

# Starting Strength

## Exercise, Government-Style

by

Mark Rippetoe

The National Institute for Health operates a subdivision they call the National Institute on Aging, apparently charged with, among other very important things, the task of amusing us with their ideas about exercise for older people. From Wikipedia: “The NIA leads a broad scientific effort to understand the nature of aging and to extend the healthy, active years of life. In 1974, Congress granted authority to form NIA to provide leadership in aging research, training, health information dissemination, and other programs relevant to aging and older people.”

Finally, leadership. Previously we were all just standing around, waiting.



Their web page [Go4Life](#) illustrates the whole panoply of human activity: Endurance. Strength. Balance. Flexibility. In keeping with everything else the Federal Government’s bureaucracy does, this one is ineffective and inefficient, as well as embarrassingly silly and offensively condescending.

Since the NIA has gone to great lengths to pictorially illustrate their ideas about what older people should be doing for exercise, we thought we’d show you precisely what your [tax money](#) is being spent on.

### Endurance

The capacity known as “endurance” is merely the ability of the body to repeatedly apply sub-maximal amounts of force for an extended period of time. As such, endurance is a function of strength, and for anyone in a position to be concerned with the NIA’s opinion about increasing their endurance, getting stronger will improve endurance more efficiently than, for instance, running, which most older people cannot do.

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This illustrates something called “Sports.” I suppose this is meant to depict Seated Volleyball. The [NIA’s list of suggested sports](#) includes tennis, pickleball (a very slow version of tennis played with wooden paddles and balls that don’t bounce), hockey (ice hockey? for geriatric people??), and golf. Also on the list is wheelchair basketball, a very strenuous competitive sport played at the International Paralympic level; this is not a well-thought-out suggestion for geriatric exercise.



Here is an “indoor activity” that uses an exercise machine of some type, under *The Watchful Eye* of an expert trainer, identifiable by the sign hanging from her neck. Also [listed by the NIA](#) are swimming laps, joining a water aerobics class, dancing, performing martial arts (MMA for old people?), and bowling (indoor golf).



This photo illustrates “Outdoor Activities” such as cycling. Also [suggested by the NIA](#) are horseback riding (where the horse gets to exercise), sailing (a wonderful activity obviously accessible to nearly everyone, everywhere), snorkeling (apparently one swims indoors and snorkels outdoors), jogging or running, and skating (just the thing for older people prone to fractures).



“Around The House” is a fine place to be. You’re there anyway, doing things like gardening, “heavy” housework, sweeping, and raking. Things you’d be doing *anyway*. The “shoveling snow” suggestion is perhaps the most irresponsible on the whole [NIA list](#), because shoveling snow is very hard endurance work for an untrained older person, and kills several people each year. But if you stick to what the lady in the picture is doing, you’ll be fine.



This nice older lady is “Nordic Walking” with her poles, following the NIA’s advice to “walk or roll” for endurance exercise. Nordic walking involves not tripping over your poles, mall walking involves not tripping over adolescents, walking the dog involves not tripping over the dog, hiking involves not tripping over trees and rocks, and rolling your wheelchair involves other hazards.

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### Here is the Starting Strength version of endurance work for older people:

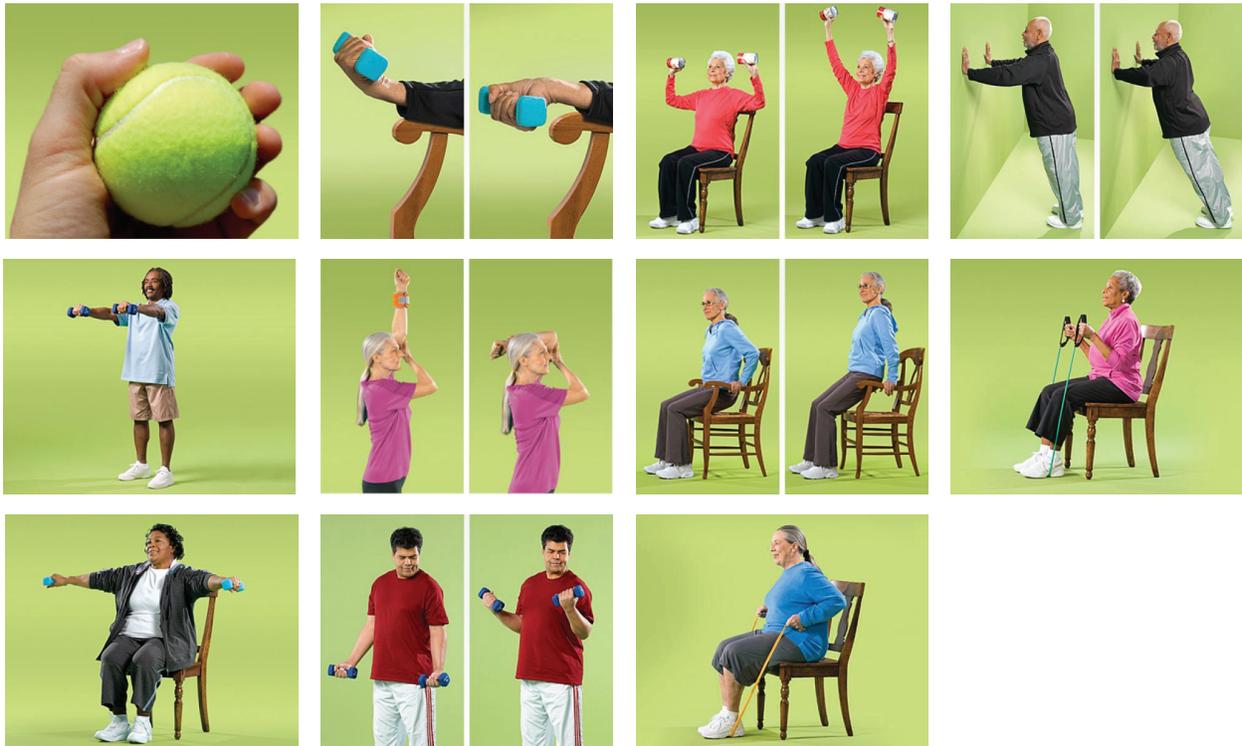
This is a weighted sled called “the prowler.” Note that this is actually strenuous, but that the intensity can be precisely controlled and increased with the very gradual addition of a little more weight. As opposed to wandering around in the mall. And this is a deadlift, which increases endurance by increasing strength, and does both better than “Nordic Walking.”



## Strength

Strength is the production of force against an external resistance. It is a function of your muscles’ ability to contract, thus moving your skeleton and applying force to the objects in your environment, including the floor and the things you touch with your hands.

This section is much worse. Here are all the pictures of the upper body exercises – no point in dragging it out.



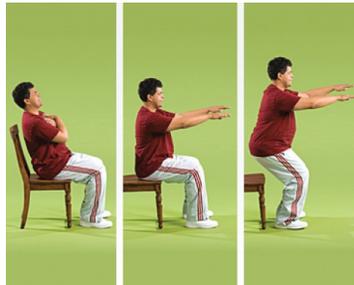
You really *must* read the instructions for these exercises. The “tips” are all a version of this: “As your progress, use a heavier weight.” Seriously? They fail to understand the most basic principle of physical improvement – that you don’t make progress *until* you use a heavier weight.

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Here are the Starting Strength upper body exercises for older people:



Now, the lower body exercises:



Quite literally, these “exercises” are positions you occupy *anyway*. Already. Accidentally. Every day. If they were capable of making you stronger, you’d already be stronger, accidentally. And how would it be possible to make these silly positions difficult enough to continue making you stronger for more than a few days?

Here are the Starting Strength lower body exercises for older people:



## Balance

Even more interesting are the following positions and “moves” which have been carefully selected to *demonstrate* the ability to balance, instead of *developing* this ability, as an exercise should do. Balance is the ability to exert sufficient force against the floor to maintain your center of mass directly over your feet, so you don’t fall. As such, balance is a function of strength. Do any of these positions have the potential to improve your balance? Or do they merely display what is left of this ability as you age?

Most of these were obviously developed by The Ministry of Silly Walks, and have precisely the same capacity to improve your balance as the expert coaching of Mr. Putey.



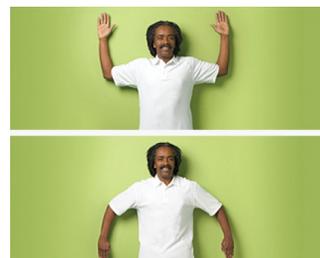
Here are the Starting Strength balance exercises:



Note the absence of people falling down. Note also the presence of the barbell, a tool for training balance that is gradually loaded with heavier weights while not falling down. Note also some repetition in the pictures. We don’t use many exercises, and most of them accomplish more than one thing.

## Flexibility

Flexibility is the ability to display a normal, useful range of motion around the joints of your body. The NIA website has lots of pictures of “flexibility moves” which are also very silly. Here are a few:



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We'd rather get something *more* accomplished, so Starting Strength uses these:



Our positions challenge your range of motion more effectively than theirs do, and make you progressively stronger while staying in balance at the same time.

Now, here is the important question: Why are older trainees using Starting Strength methods getting stronger, with better flexibility, endurance, and balance, using barbells, while the federal government's older trainees are restricted to waving their arms and legs around in the air, *activities that cannot possibly make anyone stronger?*

Seniors that have worked with Starting Strength Coaches have increased their strength, retired their walkers, tossed their canes, and decreased their insulin requirements. For both athletes and older people, an approach that is so conservative that it fails to make anything change is a waste of time, and time is much more precious a commodity to an older person.

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**Important update:** Our crack research team has uncovered some important details about the GO4LIFE/ NIA website and exercise recommendations. It appears as though **\$2,647,435** was spent on this project, with a public relations /advertising firm called JBS International, a company that specializes in government contracts. JBSI has “been a behind-the-scenes partner of the National Institute on Aging” since the “early 90s.” They interact across the ACA, and over the past 7 years have received about **\$430 million** in awards from the Federal Government. Their “Go4Life” website is linked across hundreds of

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.org and .gov pages, all featuring the same happy elderly models smiling at one another as they wiggle their arms and legs in front of out-of-focus pastel backgrounds.

Despite this astonishing investment, the following people who are listed as Experts on Aging-related Issues have the following credentials, and were apparently associated with the project (some info gathered from LinkedIn): ([Subject Matter Experts](#))

- **David Burton** is the Project Director at JBSI for the NIA's Go4Life initiative. He has a BA in History from Washington College. He serves primarily as a grant writer, editor, and project manager for JBSI. No mention of any exercise-related education or experience.
- **Susan Farrer** is the Deputy Project Director/Senior Print and Digital Project Manager on the Go4Life/NIA website for JBSI. She serves as a writer and editor for projects at JBSI. Ms. Farrer has a BS (?) in Journalism and an MS in Health Education from the University of Maryland. No mention of any exercise-related education or experience.

These people are listed as Aging experts on JBSI's website, and may have been associated with the Go4Life project:

- **Karen Bell, MD, MMS**, "is the Director of the Center for Sustainable Health and Care and a nationally recognized expert in health IT with clinical and leadership experience in the payer, provider, government, and public health sectors. As Chair of the Certification Commission for HIT (CCHIT), she was primary author of the CCHIT ACO/HIT Framework, the only consensus-developed, publicly available guidance on health IT for accountable care organizations. Dr. Bell was Director and Acting Deputy of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC). She has served as a Medical Director at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in several commercial health plans, and at Partners Community Healthcare, Inc. Dr. Bell is among the top 50 influential physician executives named by Modern Healthcare in 2013 and among the top 25 in 2012." No mention of any exercise-related education or experience.
- **Eileen Elias** is the Director of the Disability Service Center at JBSI. She is a former Deputy Director at the US Department of Health and Human Services, and an adjunct professor at Boston University, where she teaches an undergraduate course in disability-based public policy. She has a BA in "General Science" and a Masters of Education in Rehabilitation Counseling from Temple University. No mention of any exercise-related education or experience.
- **Donald Pratt** is a research associate at JBSI. He has a PhD in sociology from Syracuse University. Again, no mention of any exercise-related education or experience.

Once again, the NIH has spent **\$2.6 million dollars** on a website that encourages elderly people to "exercise" in ways that cannot effectively address the concerns that exercise for the elderly should address.

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