Exercise by older adults is very important to maintaining good health and mobility. Many older adults are nervous about exercising because they are afraid of falling; however, exercise is extremely important in fall prevention and injury prevention in general. The following guidelines describe the amount and types of exercise that are necessary to help reduce fall risk in seniors.¹

**Exercise to reduce fall risk**

1. Exercise should be moderately or very challenging to balance, should involve reducing the base of support, moving one’s centre of gravity, and aim to decrease reliance on upper body support to balance while standing. A good example of such exercise is Tai Chi, which challenges balance through slow controlled movement.

2. In order to have an effect on fall risk, older adults should engage in at least two hours of exercise per week.

3. Exercise needs to be ongoing, as benefits can be rapidly lost.

4. All adults, whether they are at a high risk for falling or living independently in the community, should engage in exercise to prevent falls.

5. Exercise in a group setting or at home has been shown to reduce falls, and many studies have shown positive results when group exercise is supplemented with home exercise.

6. Walking is beneficial and can be included in an exercise program, but not at the expense of balance training. Additionally, adults at high risk for falls should avoid brisk walking, as it has been shown to increase falls among these individuals.

7. Similarly, strength training has many benefits for health and physical fitness. However, it should not be included at the expense of balance training, only in addition to exercises improving balance.

8. Those involved in administering exercise for older adults should be aware of other fall-related risk factors, and suggest a full risk assessment. Multifactorial interventions have been strongly linked to decreased fall risk and it is preferred to implement other appropriate strategies in addition to exercise.

Another reason older adults may avoid exercise is frail health. If an adult has a health problem that could interfere with performing physical activity, it is important to consult a physician prior to beginning a new program. Conditions such as a recent surgery, unexplained chest pain, breathing difficulties, osteoporosis, arthritis or high blood pressure should be discussed with a physician before exercising.² However, exercise can be adapted to accommodate almost any

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health condition and is highly recommended because of its ability to improve common health problems associated with advancing age.

**Start slow**

Beyond ensuring medical conditions are assessed prior to beginning an activity or program, the same injury prevention principles apply to older adults as in the general population: a slow start, a gradual increase in difficulty and the proper use of equipment. Exercise classes specifically designed for older adults are increasingly available. More information is available through the [Centre for Active Aging at Western University](https://www.ph.uwo.ca/centre-for-active-aging/)

This is an excerpt from the Ontario Injury Regional Data Report. For more summaries like this, please see the [Ontario Regional Injury Data Report](https://www.ontario.ca/wps/portal/ontario/health/health-prevention/injury-prevention/summary), produced by the Ontario Injury Prevention Resource Centre.

**References**
