

Tips for Ramblers

What a great pastime, walking with a group of friends, across varying terrain and possibly a pub lunch at the end. Good exercise and a fun social activity as well.

So, what easy exercises can you do to keep yourself rambling forever?

Firstly, we need to look at the equipment and physical skills needed to ramble safely:

1. Good equipment, boots with supportive insoles, walking pole and breathable, waterproof clothing
2. Good flexibility to be able to negotiate hazards, styles or walls encountered en route
3. Good muscular strength in the important muscle groups to help avoid fatigue and help you lift yourself up over those higher styles
4. Good balance, especially for walking over uneven ground to avoid falling, sprains, strains or just the indignity of a face plant in wet mud!

One of my main aims for Fitter Forever is to educate the over 50s to understand how they can keep their body fitter and younger by simple exercises. To do this I just need to briefly explain a bit about how your muscles age.

In a nutshell, we have two types of muscle fibres, slow ones that are for endurance and fast ones that are for power and speed. As we age, if we do not keep the fast fibres working they begin to waste. It is thought that we start to lose around 1% of our muscle mass per year from the age of 30!! So that means that by the time you are 70, if you haven't kept yourself fit, you could have lost between 30-40% of your muscle mass.

However, the good news is there have been plenty of studies that show it doesn't matter whatever your age, you can always build up those muscles again. This is important as strong muscles protect your joints against arthritic changes keeping you fitter and effectively younger! I will show below what exercises you can do to keep your strength.

The more flexible you are then the better condition your joints will be in. The bigger the range of movement that you can move your joints through, then the more nutrition your joint surfaces get and this helps to protect from arthritic changes, resulting in your joints staying younger! I will show below what easy stretching exercises you can do.

Lastly, the better your balance is the quicker your reactions will be (this is often used as a measure of biological age). Quicker reactions/better balance will also help prevent falls and injuries making it easier for you to walk over uneven ground. I will show below some very easy balance exercises you can do.

Footwear: I would always recommend good quality footwear with a good insole in them that will support you arch and heel. You may have to buy a separate insole as not all footwear come with adequate support. If you have any heel issues then you may also want to stick a gel pad in the heel area to act as a shock absorber. It is possible to buy insoles with gel pads already in the heel. I have stuck a gel pad on the heel of my insole and it is actually one of those that are meant to ease pressure on the balls of the feet when wearing high heels. They can be purchased from any pharmacy or superstore.

Exercise: to build up your fast muscle fibres you need to do resisted exercise. That means you need to lift a weight or have some type of resistance to the exercise. These are simple exercises that you can do as part of your everyday activities and you can use your body weight as the resistance.

- To build up your calf muscles, whenever you are standing at the sink, or at a table, hold on if you need to but try to go up onto your tip toes (lift your heels up) then lower slowly. Try to do this 10 times and only hold on lightly to help you balance.
- To build up your thigh muscles, when going up stairs, try to go up two steps at a time. You may have to hold on to the bannister for balance.
- To build up the muscles around your hips, every time you stand up from a chair, try to do it without using your hands to push you up. Also, try to sit to stand 3 times before you actually walk off.

Flexibility: to keep your joints flexible you need to regularly stretch your muscles to stop them tightening up. You must only stretch warmed muscles, never stretch cold muscles as this can lead to injury of the muscle. The best time to do these stretches is when you have warmed up your muscles after exercise, eg after a brisk walk or perhaps after you have run up and down the stairs a few times.

You need to hold each stretch for about 30 seconds. Only stretch to the point where you can start to feel the tension in your muscle. Do not bounce through the stretch.

The easiest way to stretch your **calf muscles** is shown below in the diagram.



Stand with your arms straight against a wall and put your left foot forwards knee bent. Keep your right leg back with your heel on the ground and knee straight. Lean forwards against the wall until you feel the tension in your right calf muscle. Hold for 30 seconds and then relax. Repeat x3 each leg.

The easiest way to stretch your **hamstrings** is as shown below.



Put right leg straight out in front of you. Gently slide your right hand down your leg until you feel tension in your hamstrings on the back of your leg. Hold for 30 seconds and then relax. Repeat x 3 each leg.



The easiest way to stretch your **quadriceps** is shown below



Sit near the edge of the seat so that your leg can move back along the side of the chair. Hold onto your ankle and gently pull your ankle up and back until you feel the tension in your quads on the front of your thigh. Hold for 30 seconds then relax. Repeat x3 each leg.



As well as doing the stretches mentioned above, lying flat on the floor, or on your tummy, can also be beneficial. This is because it relaxes the muscles on the front of the hips and in your back preventing them from becoming tighter. This helps to maintain a good upright posture.

Balance: balance is a skill that you will lose if you don't use it. To practise and improve your balance, every time you brush your teeth try to do it standing on one leg. Or, whenever you are standing near a supportive surface that you can hold onto if you need to steady yourself, practise balancing on one leg.

With muscle strength, flexibility and balance, remember...if you don't use it you will lose it!

Try to make these simple exercises part of your everyday activity...happy rambling!

NB: If you have any existing medical conditions then you should check with your GP or appropriate healthcare professional before undertaking any exercise or stretching programmes. The author assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage caused, or allegedly caused, directly or indirectly by the use of information contained in this guide sheet and specifically disclaims any liability incurred from the use or application of the contents of this guide