

Staying Strong for Life: Your Guide to Preventing Frailty

The good news: Frailty — the feeling of weakness, exhaustion, and vulnerability that can come with getting older — is **not inevitable**. Research from around the world shows that you can prevent it, delay it, and even reverse it at almost any age. This guide explains what to do, in plain language, based on the decade of life you are in right now. There is also a quick self-check at the end of this handout.

Important: *This handout is for general information. Always check with your doctor before starting a new exercise programme, especially if you have a health condition or have not been active for a while.*

Ages 20 – 39

Building your future strength

Every hour of physical activity you do now reduces your chance of muscle weakness in later life by about 6%. The healthy habits you build today protect you for decades to come.

Li et al., *Medicine* 2025 | doi.org/10.1097/MD.00000000000044312

Lift weights at least twice a week

Use weights, resistance bands, or just your own bodyweight — squats, push-ups, lunges. You do not need a gym. Doing this twice a week is the single most powerful thing you can do to stay strong as you get older.

Tan et al., *Front. Public Health* 2026 | Ref [3]

Move your body every day

Walk briskly, cycle, swim, dance — anything that gets your heart rate up. Aim for at least 30 minutes most days. Avoid sitting for long stretches without getting up and moving.

Li et al., *Medicine* 2025 | Ref [2]

Eat protein at every meal

Think eggs, chicken, fish, beans, lentils, yogurt, cheese, or tofu. Having protein at breakfast, lunch, and dinner — not just dinner — helps your muscles stay strong.

Lengelé et al., *Curr Opin Clin Nutr* 2025 | Ref [4]

Protect your sleep and your mental health

Aim for 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night. If you are struggling with low mood, anxiety, or stress, getting support early makes a real difference to your long-term strength and energy.

Su et al., *Front. Psychol.* 2025 | Ref [6]

Ages 40 – 49

Slowing the clock

A 20-year study of over 6,000 people found that having just four healthy habits at age 50 cut the risk of becoming frail later in life by 72%. It is never too early to start.

Gil-Salcedo et al., *PLoS Medicine* 2020 | doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003147

Challenge yourself more when you exercise

After age 30, muscles naturally get a little smaller each year. The best way to fight this is to keep making your workouts slightly harder over time — a little more weight, one more rep, a slightly steeper hill. Three sessions a week is a good goal.

Devries & Giangregorio, *Bone* 2023 | Ref [12]

Spread your protein through the day

Your body gets less efficient at using protein as you get older, so spreading it across all three meals matters more than it used to. Aim for a portion of protein at every meal — not just at dinner.

Murphy et al., *Proc Nutr Soc* 2023 | Ref [5]

Keep on top of your health checks

High blood pressure, diabetes, and carrying extra weight all speed up muscle loss. Staying on top of these conditions with your doctor is one of the most important things you can do in your 40s.

Hoogendijk et al., *Lancet* 2019 | Ref [13]

Stay connected with the people around you

People who stay socially active — joining clubs, volunteering, keeping in regular touch with friends and family — are significantly less likely to become frail as they age.

Yang et al., *Maturitas* 2026 | Ref [15]



Ages 50 – 59

A very important decade — act now

People who are already showing early signs of frailty in their 50s can reverse it by becoming more active. Even a moderate increase in activity more than doubles the chance of getting back to full strength.

Yang et al., *Maturitas* 2026 | doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2026.108825

Mix strength, cardio, and balance training

Combine weight-bearing exercise (lifting or resistance bands) with cardio (walking, swimming, cycling) and balance work (standing on one foot, side steps, heel-to-toe walking). Doing all three together works much better than any one type alone.

Sun et al., *Age and Ageing* 2023 | Ref [17]

Aim for 80 to 100 grams of protein a day

That is roughly three palm-sized portions of protein spread across your meals. If food alone is not enough, a protein shake or a high-protein soup after exercise is a simple, proven way to top up.

Peng et al., *J Cachexia Sarcopenia* 2024 | Ref [18]

Take sleep problems seriously

Snoring, trouble falling asleep, or waking up repeatedly through the night all significantly raise the risk of becoming frail. If sleep is a regular problem, please mention it to your doctor.

Zhu et al., *BMC Medicine* 2022 | Ref [19]

Tell your doctor if something does not feel right

Feeling tired all the time, losing weight without trying, or noticing you are walking more slowly than you used to — these are early warning signs worth discussing at your next appointment.

Hoogendijk et al., *Lancet* 2019 | Ref [13]

Ages 60 – 69

Get checked — and keep moving

Combining regular exercise with good nutrition cuts the risk of becoming frail by 38%. Use the self-check on the last page to find out where you stand — then bring your result to your next appointment.

Macdonald et al., *PLoS One* 2020 | doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228821

Complete the self-check on the last page

The FRAIL Scale on the last page of this handout takes 2 minutes to complete. It will tell you whether you are robust, pre-frail, or frail — and what to do next. Bring your result to your next appointment.

Morley et al., *J Nutr Health Aging* 2012 | Validated in Whitehall II cohort

Exercise regularly — ideally with some guidance

Aim for 30 to 60 minutes of combined strength and cardio exercise, 3 to 4 times a week. A physiotherapist or fitness professional can design something safe and effective for your current fitness level.

Kim & Rockwood, *NEJM* 2024 | Ref [22]

Eat more protein than you think you need

Aim for 75 to 115 grams a day. If you are dealing with an illness or recovering from something, you may need even more. Try to eat protein within an hour of finishing exercise to get the most benefit.

Kim & Rockwood, *NEJM* 2024 | Ref [22]

Ask your doctor to review all your medications

Some medications — especially when taken together — can cause tiredness, weakness, and falls without you realising it. Ask whether everything you are taking is still necessary. Sometimes fewer medications means more energy.

Cai et al., *Am J Epidemiol* 2025 | Ref [24]



Ages 70 – 79

Frailty can be turned around

In a large clinical trial, 82 out of 100 frail people in their 70s who followed a structured exercise and nutrition program got better — compared to only 52 out of 100 who did not. It is absolutely not too late.

Abizanda Saro et al., JAGS 2026 (FRAILMERIT trial) | doi.org/10.1111/jgs.70266

Keep doing resistance exercise — at your own level

Lifting weights or using resistance bands is still the most effective tool for staying strong, even in your 70s. A physiotherapist or trainer can adapt any exercise to suit you, including seated or chair-based versions if needed.

Sun et al., Age and Ageing 2023 | Ref [17]

Add balance exercises to your routine

Simple balance exercises — standing on one foot, walking heel to toe, stepping sideways — help prevent falls and keep you steady on your feet. Many community centres offer low-cost group classes for older adults that include balance work.

Chopra et al., MJA 2026 | Ref [20]

Eat protein and exercise — do both together

Research shows that eating well and being active at the same time works far better than doing either one on its own. If your appetite has shrunk, ask your doctor about easy ways to add more protein to your meals.

Yang et al., BMC Geriatrics 2026 | Ref [26]



Ask for a full health review from your doctor

A thorough review covering your medications, nutrition, physical activity, and mental wellbeing is one of the most powerful frailty treatments available — and it starts with a conversation at your family doctor's office.

Macdonald et al., PLoS One 2020 | Ref [21]

Ages 80 and over

Every bit of movement still counts

Even past age 80, exercise improves strength, steadiness, and energy. A thorough health review by your doctor has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of hospital stays and nursing home admissions.

Kim & Rockwood, NEJM 2024 | doi.org/10.1056/NEJMra2301292

Move in whatever way works for you

Even gentle seated exercises improve strength and steadiness. You do not need to stand or walk long distances. A physiotherapist can design a safe, personalised plan for your current abilities. Do not wait for a fall before asking for help.

Dent et al., Curr Osteoporos Rep 2023 | Ref [28]

Focus on eating enough — not on eating less

Strict diets (low-salt, low-sugar, low-fat) can sometimes do more harm than good at this stage. The priority is eating enough food — especially protein. If your appetite has dropped, please tell your doctor.

Dent et al., Lancet 2023 | Ref [29]

Write down your wishes with your family

Work with your doctor and the people you trust to write down what matters most to you — including what you would want if your health changed significantly. Review this plan regularly so everyone is on the same page.

Chopra et al., MJA 2026 | Ref [20]

Ask about a referral to a frailty specialist

If frailty is having a real impact on your daily life, ask your family doctor about a referral to a geriatrician — a doctor who specialises in the health of older adults. There are programmes specifically designed to help.

Zheng et al., J Adv Nursing 2022 | Ref [8]

Five things that matter at every age

Strength exercise (most important)	Enough protein (every meal)	Good sleep (7 to 8 hours)	Social connection (stay engaged)	No smoking (quit at any age)
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Save your money — these have NOT been shown to help: Omega-3 fish oil capsules, testosterone, growth hormone, and computer brain-training games have all been studied in clinical trials. None of them have been shown to prevent or reverse frailty. The evidence is clear.

Kim & Rockwood, NEJM 2024 (Ref [22]) | Zheng et al., J Adv Nursing 2022 (Ref [8])



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Evidence-based
Plain language
2026

Am I at risk of frailty? — Quick self-check (FRAIL Scale)

Circle YES or NO for each question

Answer all five questions honestly. Add up how many times you answered YES. Your score is at the bottom.

- F FATIGUE** ☐ YES ☐ NO
Do you feel tired most of the time, even after resting?
- R RESISTANCE** ☐ YES ☐ NO
Do you have difficulty climbing one flight of stairs without stopping or resting?
- A AMBULATION** ☐ YES ☐ NO
Do you have difficulty walking 100 metres (about one city block) on your own?
- I ILLNESSES** ☐ YES ☐ NO
Have you been told by a doctor that you have 5 or more long-term health conditions?
(e.g. diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, lung disease, kidney disease, cancer, depression, high blood pressure, stroke, asthma)
- L LOSS OF WEIGHT** ☐ YES ☐ NO
Have you lost more than 5% of your body weight in the past year without trying?
(For example: if you weighed 80 kg, that is a loss of more than 4 kg)

MY SCORE (number of YES answers):

Score: 0

You are not frail right now.

Great news! Keep up the healthy habits in this guide to stay strong.

Score: 1 or 2

You may be in the early stages (pre-frail).

This is the best time to act. Focus on the steps in this guide for your age group, and mention this at your next doctor's appointment.

Score: 3, 4 or 5

You may be frail.

Please speak to your doctor at your next visit and show them this result. Frailty is treatable — help is available.

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