Sometimes hip pain can affect the tasks and activities you do every day. Things like getting dressed in the morning, moving around the house, and even using the bathroom. **Some of the things that keep our hips as healthy as possible include:**

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Regular low impact exercise
- Balance and falls prevention activities
- Using assistive products
- Wearing good shoes.

Assistive products can also help you perform everyday tasks. They can be used to improve safety with certain activities. **Some readily available products include:**

- A long handled sponge for tough to reach spots (back)
- Sock aid to get socks on
- Shoehorn to fit shoes on
- Dressing stick to reach over your shoulder or down your leg
- A long handled reacher for those tough to reach items on shelves or the floor
- Nonslip safety mats.

Some assistive products require an assessment to ensure they are suitable for you. Occupational therapists are the experts in prescribing assistive products. They will help you find the best products for your situation. This may include:

- A raised toilet seat so it's easier to sit down
- Grab rails so you have some extra support
- Ramps to avoid having to lift your foot too high
- Walking sticks and frames to help you get around.

Hip exercises

You can perform strengthening exercises for your hips safely and easily in your home. Exercises can be modified if you have poor balance or find standing too difficult. It is best to start with exercises you can perform while seated or lying down. This way you can improve your leg strength before moving on to standing exercises.

Important

These exercises are provided for general information and educational purposes only, and may not be suitable for you.

Exercise is not without its risks and may result in injury. To reduce the risk of injury, you should use your own judgment and consult a health care professional before beginning these exercises. This information is not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of these exercises, nor is it intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Performing these exercises is solely at your own risk.

Independent Living Assessment Incorporated is not responsible or liable for any injury, loss or damage sustained as a result of performing these exercises. As with any exercise, if at any point you feel any new or increasing pain, faint, dizzy, clammy, short of breath, or have any physical discomfort, you should stop immediately and consult a health care professional.

Level 1 - Laying down

Straight Leg Raise

This exercise helps strengthen your hip flexors and the muscles on the front of your thigh.

To perform this exercise:

- Lie flat on your back with one leg straight and the other knee bent with your foot on the mattress or floor.
- Keep your stomach tight and gently brace throughout the movement.
- Lift your straight leg as high as you feel is comfortable.
- Slowly lower and return to the starting position.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Ensure there is no discomfort in your lower back when completing this exercise.



Bridge

This exercise is used to improve leg stability by strengthening the hips and backside muscles. We use these muscles every day to move forward when walking, stepping up when climbing stairs, and standing up from a seated position.

To perform this exercise:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
- Lift your hips off the ground ensuring your hips are balanced.
- Squeeze the muscles of your backside as you lift your hips up.
- Try not to arch your back.
- Hold for a few seconds at the top, then slowly lower your hips back down.
- Do this in a controlled manner.



Clam Shell

This exercise helps to strengthen the muscles that surround your hips. These muscles help stabilise your hips and keep you balanced.

To perform this exercise:

- Lie on your side, with legs stacked on top of each other and knees bent.
- Rest your head on your lower arm or a pillow, and use your top arm to steady your frame.
- Be sure that your hipbones are stacked on top of one another and try to avoid rocking backward.
- Keep your stomach tight to stabilise your spine and pelvis.
- With your feet touching, raise your upper knee as high as you can without rocking your hips.
- Slowly lower your knee and repeat.



Level 2 – Seated

Hip Marching

This exercise strengthens our hip flexor muscles. It can help maintain or improve your lower body strength and ensures you are able to lift your foot off the ground.

To perform this exercise:

- Sitting up tall with your feet flat on the floor.
- Your hands can rest at the sides of your chair, or wherever is most comfortable.
- Lift up your right knee as high as comfortable, then lower it.
- Alternate lifting your knees.
- Ensure you perform this movement slow and controlled.



Hip Opener

This exercise can help improve your hip mobility and abductor strength. These muscles are used when standing, walking, and performing tasks like getting in and out of cars.

To perform this exercise:

- Sitting up tall in your chair with your knees together.
- Slowly push your knees out to the side and then bring them back together in a control motion.
- Do not rush the exercise and maintain an upright posture throughout.
- If this is too easy, perform this exercise with a resistance band wrapped around your knees.



Hip Squeeze

This exercise can help improve your hip mobility and adductor strength. These muscles are important for hip stability during different movements like walking and sitting.

To perform this exercise:

- Sitting up tall, shuffle forward closer to the edge of your chair.
- Place a cushion or a rolled-up towel between your knees.
- Bring your feet together, ensuring they are flat on the floor.
- Whilst lightly holding the cushion with your hands, squeeze the cushion using your knees.
- Hold this for 5 seconds and relax.



Level 3 – Standing

Hip Marching

Similar to performing in a seated position, this is a great exercise to maintain or improve your leg strength and mobility. It also adds a component of balance and stability.

To perform this exercise:

- Begin by standing tall beside a wall or gently holding on to a sturdy chair.
- Raise your left leg, lifting your knee toward your chest.
- Alternate legs and complete this exercise in a controlled manner.
- Try not to hold your breath.



Side Kicks

This exercise is used to maintain or improve your leg strength and specifically targets the muscles on the side of your hips.

To perform this exercise:

- Stand tall and hold onto a chair or wall for stability.
- Start by bringing both feet together.
- Slowly raise one leg off the ground and away from your body, kicking out to the side.
- Return to the start position.
- Switch legs and repeat on the opposite side.
- Avoid leaning to one side.



Back Kicks

This exercise is used to maintain or improve your leg strength and specifically targets the muscles of your backside.

To perform this exercise:

- Stand tall and hold onto a chair or wall for stability.
- Keep your legs straight throughout the movement.
- Extend your right leg back, keeping your toes on the ground. Your legs will create a triangle-like position.
- Keep your stomach tight and try to avoid arching your back.
- Return your foot to the starting position.
- Repeat for the other leg.



Important

Make sure to perform standing exercises next to something stable. For example, a railing, table, or chair. This will provide you support so that you do not lose your balance.



More helpful information

If you need more information, get in touch with one of our helpful team on **1800 951 971**.

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