

# ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

## Brain Fitness

Brain Fitness is a popular topic among older adults. Here are some ideas to incorporate brain fitness as part of your Senior Day event. Copy the brain fitness senior health information handouts to distribute at your event.

- **Tai Chi demonstration.** Recent research shows that this ancient Chinese exercise may help improve mental health and activity.
- **Brain Healthy Foods.** Invite a local medical/health expert to discuss how certain foods can help maintain your brain health.
- **Physical Activity and Brain Health.** Recent studies show regular physical activity can help brain health. Invite a local health educator to discuss the benefit of regular exercise for brain fitness.

## Walking

- **Scenic walk.** Through a public park, with checkpoints along the way. At each station, participants answer health questions and get their walk/run log stamped.
- **Fitness trail with exercise stations along the way**
- **Laps around an outdoor or indoor track**
- **“Dog walk/run” to a dog park or pet store, with healthy treats and fresh water for all**
- **Nature walk led by a local expert:**
  - identifying flower and tree species at a botanical garden
  - bird watching at a park, lake, or river

- **Zoo tour**
- **Historic walking tour of homes, museum, town square, etc.**
- **Designated location walk—to and from a place of interest or an event**
  - art gallery or exhibit
  - band shell featuring live entertainment
- **Mall walk with incentives at checkpoints or after each lap**
- **Scavenger hunt/treasure hunt**

## Exercising

The following exercise activities are organized into three groups, based on the primary benefit derived from the exercise: **aerobic, strength, or flexibility**. You might want to offer at least one activity from each benefit group to emphasize the importance of cross-training.

- **Aerobic exercise for cardiovascular strength, weight management, and endurance**
  - aerobics/step aerobics
  - low-impact aerobics
  - Jazzercise®
  - Tae Bo®/cardio-kickboxing/martial arts
  - interval training
  - bicycling—group ride on a bicycle path
  - Spinning® class
  - jumping rope
  - rowing

- **Resistance training for strengthening bones, muscles, and tissues**
  - professional equipment
  - hand weights or soup cans
  - Thera-Band® exercise bands
  - resistance tubing or rings
- **Flexibility, range of motion, balance, and strength**
  - bending and stretching/sculpting
  - Tai Chi
  - Pilates
  - Yoga
  - balance boards
  - combined Yoga/Tai Chi/Pilates
  - Martial Arts: Judo, Jujitsu, Karate, Kendo, Kung Fu, or Tae Kwon Do

## Recreational Sports and Games

This section contains many ideas for recreational sports and active games. These activities can be organized as drills, workshops, tournaments, or noncompetitive games.

- **Team sports**
  - basketball
  - softball
  - soccer
  - volleyball
  - field hockey
  - indoor broom hockey
  - wallyball (an indoor variation of volleyball)
- **Racquet/paddle sports**
  - tennis
  - racquetball
  - badminton

- squash
- table tennis

- **Miscellaneous sports**
  - billiards
  - Nintendo® Wii™ video games
  - bowling
  - archery
  - golf
  - low ropes course
- **Outdoor/lawn games**
  - fishing
  - croquet
  - bocce ball
  - lawn bowling
  - shuffleboard
  - horseshoes
  - Frisbee® golf
  - lawn darts
- **Active games for fun**
  - relays/races
    - carrying an egg on a spoon
    - stacking cups
    - hula hoop rolling
    - passing the baton
  - capture the flag
  - parachute fun
  - water balloon toss
  - musical chairs

## Water Activities

Water exercise is beneficial for maintaining fitness, preventing injury, and for rehabilitation. Each of these activities can be conducted as a group activity, as a demo, or both. Invite participants to try a range of water activities that promote aerobic, strengthening, and flexibility exercises.

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- **Swimming**
  - recreational lap swim
  - stroking techniques
  - treading water
- **Water exercise classes**
  - water aerobics
  - water ballet
  - Aqua Toning using beach balls, kickboards, styrofoam dumbbells, hand paddles, and “noodles”
  - Aqua Dance with music
  - Aqua Kickboxing
  - Aqua Pilates
  - Aqua Yoga
  - Aqua Tai Chi
- **Other water exercises**
  - “wall” warm-ups and exercises
  - water-walking/jogging/running
- **Water therapy for:**
  - injuries
  - arthritis, diabetes, and other conditions
- **Water sports/games**
  - scuba/snorkeling
  - water volleyball
  - water basketball
  - dive for coins or objects
  - water polo
- **Water safety**
  - lifesaving techniques demo/class
- **Dance classes**
  - ballroom dancing
  - ballet/modern dance
  - tap
  - jazz/hip hop
  - belly dancing
  - hula dancing
  - ethnic dancing
  - clogging
  - line dancing
  - square dancing
  - contra dancing (folk-style dance)
  - swing
  - folk dancing
- **Party ideas—incorporate costume and food into party theme**
  - Country western
    - square dancing
    - line dancing: Macarena, Cha-cha slide, Cotton Eyed Joe
  - Crazy dances
    - Hokey pokey
    - Chicken dance
    - Conga line
    - Bunny hop
    - Mexican hat dance
  - Dancing through the Decades
    - Roaring 20’s—featuring the Charleston
    - Sock hop—featuring the Twist
    - Disco fever—featuring the Hustle
- **Contests**
  - limbo
  - dance-a-thon
  - rock-a-thon in rocking chairs

## Dancing

You may want to offer one or more types of dance classes, have a dance party, or contests. Props and costumes always add interest.

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## Health Information Activities

If you will have seniors in different age groups, select a broad-reaching topic or consider addressing two issues simultaneously that will appeal to different ages. Health information topics can be covered with a speaker, panel discussion, question and answer session, demonstration, or a combination of these formats.

- **Medications**

- understanding over-the-counter pain products
- managing your “meds”
- medication interactions with certain foods, beverages, and herbal supplements
- discussion of routine vaccinations, boosters, etc.

- **Coping with specific issues/disorders**

- Parkinson’s disease
- lupus
- SAD—seasonal affective disorder
- sleep disorders
- edema management
- asthma
- Alzheimer’s disease and caregiver issues
- urinary incontinence, bladder disorders
- arthritis (PACE – People with Arthritis Can Exercise)
- mental health/depression awareness
- hormone replacement therapy— is it for you?
- make-up and hair care tips for cancer survivors/people with skin disorders
- fibromyalgia
- knee and hip replacement surgery— why are they so common

- how to prepare for surgery
- grief management
- obesity
- loneliness/social interaction issues

- **Safety/Prevention**

- exercise safety
- healthy back exercises
- taking care of your feet
- skin health: mole mapping and skin assessments
- dental health and hygiene
- stroke prevention/quick response
- preventing falls
  - fall-proofing your “living quarters”
  - safe footing/footwear
  - balance exercises
- CPR/Heimlich maneuver
- fire prevention and safety
- disaster preparation
- safe driving tips
- safe travel tips
- crime prevention tips
- self-defense
- telephone scam prevention
- identity theft prevention

- **Exercise-related topics**

- warm-up/cool-down routines
  - buying the right athletic shoes
  - dressing for the weather
  - correct breathing techniques
  - benefits of cross training
  - target heart rate clinic
  - do’s and don’ts of using light weights
  - how to find a health club
  - proper use of therapy balls
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- keep it up: exercising while traveling
- home exercise equipment: what do I need?
- before/after testimonials from seniors who have begun exercise routines
- bike safety discussion—helmet fitting
- joint maintenance/flexibility concerns

- **Miscellaneous**

- training for a fitness event—marathon, triathlon, walkathon
- memory sharpening tips
- living will
- myths and facts about alcohol consumption
- advances in medicine
- new health and fitness products on the market
- latest health and fitness books, cookbooks, CDs & DVDs
- alternative health
  - reflexology
  - acupuncture
  - magnet therapy
  - Reiki™ —energy healing
  - aromatherapy
- demystifying health insurance
- Medicare drug coverage
- truths and myths about healthy aging
- the importance of laughter
- health benefits of pets
- finding reliable health information on the Internet
- senior respite or home help programs
- presentation on organ donation
- financial planning strategies
- keeping a health history

## Screening and Testing Activities

The goal of screening and testing is to increase awareness and highlight any needs that may require further investigation by a doctor or other professional—*not* to make definitive diagnoses of medical problems. Participants will be most interested and engaged by screenings/tests that provide immediate results or feedback. Certain screenings, of course, should be kept confidential: for example, cancer, weight, body fat, and memory diagnostics.

You may want to consider including any of the following screenings/tests:

- arthritis assessment
  - back problem risk assessment
  - blood glucose
  - blood pressure
  - BMI (body mass index) calculations
  - body composition/body fat analysis
  - breast cancer
  - cholesterol
  - coordination test
  - dental exam/oral cancer screening
  - diabetes testing
  - fitness assessment
  - flexibility, endurance, and strength testing
  - foot assessment for bunions, proper arch support, nail disorders, etc.
  - hearing
  - lung screening/pulse oximetry
  - memory diagnostic testing
  - osteoporosis analysis/spinal screening/ bone density
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- posture/gait analysis/balance
- prostate cancer
- skin cancer/melanoma
- stress level testing
- thyroid
- vision and night blindness testing/  
cataract and glaucoma screening

## Nutrition

Nutrition can be addressed through various formats including speakers, cooking demos, hands-on workshops, recipe distribution, games, and sampling.

- **Healthy foods**
    - health benefits of fruits and veggies
    - healthy snacks
    - make your own trail mix
    - energy drinks
    - healthy food sampling booth
    - low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt social (healthy toppings)
    - smart salad bar tips
    - packing a healthy picnic basket
    - healthy cookout options: turkey, soy, or veggie burgers
    - health benefits of green and black tea
  - **Nutrition basics**
    - food supplements: What vitamins, herbs, and minerals do I need to take?
    - healthy portion sizes
    - fiber in the diet: how much is enough?
    - all about antioxidants
    - boosting calcium content
    - food pyramid discussion
    - reading food labels
  - **Eating strategies**
    - why mini-meals and “grazing” may be healthier than “three squares”
    - healthier eat out/take out strategies
    - “guess-the-calories” contest
    - safe dieting
    - kickoff a healthy weight-loss program
    - how sound are popular diets?  
Assessing the Atkins Diet<sup>®</sup>, Weight Watchers<sup>®</sup>, etc.
    - keeping a food journal
    - fueling up for competition
  - **Cooking with local chef/celebrity**
    - empty nesters—cooking for one or two
    - cooking tips for gluten-free diets/  
food allergies
    - cooking healthy the vegetarian way
    - eating healthy the Mediterranean way
    - healthy grilling (focus on fish and veggies)
    - great-tasting roasted vegetables
    - microwave or convection oven cooking
    - cooking the low-sodium,  
low-cholesterol, low-fat way
    - adapting recipes for diabetics
    - making high-fiber bread with  
bread machine
    - adding whole grains to recipes
  - **Miscellaneous**
    - walk to a local grocery store, health food store, or farmer’s market for a discussion on preparation of healthy, creative, economical meals
    - healthy recipe exchange (each participant brings copies of a favorite recipe, and leaves with a cookbook or collection of recipe cards)
    - food safety/food storage tips
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## Relaxing and Socializing

- **Relaxation techniques**
    - Massage/self-massage demo
    - therapeutic touch
    - meditation
    - mini-facials
  - **Card and board games**
    - Bunco
    - Pinochle
    - Canasta
    - Bridge
    - Jigsaw Puzzles
    - Mahjong
    - Scrabble
    - Chess/Checkers
    - Bingo (calling out health terms)
  - **Other games for mental stimulation**
    - crossword puzzles/word searches/  
word scrambles
    - Jeopardy
    - Sudoku
    - trivia
    - spelling bee (health terms)
    - memory games
      - “Concentration”
      - “Finish the Saying”
      - “Name That Tune”
      - “Which Happened First?”  
(historical events)
  - **Hands-on art therapy**
    - gardening
    - flower arranging
    - painting
    - ceramics/sculpture
    - scrapbooking
    - calligraphy
    - woodworking
    - stain-glass
    - quilting
    - jewelry making
    - sewing
    - knitting
  - **Technology**
    - computer workshop
    - digital photography
    - wonders of the World Wide Web
    - how to do genealogy research online
    - how to use the latest high-tech gadgets
  - **Entertainment**
    - classic movie comedy and popcorn
    - comedian—live or videotaped
    - magician/learning magic tricks
    - juggler/group juggling
    - fitness-wear fashion show
    - motivational/inspirational speaker
  - **Fine arts**
    - singing
    - instruments
    - local band performance
    - local dance troupe
    - talent show
    - senior exercise team (dancers, aerobics,  
marching, etc.), to demonstrate and/or  
teach their moves
    - charades—relate to health/fitness
    - writing poetry
  - **Community involvement**
    - flower, shrub or tree planting to  
beautify an outdoor space
    - painting park benches or playground  
equipment
    - helping older seniors with home  
maintenance tasks
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## Seated Activities for Special Needs

Many of the previous activity suggestions can be adapted to allow seniors with special needs to fully participate in your event. However, if you really want to meet the needs of seniors who have limited mobility, it's important to offer forms of exercise specifically designed to be done while sitting.

Brainstorm for ways to adapt traditional fitness activities, and think about including some of the activities below. Plan to have plenty of staff and volunteers on hand to pair up with special-needs seniors as needed. And be sure to let more active senior participants know they are welcome to try the chair events, too. Seated exercise can be fun for everyone!

### ● Seated activities

- exercise while you sit
  - chair aerobics
  - chair yoga or Pilates
  - in-chair swimmer's workout choreographed to a water tune
  - "airplane trip" stretching class—chairs lined up flight-style
  - Simon Says with stretching
  - sing-along with upper body stretches
  - free weight workout for upper body
  - resistance training with elastic exercise bands, towels, or dumbbells
  - finger and hand stretches
  - grip ball exercises
- armchair dancing (e.g., "sit down polka" with leader to call moves)
- throwing games—moving chairs farther apart after each toss
  - hard boiled egg toss

- beach ball toss
- ring toss
- darts
- bean bag toss
- Frisbee®
- NERF®
- horseshoes
- hot potato
- water balloons

### ● Wheelchair specific activities

- sports
  - basketball
  - softball
  - kickball
  - soccer
  - volleyball—try a balloon or beach ball
- bowling with weighted therapy ball
- obstacle course
- races/relays
- "walk 'n roll"—around a gymnasium or fitness track
- "nature roll"—around a nature center or you can set up your own
- partner exercises: seated palm-to-palm pushes, gentle tug of war, etc. (pair up two special-needs seniors or a senior with a staff member/volunteer)

### ● Miscellaneous

- raised-bed or container gardening class
  - wading pool "fishing"
  - raking designs for an Oriental sand/rock garden
  - motivational talk by a wheelchair athlete
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# IDEAS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR ACTIVITIES

## Themed Event

For this approach, you would first select a fun theme and then plan all of the activities, food, music, decorations, etc. around it. Examples of overall themes include the following:

- **Ocean theme**
  - seafood snacks and recipes
  - meditation to ocean sounds
  - aquatic exercise
  - aromatherapy with a sea scent
  - facials with sea ingredients
- **Eastern influences**
  - healthy Asian recipes
  - lecture on acupuncture
  - tai chi class
  - introduction to Feng shui
  - sand raking workshop
- **Spa day**
  - Yoga, tai chi or other quiet activity
  - blood pressure check
  - back massage (chair or table)
  - foot massage and podiatric screening
  - nutritious snacks and beverages served at a juice bar
  - facial/skin care presentation

## Fundraising

The main activity of the day could be a fundraiser such as a walk-a-thon, dance-a-thon, bike-a-thon (on stationary bikes), or a swim-a-thon. Or, you may decide to have just one of the sub-events as a fundraising

activity. Some additional fundraising ideas include:

- **Sports-a-thon**
  - pledge per home run, basket, goal, “hole in one,” etc.
- **Arts and crafts projects for sale**
- **Healthy baked goods sale**
  - get residents to sign up ahead of time to bring a healthy treat for sale
- **Ring toss or a similar game**
  - sell throws (e.g., three for \$1) to win small health-related prizes

## Noncompetitive fun

This approach emphasizes the importance of just getting seniors up and moving. Keep it light, fun, and noncompetitive! Some ideas for this approach include:

- **Not keeping score of games**
- **Adding a funny twist to a game** (e.g., running bases in reverse order)

## Health fair

You may want to include a health fair where participants can be screened for various health problems, make contact with local or national organizations, and pick up useful health and fitness information. A health fair could be set up as the main event or as a sub-event.

If your organization is a hospital, you probably have all of the people and equipment you need to set up a successful health fair. If you don't, you might propose partnering

with a nearby hospital, senior center, etc. to pool your resources.

Alternatively, you can contact the following organizations requesting them to send representatives and/or free publications to your fair. (Look for listings in your local phone directory.):

- **A local Medicare office**
- **Area health insurance plans**
- **Local chapters of the:**
  - American Diabetes Association
  - Arthritis Foundation
  - American Cancer Society
  - American Heart Association
  - American Red Cross
- **Local pharmacies**
- **Specialists**
  - optometrists for vision screenings and eye glass adjustments/cleanings
  - podiatrists for foot screenings
- **Other health and/or senior-related organizations**

Also, invite a variety of local groups/organizations to run booths at the health fair, for example:

- **Park departments and other organizations offering fitness programs**
- **Special-interest senior groups** (dancing groups, walking clubs, etc.)
- **Organizations seeking senior volunteers**
- **Activity groups sponsored by local houses of worship**
- **Community colleges offering courses that would interest seniors**

If staffed booths aren't possible, create an attractive display of brochures on each health topic.

## Invite a Speaker

One way to entertain your participants is to hire a speaker to talk at your event. A speaker could be anyone—a local celebrity, an athlete or fitness instructor, a health expert from your town, etc. This can offer a good break from physical activity, or allow your less active participants a chance to get involved.

### Tips for Lining Up a Speaker

- **Before contacting potential speakers, know the date and time of your event, as well as the probable size and make-up of the audience.**
- **Know your budget for speaker fees.** Will you be working within a fixed budget, or raising money through fundraising or sponsorships? Finding a speaker who is located nearby will keep costs down. For community speakers, try local colleges or hospital speaker bureaus.
- **Be sure to choose a presentation that will suit the room size and the available video, sound and stage equipment.** Discuss these factors with potential speakers.
- **Interview each candidate, and if possible, view a video of his or her presentation.**
- **Have a letter of agreement between your organization and the chosen speaker(s), confirming the date, time and length of presentation, the topic, the agreed-upon fee, cancellation policies, and other particulars such as whether the speaker may sell products at the event.**
- **Before the event, be sure to give the speaker adequate background on your organization, the event, and the audience.**

## Team-building games

Team-building games incorporate physical activity, fun, and a forum for socialization and relationship building. These types of games are best played among the residents of a retirement community or between the residents and the staff of a retirement community or nursing home. Below are two examples of team-building games.

**Blanketball (8-24 players):** Divide the group into two teams. The members of each team spread themselves out around the edges of the blanket, holding it with both hands. One team places a beach ball in the center of the blanket and propels it over the net. The other team tries to catch the ball and then sends it back over the net. Teams have to move as a unit to position the blanket under the place where they anticipate the beach ball will land.

**Team Cheer:** For an event with games, relays, etc., have each team make up a team cheer (preferably with movements) that they will use throughout the day.

## Intergenerational participation

This approach focuses on getting seniors involved with younger generations.

Activities could be organized between seniors and:

- **Family members—children and/or grandchildren**
- **Students from local schools**
- **Members of youth groups**
  - Girls Scouts
  - Boy Scouts
  - Indian Princesses
- **Local youth sports teams**

## Location-specific event

With this approach, activities are selected based on the location of the event. Examples of location-specific events include:

- **The local mall**
  - invite mall merchants with health and fitness related merchandise to do demonstrations, fashion shows, or store tours.
  - set up a health fair
  - organize a fitness walk with fitness stations along the way
- **The park**
  - noncompetitive sports games
  - fishing derby
  - park clean-up
  - kite flying
  - healthy picnic lunch

### Preparing a mall scavenger hunt:

Develop a list of health and fitness items and the stores where they are to be found. When participants find specific items at each store, they receive a sticker. The team with the most items by the end of the time limit is the winner.

## Incentives and rewards

This approach emphasizes using incentives and rewards for seniors to get involved in as many event activities as possible as well as to be more active on a daily basis. The following are ideas for motivating participants at your event:

- **Provide each person with an activity card or “passport”**
  - after completing an activity, the card is stamped in the appropriate place.

- participants receive 1-5 raffle tickets—based on the number of activities completed.
- those with completed cards are eligible for the grand prize drawing at the end of the event.
- **Have a poker walk at the health fair.**
  - hand out one playing card at each booth
  - after collecting five cards, one can be discarded for each new one (always keeping five cards in their hand).
  - at the end, players turn in their cards—the best poker hand wins a prize.
- Issue fitness dollars after an activity is completed. (At the end of the day, participants can cash them in for healthy prizes.)
- **Remind participants that walking the fair is good exercise.**
  - Post encouraging signs:
    - “Once around the fair and you have walked a mile!”*
    - “From the first table to this point, you have burned X number of calories!”*
- **Ask residents to write a testimonial about their exercise routine and how it has changed their lives.** Publish testimonials to be distributed at the event.
- **Plan your health fair as the big finish of a week/month of pre-event activities.** When participants register in advance, give or mail each person an activity calendar with boxes for each day’s health/fitness activity (to be stamped upon completion). For example, one day’s activity could relate to safety, another to arthritis, diabetes, cardiofitness—use your imagination! At the end of the week/month on National Senior Health & Fitness Day, participants are awarded prizes depending on how many activities they completed.

## Brain Fitness Resources

Here are some resources if you are interested in brain fitness for your Senior Day event. Contact us if you need more help.

1. Terry Stickels is a well-known author and speaker on brain fitness. Visit his Web site for more about his brain fitness programs and materials: [www.terrystickels.com](http://www.terrystickels.com)
2. Here are several companies that offer brain fitness programs and resources. (These are listed in alphabetical order.)
  - CogniFit — [www.cognifit.com](http://www.cognifit.com)
  - Dakim — [www.dakim.com](http://www.dakim.com)
  - Lumos Labs — [www.lumosity.com](http://www.lumosity.com)
  - NeoCorta — [www.neocorta.com](http://www.neocorta.com)
  - PositScience — [www.positscience.com](http://www.positscience.com)
  - Sharpbrains — [www.sharpbrains.com](http://www.sharpbrains.com)