



Benton
Hospice
Service

TWO MINUTES THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

To Your Health (Gazette-Times, Democrat-Herald)
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These days you can hardly open a newspaper, walk through a bookstore, or even check your email without being bombarded with advice about saving money so you can have a better, more comfortable retirement. Everybody has recommendations, ranging from how to save on your bus fare to how to invest your millions. But I've never seen anything at all about how to prepare so you can have a better, more comfortable death.

As a hospice physical therapist, I work with people who, regardless of the state of their finances, don't have the resources to satisfy their simple wish to move from a bed to a wheelchair or bedside commode. Even achieving a comfortable position in bed—to get a good deep breath, to swallow, and to look up to interact with family and friends—can become challenging.

I can't promise that if you follow my advice you'll be guaranteed these abilities at the end of your life; there are diseases that can circumvent all our best efforts. But I can guarantee that for an extremely small investment of time you can prevent some common debilities that can rob us of autonomy in our last years and months of life.

There are four simple and easy items in my prescription—four items which can be accomplished in less than **two minutes a day** by even a marginally able-bodied person. In fact, the most difficult part of filling this prescription is remembering to do it. Linking the items to a routine daily activity can be the key to getting them done. Two minutes after your morning shower, two minutes during the evening news, two minutes after tidying the kitchen, or two minutes during a phone conversation are some possibilities. These exercises improve balance, muscle strength, and joint flexibility—fundamental requirements for many ordinary daily tasks.

1. WALL STRETCH

Stand with your back to a wall, your heels three or four inches from the wall, and stretch your arms out to the side, pressing as much of your body as possible (including the backs of your hands) against the wall. You will have a gap at your neck, and probably at the small of your back. As you may not be able to get your head and arms flush against the wall, only press as far back as you comfortably can. Be sure to keep your chin tucked, rather than tilted up, to get your head to touch the wall. Hold ten to fifteen seconds.

2. REPEATED SIT TO STAND

Sit on the edge of a straight-back chair that has armrests. With your hands on the armrests, with your feet about shoulder width apart, and keeping your hips in a neutral

position so your knees stay aligned over your toes, push down against the armrests and stand up. Sit down. Repeat five to ten times.

3. STANDING ON ONE FOOT

Face the kitchen sink (or another high, sturdy surface that you can use to recover your balance if necessary). With your hands poised just above the ledge of the supportive surface, but not touching unless you have to, stand on one foot. While you keep the toes of the other foot up and facing forward, swing your leg several inches out to the side. Repeat five to ten times. Then swing the leg a few inches to the back. Repeat five to ten times. Repeat on the other side.

4. HEEL AND TOE LIFTS

In the same position as number 3, stand on one foot and lift the heel of that foot so that your weight is on the ball of your foot, then rock back until your toes lift and your weight transfers to your heel. Repeat five to ten times. Repeat on the other side.

After you do two minutes a day: WALK, WALK, WALK. Look for opportunities to increase the time you spend walking. Swing at least one of your arms as you walk; and if you're carrying things, transfer them occasionally so each side gets a chance to swing freely. Enjoy the pleasant sensation of the earth pressing up through your feet and legs, and the rhythm of your alternating steps.

Death is the only thing in life that is truly equitable—we each get exactly one. How we die, however, can be influenced by how we live. Maintaining basic strength and balance skills may mean greater independence and comfort in the last years and months of life. In my opinion, having the physical resources to accomplish tasks that can make the end of life peaceful and meaningful is as valuable as money in the bank.