Sample exercises
Many types of physical activity can improve your health and future independence. Whether you do the exercises shown in this chapter or other physical activities that accomplish the same goals, gradually work your way up to include stretching, balance, flexibility and endurance activities.

Introduction
Each exercise in this guide will show you where the exercise covers more than one type of physical activity. For example, toe stand exercises for strength can also help to improve your balance. Usually each exercise also provides progression options to help you choose an exercise level suitable for your starting point.

How much, how often
As discussed in Chapter 3 – Go!, it is important to mix up the types of physical activity to increase the health benefits to you. The aim is to do a range of physical activities that incorporate strength, balance and flexibility and endurance to reach at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day. If you lift weights, alternate these exercises with time on the treadmill or exercise bike. End your routine with stretching exercises. If you focus mainly on endurance activities, be sure to also add stretching, balance and strength exercises to your routine.

A weekly physical activity program example covering all four types of activity is presented in the workbook. You can use the weekly physical activity plan in your workbook to help you plan your own program.
Warm up/cool down

It’s important to spend about five minutes at the beginning and end of your routine to warm up and cool down. Warming up and cooling down give your muscles a chance to get ready to work and gradually return to rest at the end. These ‘before-and-after’ activities help prevent injury and reduce muscle soreness later. Here are a few suggestions.

• Do some light endurance activity first, such as walking for five minutes.
• If you’re going to be walking briskly or running, gradually build up to that pace.
• At the end of your activity, gradually slow down and let your body cool down.
• Do a few exercises to work the muscles and joints you’ll be using in your activity. For example, if you plan to swim, do a few arm exercises first to warm up your arms and shoulders.

Safety

No matter which type of physical activity you do, there are certain safety tips to help you get the best benefits from physical activity.

• Talk with your doctor or health professional if you plan to significantly increase your level of physical activity.
• Talk with your doctor or health professional if you are unsure about doing a particular exercise. For example, if you’ve had hip or back surgery/problems, talk about which exercises might be best for you.
• Don’t hold your breath during exercises. Holding your breath while straining can cause changes in blood pressure. This is especially true for people with heart disease.
• Breathe regularly. Breathe in slowly through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth. If this is not comfortable or possible, breathe in and out through either your nose or mouth.
• Proper form, technique and safety go hand-in-hand. Concentrate on stabilising your core body by tightening your abdomen and back muscles while performing exercises.
• Keep your body in the correct alignment with your back straight and your hips under your shoulders. This is very important to avoid a back injury.
• Avoid ‘locking’ your arm and leg joints in a tightly straightened position. Keep your knees and elbows slightly bent to avoid injury.

Progressing

To help you build your strength, balance, flexibility and endurance over time, most exercises in this book have three levels of progression — 1, 2 and 3. The exercise description and illustrations show the base level (Level 1) for each exercise. This is great place to start. As your muscles strengthen, your balance and flexibility improve and your cardiovascular fitness increases, you may be able to progress to a higher level of physical activity.

Progression levels 2 and 3 give hints on how you can gradually increase the difficulty of the exercises and continue to build on the benefits of physical activity over time. If you are already pretty active, then the higher progression levels may be a more suitable starting point for you.

Quick tips

• Challenge yourself, but listen to your body and use common sense when you’re physically active.
• If you feel sick or have pain during or after physical activity, you might be overdoing it.
• While you want to feel like you have done something, doing too much could leave you feeling exhausted, injured or with sore joints and muscles that stop you being physically active.
• Take it slow and gradually build up the intensity for the best ongoing benefits.
• None of the exercises in this guide should cause severe pain. If they do, you might need to see an exercise specialist.
How to improve your strength

Exercising at home is just one way to be active. Getting out into the community can also offer opportunities to be active for little cost, as Gwen found:

‘I’m 69 and live on my pension income. My kids try to spoil me, but I’d rather do things on my own as much as possible. I checked out a gym where I could use strength-building equipment, but it really was quite expensive. I decided to look at the local council website and found a heap of activities that I could do for $3 a session. I joined a seniors strength class and thoroughly enjoy working out to music with resistance bands and have become great friends with two of the ladies from my class. Even though I felt I may be too old, I also joined a walking group. Despite being the oldest, my endurance has greatly increased and I can now keep up with even the youngest person. I also hear more about what’s going on in my neighbourhood. I’ve always been active, but never as active and social as I am now.’

Make it affordable

Even very small changes in muscle strength can make a real difference in function, especially in people who have already lost a lot of muscle. An increase in muscle that you can’t even see can make it easier to do everyday things, such as get up from a chair, climb stairs, carry shopping bags, open jars and even play with your grandchildren. Lower-body strength exercises will also improve your balance.

How much, how often?

• Try to fit strength exercises for all your major muscle groups into your weekly physical activity of 30 minutes each day, but don’t exercise the same muscle group on any two days in a row. Use the weekly physical activity plan in your workbook.

• Muscle soreness lasting a few days and slight fatigue are normal after muscle-building exercises, at least at first. After doing these exercises for a few weeks, you will probably not be sore after your workout.
About strength exercises
To do most of the strength exercises in this book, you need to lift or push weights.

Equipment
• You can use weights, resistance bands or common objects from your home. Or you can use the strength-training equipment at a gym.
• Some exercises in this guide require a chair. Choose a sturdy chair that is stable enough to support your weight when seated or when holding on to it during the exercise.

How heavy?
• Start with light weights (or no weights at all) and gradually increase the amount of weight you use. Starting out with weights that are too heavy can cause injuries. Your body needs to get used to strength exercises.
  • It should feel somewhere between hard and very hard for you to lift or push the weight. It shouldn't feel very, very hard. If you can’t lift or push a weight eight times in a row, it’s too heavy for you. Reduce the amount of weight.

Lifting weights
• Take three seconds to lift or push a weight into place, hold the position for one second, and take another three seconds to return to your starting position. Don’t let the weight drop; returning it slowly is very important.

• Try to do 10 to 15 repetitions for each exercise. Think of this as a goal. If you can’t do that many at first, do as many as you can. You may be able to build up to this goal over time.
• For some exercises, you may want to start alternating arms and work your way up to using both arms at the same time. If it is difficult for you to hold hand weights, try using wrist weights.
• To prevent injury, don’t jerk or thrust weights into position. Use smooth, steady movements.

Breathing
• Breathe out as you lift or push, and breathe in as you relax. For example, if you’re doing leg lifts, breathe out as you lift your leg, and breathe in as you lower it. This may not feel natural at first, and you probably will have to think about it for a while as you do it.
• You don’t need to do all the exercises listed in this section. Do a variety and don’t exercise the same muscle group two days in a row.
• Use your workbook to do a variety of strength exercises.

Quick tip
A repetition, or rep, is one complete movement of an exercise. A set is one group of reps. In this guide, a set of strength exercises is 10 to 15 repetitions. You can use the strength and balance daily record in your workbook to keep track of the number of strength exercises you do.
Progressing

Muscle strength is progressive over time. Gradually increase the amount of weight you use to build strength. When you can do two sets of 10 to 15 repetitions easily, increase the amount of weight at your next session.

Here’s an example of how to progress gradually: Start out with a weight you can lift only eight times. Keep using that weight until you become strong enough to lift it easily 10 to 15 times. When you can do two sets of 10 to 15 repetitions easily, add more weight so that, again, you can lift it only eight times. Keep repeating until you reach your goal and then maintain that level as long as you can.

As you progress:

- If you are a beginner, try exercising without the band until you are comfortable, then add the band.
- Choose a light band if you are just starting to exercise
- Move on to a stronger band when you can do two sets of 10 to 15 repetitions easily.

Quick tip

Hold on to the band tightly (some bands have handles), or wrap it around your hand or foot to keep it from slipping and causing possible injury. Do the exercises in a slow, controlled manner and don’t let the band snap back. Resistance bands can be bought from sports stores, department stores and some service providers such as physiotherapists.
Working with weights

You don’t have to go out and buy weights for strength exercises. Find something you can hold on to easily. For example, you can make your own weights from unbreakable household items.

- Fill a plastic milk container with sand or water and tape the opening securely closed.
- Fill a sock with nuts or rice and tie up the open end.
- Use common grocery items, such as bags of rice, vegetable or soup cans, or bottled water.

Hand grip

This simple exercise should help if you have trouble picking things up or holding on to them. It also will help you open things like a jam jar more easily. You can even do this exercise while reading or watching TV.

1. Hold a tennis ball or other small rubber or foam ball in one hand.
2. Slowly squeeze the ball as hard as you can and hold it for three–five seconds.
3. Relax the squeeze slowly.
4. Repeat 10–15 times.
5. Repeat 10–15 times with other hand.
6. Repeat 10–15 times more with each hand.
Wall push-up

1. Face a wall, standing a little further than arm's-length away, feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Lean your body forward and put your palms flat against the wall at shoulder height and shoulder-width apart.
3. Slowly breathe in as you bend your elbows and lower your upper body toward the wall in a slow, controlled motion. Keep your feet flat on the floor and your body straight.
4. Hold the position for one second.
5. Breathe out and slowly push yourself back until your arms are straight. Keep your elbows slightly bent so you don’t lock your joints.
6. Repeat 10–15 times.
7. Rest; then repeat 10–15 more times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Push up off lower levels, such as a table or chair secured safely against a wall.

Level 3: Do regular push-ups on the floor.

These push-ups will strengthen your arms, shoulders and chest. Try this exercise during a TV commercial break.
This exercise to strengthen upper back, shoulder and neck muscles should make everyday activities, such as raking and vacuuming, easier. (See — Working with a resistance band on page 34.)

1. Sit in a sturdy, armless chair with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Place the centre of the resistance band under both feet. Hold each end of the band with your palms facing inward.
3. Relax your shoulders and extend your arms beside your legs. Breathe in slowly.
4. Breathe out slowly and pull both elbows back until your hands are at your hips, pulling your shoulder blades together.
5. Hold position for one second, keeping your shoulders down.
6. Breathe in as you slowly return your hands to the starting position.
7. Repeat 10–15 times.
8. Rest; then repeat 10–15 more times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Use a heavier strength band.
Overhead arm raise

1. You can do this exercise while sitting in a sturdy, armless chair.
2. Keep your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
3. Hold weights beside you at shoulder height, with elbows bent and your palms facing forward. Breathe in slowly.
4. Slowly breathe out as you push upwards with both arms up over your head. Keep your elbows slightly bent so you don’t lock your joints.
5. Hold the position for one second.
6. Breathe in as you slowly lower your arms.
7. Repeat 10–15 times.
8. Rest; then repeat 10–15 more times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Do this exercise while standing.
Level 3: Use a heavier weight. You may want to use alternate arms until you can lift the weight comfortably with both arms.

This exercise will strengthen your shoulders and arms. It should make activities, such as lifting items into overhead cupboards, hanging out the washing and lifting and carrying grandchildren, easier.