THRIVING SENIOR

Helping seniors live better, one tip at a time

5-Minute Morning Joint Routine

Why your joints feel stiff - and how to fix it before you get out of bed

☐ Seated Heel Slides: Warm Up the Knees

Sit at the edge of your bed or in a chair with both feet flat on the floor. Slowly slide your right heel backward along the floor, bending your knee as far as is comfortable without pain, then slide it forward to return to the starting position. Complete 10 slow, controlled slides on the right, then repeat on the left. Keep your back straight and your movement smooth rather than jerky.

☐ Gentle Leg Extensions: Activate the Quads

Remaining seated, straighten your right leg slowly until it is nearly parallel to the floor, hold for two seconds, then lower it back down with control. Perform 10 repetitions on the right side, then switch to the left. Focus on squeezing the front of the thigh as you extend. This movement pumps synovial fluid into the knee joint and begins activating the quadriceps, which are essential for safe standing and stair use.

☐ Ankle Circles: Mobilize the Ankle and Foot

Lift your right foot a few inches off the floor and slowly rotate your ankle in a full circle, making the circle as large as comfortable. Complete 5 circles clockwise, then 5 counterclockwise. Lower the foot and repeat on the left ankle. Move slowly and deliberately through the full range of motion. Ankle mobility is closely tied to balance and gait stability, and this movement warms the many small joints in the foot and ankle simultaneously.

☐ Ankle Alphabet: Extend Foot and Ankle Range

With your right foot lifted, use your big toe as a pointer and slowly trace the letters A through E in the air. Lower the foot and repeat on the left side. Keep the movement coming from your ankle rather than your entire leg. This exercise takes ankle mobilization further than basic circles and is particularly useful for people who experience foot stiffness, plantar fasciitis symptoms, or reduced ankle flexibility.

☐ Seated Knee Lifts: Open the Hips

Sitting upright with feet flat on the floor, slowly lift your right knee toward your chest as high as is comfortable, hold for two seconds, then lower it with control. Repeat 8 to 10 times on the right, then switch to the left. Hold the sides of the chair lightly for balance if needed. This movement begins to lubricate the hip joint and activates the hip flexors, which tighten significantly during long periods of sitting or lying down.

☐ Chair Figure-4 Stretch: Release the Hip and Glute

Seated upright, cross your right ankle over your left knee so your right leg forms a figure-4 shape. Gently press down on your right knee with your right hand, and if comfortable, lean your torso slightly forward until you feel a stretch deep in the right hip and glute. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, breathing slowly. Release and repeat on the left side. This stretch directly targets the piriformis and outer hip muscles, which commonly become tight and contribute to hip and lower back stiffness.

☐ Seated Inner Thigh Stretch: Address the Groin

From a seated position, open your knees wide and place your feet flat on the floor slightly wider than hip-width. Place your hands on your inner thighs and gently press outward, or simply allow gravity to provide the stretch. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, breathing deeply. This movement addresses the adductor muscles along the inner thigh, which often tighten overnight and contribute to restricted hip movement and gait stiffness in the morning.

☐ Gentle Pelvic Tilts: Mobilize the Lower Back

Sit near the edge of your chair with feet flat on the floor and hands resting on your thighs. Gently arch your lower back slightly, tilting your pelvis forward so your lower back curves inward, then reverse the movement by rounding your lower back slightly, tilting your pelvis backward. Alternate slowly between these two positions 10 times. This gentle rocking motion reduces lumbar stiffness, warms the sacroiliac joints, and improves the coordination between your core and pelvis that supports safe movement throughout the day.

☐ Seated Torso Rotation: Loosen the Spine

Sit tall with feet flat on the floor and cross your arms over your chest. Slowly rotate your upper body to the right as far as is comfortable, hold for two seconds, then return to center and rotate to the left. Complete 8 repetitions in each direction. Keep the movement slow and controlled, initiating from your mid-back rather than just your shoulders. This exercise mobilizes the thoracic spine and the joints between your ribs, areas that become noticeably stiff during sleep.

☐ Shoulder Rolls: Release Upper Body Tension

Sitting upright, lift both shoulders toward your ears, then roll them backward and down in a smooth, controlled circle. Complete 5 backward rolls, then reverse direction for 5 forward rolls. Keep your neck relaxed and your jaw unclenched throughout. Shoulder rolls warm the glenohumeral joint, the acromioclavicular joint, and the surrounding musculature of the upper back and neck, all of which bear the compression of sleeping position for several hours each night.

☐ Chin Tucks: Ease Neck Stiffness

Sitting tall, gently draw your chin straight back toward your throat, as if creating a slight double chin, without tilting your head up or down. Hold for two seconds, then release. Repeat 8 to 10 times. This simple movement stretches the muscles at the base of the skull, decompresses the upper cervical joints, and helps correct the forward head position that many people adopt during sleep. It is particularly helpful for those who wake with neck tightness or headaches.

☐ Wrist Circles and Finger Flexion: Wake Up the Hands

Extend both arms forward and slowly rotate your wrists in full circles, 5 times in each direction. Then spread your fingers wide, hold for two seconds, make a gentle fist, and hold for two seconds. Repeat the open-and-close sequence 8 times. These movements are especially important for those managing arthritis in the hands or wrists. The wrist circles distribute synovial fluid through the small carpal joints, and the finger flexion reduces the particular stiffness that affects grip strength and fine motor control in the morning.

What to Do Next

Once you have completed the full sequence, take three deep breaths, plant both feet firmly on the floor, and rise from your seat slowly using your leg muscles rather than pushing up with your arms. Spend the first minute of standing walking in place or moving deliberately through your home at a comfortable pace to continue warming the joints before any stairs or longer walks. If you notice persistent pain, swelling, or any joint that feels significantly worse on a particular morning, contact your physician before continuing the routine that day.

Print this page. Work through one box at a time. Every box you check is one more layer of protection.