



Building Strong Calves to Maintain Your Youthful Stride

Luci Gabel
MA, MBA, ACSM, ACE

Calf muscles aren't just for looking nice in summer shorts and skirts. Along with other muscles around the ankle, strong and flexible calves help to protect your ankle from sprains and strains. These muscles are also key players in maintaining balance.

During the fall and winter months, it's great to have strong muscles around your ankles and good balance to protect yourself from injury due to any kind of slip or slide! The calf-raise is a good exercise to develop strength and flexibility in this area. Following is a description of calf raises you can do at home or anywhere:

Calf Raises

- Place one hand on a wall and stand with your legs hip distance apart, knees straight.
- Rise up onto your toes as high as you can go. Make sure that you keep your weight centered over your toes - don't lean onto your pinky toe or your big toe.
- Lower the heels down until they touch the floor, and lift them right back up.
- Repeat until you can do 20 x.

Increasing the Intensity

If you can do 20 or more repetitions, try the next intensity level, and then the next. Make sure that you have a banister or a wall to hold on to while you do these exercises.

- Intensity level II: Use one leg at a time.
- Intensity level III: Support yourself with one hand and hold a weight in the other.
- Intensity level IV: Combine exercises II and III: Use one leg at a time, and hold a weight.
- Intensity level V: Place your feet at the edge of the stairs (It's best to use the first step on the stairs to avoid falling if you lose balance). Make sure the ball of your foot is entirely on the stair, and let your heel hang down until you get a stretch feeling in your calf. Then lift back up onto the balls of the feet. Use one leg or two, depending on your stability level.

It's recommended that you talk to your doctor before starting to workout. This is basic exercise information for the general public. If you have injuries or other physical limitations, this exercise may not be appropriate. A good rule of thumb: If it doesn't feel good- don't do it!

© Luci Gabel, Posted on www.FiftyAndFurthermore.com, September 2008