FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE NEVER LIFTED, OR HAVE NOT IN YEARS

The 4-Week At-Home Strength Starter

Six moves, two days a week, about 20 to 30 minutes, at home. No gym, no jumping, no getting down on the floor. Each move has an easier option.

WHY TWO DAYS A WEEK

US guidelines say adults need muscle-strengthening activity on **2 or more days a week**. In 2020, **23.8%** of US women aged 45 to 64 reported doing that.

Sources: CDC, What Counts as Physical Activity for Adults · CDC MMWR QuickStats, 2022

WHAT YOU NEED

A sturdy chair. A clear wall. From week 3, two light dumbbells: the source programs start beginners at **1 to 3 pounds** in each hand.

Sources: NIA, Workout to Go · Growing Stronger

THE PLAN AT A GLANCE

WHEN	MOVES	HOW MUCH	EQUIPMENT
Week 1	1 Chair Squat · 2 Wall Push-Up · 3 Toe Stand · 4 Side Leg Raise	1 set of 10	None
Week 2	The same four moves	2 sets of 10	None
Week 3	The four moves, plus 5 Biceps Curl · 6 Overhead Press	2 sets of 10	Light dumbbells for 5 and 6
Week 4	All six moves	2 sets of 10	Light dumbbells for 5 and 6

Two sessions a week on days that are not next to each other, for example Monday and Thursday. Rest about one minute between sets. This staging, starting without weights and adding them later, follows the source programs.

BEFORE YOU START

Talk to your doctor first if you have health concerns or are under a doctor’s care for a medical condition. If you are unsure about a movement, ask your doctor or a physical therapist.

Sources: Growing Stronger · NIA, Three Types of Exercise

SKIP THE SESSION AND CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU HAVE

Fever, unusual fatigue, swollen or painful muscles or joints, chest pain, an irregular heartbeat, or shortness of breath.

Source: Growing Stronger

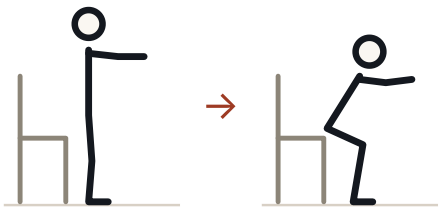
Educational resource. Not medical advice. Talk to your doctor before starting if you have health concerns or are under a doctor’s care for a medical condition. Sources: CDC, “What Counts as Physical Activity for Adults” (reviewed Dec 6, 2023) — cdc.gov · CDC, MMWR QuickStats, May 6, 2022 (National Health Interview Survey, 2020) — cdc.gov/mmwr.

WEEKS 1 TO 4 · NO EQUIPMENT

Moves 1 to 4

1 Chair Squat

LEGS AND HIPS



1. Stand in front of the chair, feet slightly wider than your shoulders, arms forward.
2. Lower yourself slowly toward the seat with your weight in your heels.
3. Stand back up.

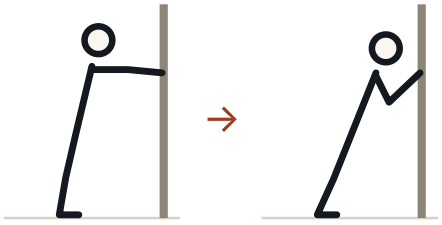
Watch for: Do not drop into the seat quickly, and do not lean forward onto your toes.

Easier: Use your hands for support, put a pillow on the seat, or squat only 4 to 6 inches.

You need: A sturdy chair · Source: Growing Stronger

2 Wall Push-Up

CHEST, SHOULDERS, ARMS



1. Stand a little farther than arm's length from the wall.
2. Put your palms flat on the wall at shoulder height, shoulder-width apart.
3. Bend your elbows to bring your upper body toward the wall, feet flat. Push back.

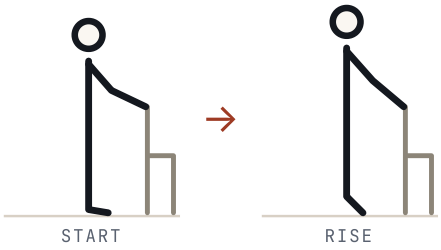
Watch for: Do not lock your elbows, and do not round or arch your back.

Easier: Bend your elbows only as far as is comfortable.*

You need: A clear wall · Source: NIA Workout to Go · Growing Stronger

3 Toe Stand

CALVES AND ANKLES



1. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, holding the chair or counter.
2. Rise onto the balls of your feet as high as you comfortably can.
3. Hold briefly, then lower your heels slowly.

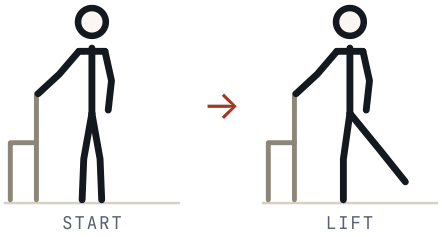
Watch for: Hold on for balance only. Keep breathing.

Easier: Rise only part of the way.*

You need: A sturdy chair or a counter · Source: NIA Workout to Go · Growing Stronger

4 Side Leg Raise

HIPS



1. Stand behind the chair, holding on.
2. Lift one leg out to the side, back straight, toes facing forward.
3. Lower slowly. Finish your repetitions, then switch legs.

Watch for: Keep the standing leg slightly bent. Move slowly.

Easier: Lift the leg only a small amount.

You need: A sturdy chair · Source: NIA Workout to Go · Growing Stronger

* Easier options marked with an asterisk are our suggestions. All other instructions follow the source programs. The drawings are simple position guides.

Educational resource. Not medical advice. Talk to your doctor before starting if you have health concerns or are under a doctor's care for a medical condition. Sources: National Institute on Aging, "Workout to Go: A Sample Exercise Routine" (Publication No. 11-4258, reprinted 2015) · Tufts University and CDC, "Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults" (Seguin, Epping, Buchner, Bloch, Nelson; 2002) — cdc.gov.

WEEKS 3 AND 4 · LIGHT DUMBBELLS

Moves 5 and 6, and How Hard It Should Feel

5 Biceps Curl

ARMS



1. Stand or sit, a dumbbell in each hand, arms at your sides.
2. Curl the weights toward your shoulders. Keep your upper arms and elbows at your sides.
3. Lower slowly.

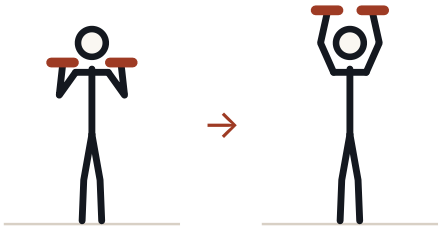
Watch for: Keep your wrists straight.

Easier: Sit down, or lift one arm at a time.*

You need: Two dumbbells · Source: Growing Stronger

6 Overhead Press

SHOULDERS, ARMS, UPPER BACK



1. Stand or sit, feet flat. Hold the weights at shoulder height, palms forward.
2. Press both arms overhead, elbows slightly bent at the top.
3. Lower slowly to shoulder height.

Watch for: Do not lock your elbows. Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.

Easier: Sit down, or lift one arm at a time.

You need: Two dumbbells · Source: NIA Workout to Go · Growing Stronger

IS MY WEIGHT RIGHT?

I cannot finish 2 sets of 10 with good form. Use a lighter weight.

I can do 10, then I need to rest. This is the right level.

I could have done a few more. Use a slightly heavier weight for the second set.

I could do all 20 without a break. Use a heavier weight for both sets.

Source: Growing Stronger. Do not add weight when you are sick, injured, or very sore.

EVERY SESSION

Warm up: walk for 5 minutes first.

Pace: about 2 seconds to lift, 4 seconds to lower.

Breathe: out during the effort, in as you relax. Do not hold your breath.

Joints: do not lock your arms or legs straight.

Pain: stop if you feel pain. Some soreness can be normal, but exercise should not hurt.

Sources: Growing Stronger · NIA, Three Types of Exercise · NIA, Workout to Go

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PRINT THIS PAGE · FILL IN A COLUMN AFTER EACH SESSION

My 8-Session Log

Write the date at the top. In each box, write the repetitions you finished in each set, for example **10 / 8**. For moves 5 and 6, add the weight you used.

SESSION	W1·A	W1·B	W2·A	W2·B	W3·A	W3·B	W4·A	W4·B
Date								
Target	1 × 10	1 × 10	2 × 10	2 × 10	2 × 10	2 × 10	2 × 10	2 × 10
1 **Chair Squat**								
2 **Wall Push-Up**								
3 **Toe Stand**								
4 **Side Leg Raise**								
5 **Biceps Curl**	—	—	—	—				
6 **Overhead Press**	—	—	—	—				
How it felt easy · right · hard								

IF YOU MISS A SESSION

Pick up where you left off. Keep at least one rest day between sessions, so the same muscles are not worked two days in a row.

Source: NIA, Three Types of Exercise

IF A WEEK FEELS TOO HARD

Repeat it before moving on, or use the easier option for that move. Use the “Is my weight right?” box on page 3.

This is our suggestion. The source programs also progress in stages.

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AFTER SESSION 8

You Finished Four Weeks. What Comes Next?

Four weeks builds the habit and the first layer of strength. It is a start, and it leaves two gaps on purpose.

WHAT THIS STARTER DOES NOT COVER YET

Back and abdomen. The guidelines ask for all major muscle groups: legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms. These six moves cover legs, hips, chest, shoulders, and arms. The source programs add floor exercises for the back and abdomen at a later stage.

Getting heavier. To keep gaining, the sources say to gradually increase the weight, the sets or repetitions, or the days per week.

Sources: CDC, What Counts · NIA, Three Types of Exercise · Growing Stronger

WANT WEEKS 5 TO 12?

We are working on the follow-up: weeks 5 to 12, with back and core moves and a clear plan for adding weight. If you want it, send the word **STRONG** to **@midlife.unfolded** on Instagram or Facebook.

Until then, keep going with week 4, twice a week, and use the weight check on page 3 to move up.

WHAT THIS KIT IS, AND IS NOT

It is one fixed starter plan built from public US health guidance. It is not a personal program, and it does not treat or diagnose anything. We sell no supplements and use no affiliate links.

How it was made: prepared with AI assistance. Every instruction and number names its source so you can check it yourself.

LEARNING GOOD FORM

The National Institute on Aging suggests a session or two with a personal trainer, or a group class, to learn proper form. It also notes that free online videos can help.

Source: NIA, Three Types of Exercise

SOURCES, READ ON NOVEMBER 21, 2026

1. CDC, “What Counts as Physical Activity for Adults” (reviewed Dec 6, 2023) — cdc.gov
2. CDC, MMWR QuickStats, May 6, 2022 (National Health Interview Survey, 2020) — cdc.gov/mmwr
3. National Institute on Aging, “Three Types of Exercise Can Improve Your Health and Physical Ability” (reviewed Jan 14, 2025) — nia.nih.gov
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