

Simple Exercises to Keep Moving, Part 1

by John C. Griffin, MSc.

Have you ever had trouble getting in or out of a car? Are recreational activities that involve agility or balance getting harder? Do you find that carrying groceries is becoming more of a challenge?

These are some tasks that require functional mobility -- the ability to efficiently perform the necessary activities of daily life without undue fatigue or pain. With good functional mobility, you can have a good quality of life and stay healthy, safe, and active.

In this series of articles, we'll have you try several 'screening tests'. These will help you spot problems with functional mobility. In each article, we will target a specific area of mobility. For each area, we'll give you a simple exercise to improve that aspect of your functional mobility.

The first area to consider is that of 'up and down' activities with a lower body focus. This includes things like getting in and out of a car, moving quickly up and down stairs, or putting on socks.

Test #1: Chair Sit-and-Reach

How to do it:

- 1) Sit up straight on the front edge of a chair.
- 2) Put one foot flat on the floor with the knee bent.
- 3) Put the other leg straight out in front, with the heel on the floor and toes pointed up.
- 4) Stretch your arms out in front of you, with one hand on top of the other, so that the middle fingers match up.
- 5) Bending at the hips, reach your hands towards or past your toes as you exhale. Keep the knee of your outstretched leg straight.
- 6) Hold the stretch for 2 seconds.
- 7) After you have practiced this with each leg, give yourself a score.



How did you do?

Score 2 points if you can reach past your toes.

Score 1 point if you can touch your toes.

Score a 0 if you are not able to touch your toes or you have pain while doing the test.

Score the test: Left ____ Right ____

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An exercise to improve lower-body mobility

If you scored a “0” or “1”, the following stretch will improve the flexibility of your back, hamstrings, and calves. You will need a scarf. Do this exercise once a day, three times on each side.

- 1) Loop the scarf around the arch of your right foot with a full circle.
- 2) Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor.
- 3) Bend your right knee and pull on the scarf to bring your right thigh in close to your chest. Hold for 10 seconds.
- 4) Keeping the upper thigh in position, extend the knee as far as you comfortably can. Gently pull with the scarf to assist the stretch. Hold for 10-15 seconds.
- 5) For an added stretch to the calf, pull your toes up toward your shin.
- 6) Repeat these steps on the left side. Do each side 3 times once a day.



Stretch 1



Stretch 2

About the Author

John C. Griffin, MSc., was a professor in the Fitness and Lifestyle Management Program at George Brown College in Toronto for 37 years. As a private consultant, speaker, coach, and writer for public and private sector organizations, John has authored more than 60 publications, numerous manuals, and a textbook published by Human Kinetics, Client-Centered Exercise Prescription. Right now John is doing research on the functional mobility of adults 50-70 years of age.it