

What You Need to Know About Fitness After 60

6 Functional Fitness Assessments You Can Do at Home

-- By [Dean Anderson, Fitness Expert](#)

This plan has been taken from [Spark People](#), an excellent website that deals with a wide range of fitness and health issues. It is recommended that you spend some time browsing through this site.

<http://www.sparkpeople.com>

If you're 60 or older, you've probably grown up with the idea that the transition from middle age into "senior citizen" status means slowing down. "Take it easy—you're not as young as you used to be." How many times have you heard that advice? If you're like me, you probably say it to yourself whenever your post-exercise aches and pains seem a little worse than usual.

It certainly seems like a lot of middle-aged (and older) Americans have heeded this advice—and taken it too far, in many cases. Surveys show that only 32 percent of adults 65 and older follow a regular exercise plan, and for those aged 45-64, the number is even lower: 30 percent.

It turns out that this is a prescription for trouble.

We know now that the physical decline associated with aging is not simply the result of getting older. In many respects, it's a product of *becoming less active* as we age. In other words, it's not aging that forces us to take it easy, it's taking it too easy that makes aging more debilitating than it needs to be. The human body is much better at repairing and maintaining itself when you keep it well conditioned through a program of regular physical activity, exercise, and good nutrition. This doesn't change when you move into old age—in fact, the old adage "use it or lose it" is probably more true when you're in your 60s and beyond than when you're in your 40s. Slacking off on healthy habits (like regular exercise and good nutrition) is the primary factor in age-related problems like excessive muscle loss, deteriorating bone density, declines in strength and aerobic fitness, and increased difficulties with balance and flexibility.

Now, don't get me wrong here. I'm not trying to say that a 60-year-old who starts exercising and eating well can expect to go out and win athletic competitions against the 20-something crowd. And I'm not encouraging you to jump up off the couch and start training for the Boston Marathon if you haven't run in 30 years. Wear and tear does have its effects, and we aren't designed to keep on going forever like the Energizer Bunny—40 may be the new 30, but 60 is never going to be the new 25.

I am saying that, with a little bit of well-planned effort, you can make your "declining years" a lot less about declining, and more about staying functionally fit enough to do what you want to do and enjoy yourself in the process.

Start Right Where You Are

If you've remained active and continued to exercise through middle age, you probably know your body well enough to recognize your strengths, your natural limitations, and the areas where you should improve to better function in your daily life. But if it's been a while since you've done much exercise or regular physical activity, or you're not sure if certain problems you're having are "normal," it's vital to start with a good assessment of where you are right now. That will be your foundation for putting together an effective exercise and activity plan.

The Senior Functional Fitness Test

NB It is essential this exercise plan is **not** a substitute for [medical evaluation and clearance for exercise](#), especially if you experience any pain, weakness, or difficulty with any of these activities. So, be sure to

check in with your doctor and get yourself cleared before starting any exercise program. These six self-test assessments and age-related performance comparisons have been adapted from the [Senior Fitness Test Manual](#), ©1999 R.E. Rikli and C.J. Jones.

Each of these assessments will measure one or more of the basic elements of functional fitness: strength, power, agility, endurance, balance, and flexibility. Research has demonstrated that a senior's performance on these assessments is a reliable indicator of his or her risk for having (or developing) functional limitations that will negatively affect quality of life. If your scores fall in the "High Risk Zone" or below the average (see table below), beginning a program of regular exercise can help you reduce your risk.

Note: You can do these tests yourself at home, but several require a **partner** to help you measure or record your results. You'll also need a **tape measure**, a **dumbbell** or hand weight (five pounds for women, eight pounds for men), and a watch or **clock** with a second hand. If you can, arrange to do this assessment in a gym with a friend, a personal trainer or fitness professional. Estimating your results or diverging from the instructions could make your results invalid.

1. **Arm Curls:** The purpose of this test is to **assess upper body strength** needed to perform regular household chores and other daily activities involving lifting and carrying things like groceries and grandchildren, opening containers, and more.

Description: Complete as many one-arm [biceps curls](#) as you can in 30 seconds, holding a hand weight of five pounds (if you're a woman), or 8 pounds (if you're a man).

High Risk Zone: Completing less than 11 curls in 30 seconds with good form

2. **30-Second Chair Stands:** The purpose of this test is to **assess lower body strength** required for daily activities such as walking, climbing stairs, getting in and out of chairs, cars, and the bathtub, and maintaining balance.

Description: Sit in a standard chair with a firm seat (such as a dining chair), with arms folded across chest and hands on opposite shoulders. Stand up and sit down as many times as possible in 30 seconds, without using hands for support.

High Risk Zone: Less than 8 unassisted stands in 30 seconds

3. **2-Minute Step Test:** The purpose of this test is to **assess aerobic endurance**, which is important for walking, stair climbing, and performing many daily activities for an extended period of time.

Description: Stand facing a wall, and put a pencil mark or piece of tape on the wall at a height that is halfway between the top of your knee and the top of your hipbone. Begin stepping in place, raising each knee up as high as the wall marker each time. Step for two minutes, and record the number of full steps taken, *counting both right and left legs together as one step*.

High Risk Zone: Less than 65 full steps in 2 minutes

4. **Chair Sit and Reach Test:** The purpose of this test is to **assess lower body flexibility**, which is important for proper walking gait, balance, and other common movements such as getting in and out of cars.

Description: Sit with buttocks on front edge of firm chair. Extend one leg straight in front of you, with heel resting on floor. Bend forward at waist, keeping arms straight, reaching hands towards toes. Stretch forward as far as possible without pain. Have a partner measure the distance (in inches) between the tips of your fingers and the tips of your toes.

High Risk Zone: Women with two inches or more between fingers and toes and men with four inches of distance or more

- Back Scratch:** The purpose of this test is to **assess shoulder flexibility**, which is important for movements such as brushing hair, putting on clothes over the head, putting on a car seat belt and more.

Description: With one hand, reach behind your back and slide hand up towards opposite shoulder as far as possible. With opposite hand, reach back over same shoulder and try to come as close as you can to touching the tip of other hand. Have a partner measure the distance between your hands.

High Risk Zone: Women with two inches or more between hands and men with four inches of distance or more

- 8-Foot Up and Go Test:** The purpose of this test is to **assess agility and dynamic balance**, which is important for tasks requiring quick maneuvering, such as getting off a bus, or getting up from a chair to answer the phone, etc.

Description: Measure out a distance of 8 feet from the edge of a chair, and put a marker there. Sit in the chair, and time yourself as you stand up, walk to the marker and back, and sit back down.

High Risk Zone: More than 9 seconds to complete this test

- After completing all tests, compare your results to the averages for your age group (for **men** and **women**):

Results by Age	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94
Chair Stand (reps)	14-19 12-17	12-18 11-16	12-17 10-15	11-17 10-15	10-15 9-14	8-14 8-13	7-12 4-11
Arm Curls (reps)	16-22 13-19	15-21 12-18	14-21 12-17	13-19 11-17	13-19 10-16	11-17 10-15	10-14 8-13
2-Minute Step (steps)	87-115 75-107	86-116 73-107	80-110 68-101	73-109 68-100	71-103 60-91	59-91 55-85	52-86 44-72
Sit & Reach (inches)	< 2.5 < 0.5	< 3.0 < 0.5	< 3.5 < 1.0	< 4.0 < 1.5	< 5.5 < 2.0	< 5.5 < 2.5	< 6.5 < 4.5
Back Scratch (inches)	< 6.5 < 3.0	1.0-7.5 < 3.5	1.0-8.0 < 4.0	2.0-9.0 < 5.0	2.0-9.5 < 5.5	3.0-10 1.0-7.0	4.0-10.5 1.0-8.0
Up & Go (seconds)	3.8-5.6 4.4-6.0	4.3-5.7 4.8-6.4	4.2-6.0 4.9-7.1	4.6-7.2 5.2-7.4	5.2-7.6 5.7-8.7	5.3-8.9 6.2-9.6	6.2-10.0 7.3-11.5

- If your scores are in the high risk zone (listed above) or below the averages listed in the chart, it will be very important to do some exercises designed to help you improve the functional abilities associated with that task. And even if your scores are above average now, a regular exercise program (cardio, strength, balance and flexibility training) is the best way to keep them there as you get older.

You can read more about these assessments, their interpretation, and instructions (including pictures) by [clicking here](#). (Note: This link will open a PDF document. You will need the free Acrobat Reader to open this document.)

<http://www.dsnm.univr.it/documenti/OccorrenzaIns/matdid/matdid182478.pdf>