

Simple Exercises to Keep Older Adults Moving — Part 3

by John C. Griffin, MSc

Functional mobility means being able to do the things we need to do in normal daily life efficiently and without undue fatigue or pain. Good functional mobility is part of a healthy, safe, and active life.

This is our third posting on functional mobility. In each posting, we offer you a screening test that helps you spot problems with functional mobility.

Then we show you how to use your findings to design exercises for yourself that will improve your functional mobility.

In this test, we focus on the upper body. This includes shoulder flexibility or 'range of motion'. This is important for things like reaching up to a high shelf, combing your hair, putting on your clothes, reaching for something in the freezer, or reaching for a seat belt.

A warning before you start:

If you have significant or increasing pain with any test or exercise, you should stop right away. Get advice from a health care provider.

How to do the Back Scratch Test

1. While standing, reach one arm up .
2. Bend your elbow to pat your back.
3. Reach your fingers down your back as far as you can.
4. Put your other hand behind your back and reach your fingers up your back as far as you can.
5. Try and touch your fingertips.
6. Try again. If your fingers do not touch, guess how far apart your middle fingers are.
7. Repeat, switching the position for each arm.



How did you do?

Score a "2" if you can touch your fingers.

Score a "1" if you are within 10cm (or 4 inches).

Score a "0" if you are more than 10cm (or 4 inches) OR if you have pain while doing it.

Score the test: Right arm upper ____
Left arm upper ____

'Corner Wall Stretch'—An exercise to improve your upper body flexibility

If you scored 0 or 1 in the Back Scratch Test, here is an exercise for shoulder flexibility. This exercise will improve your posture. It will also increase the range of motion in your shoulder. Improved flexibility decreases your chance of injury.



How to do “Corner Wall Stretch”

1. Face into an open corner of a room.
2. Place one foot into the corner with your hands flat against the walls and your elbows almost straight. Your arms are slightly below your shoulders.
3. Lower your shoulder blades (scapulae) and pinch them together.
4. Contract your abs (stomach muscles). Avoid arching your back.
5. Slowly bend your leading leg and slightly lift your chest. Ease into the stretch in a slow and controlled way.
6. When you can feel the stretch in your chest, hold the position for 12 - 15 seconds.
7. Return to standing. Repeat 2-3 times.

About the Author

John C. Griffin, MSc., was a professor in the Fitness and Lifestyle Management Program at George Brown College in Toronto for 37 years. He is now a private consultant, speaker, coach, and writer for public and private sector organizations. John has authored more than 60 publications, numerous manuals, and a textbook published by Human Kinetics, *Client-Centered Exercise Prescription*. John is currently doing research on the functional mobility of adults 50-70 years of age.