

How to Improve Your Flexibility

Stretching exercises give you more freedom of movement to do the things you need to do and the things you like to do. Stretching exercises alone can improve your flexibility, but they will not improve your endurance or strength.

How Much, How Often

- ② **Stretch after you do your regularly scheduled strength and endurance exercises.**
- ② If you can't do endurance or strength exercises for some reason, and stretching exercises are the only kind you are able to do, do them at least 3 times a week, for at least 20 minutes each session.
- ② **Do each stretching exercise 3 to 5 times at each session.**
- ② Slowly stretch into the desired position, as far as possible without pain, and **hold the stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.** Relax, then repeat, trying to stretch farther.

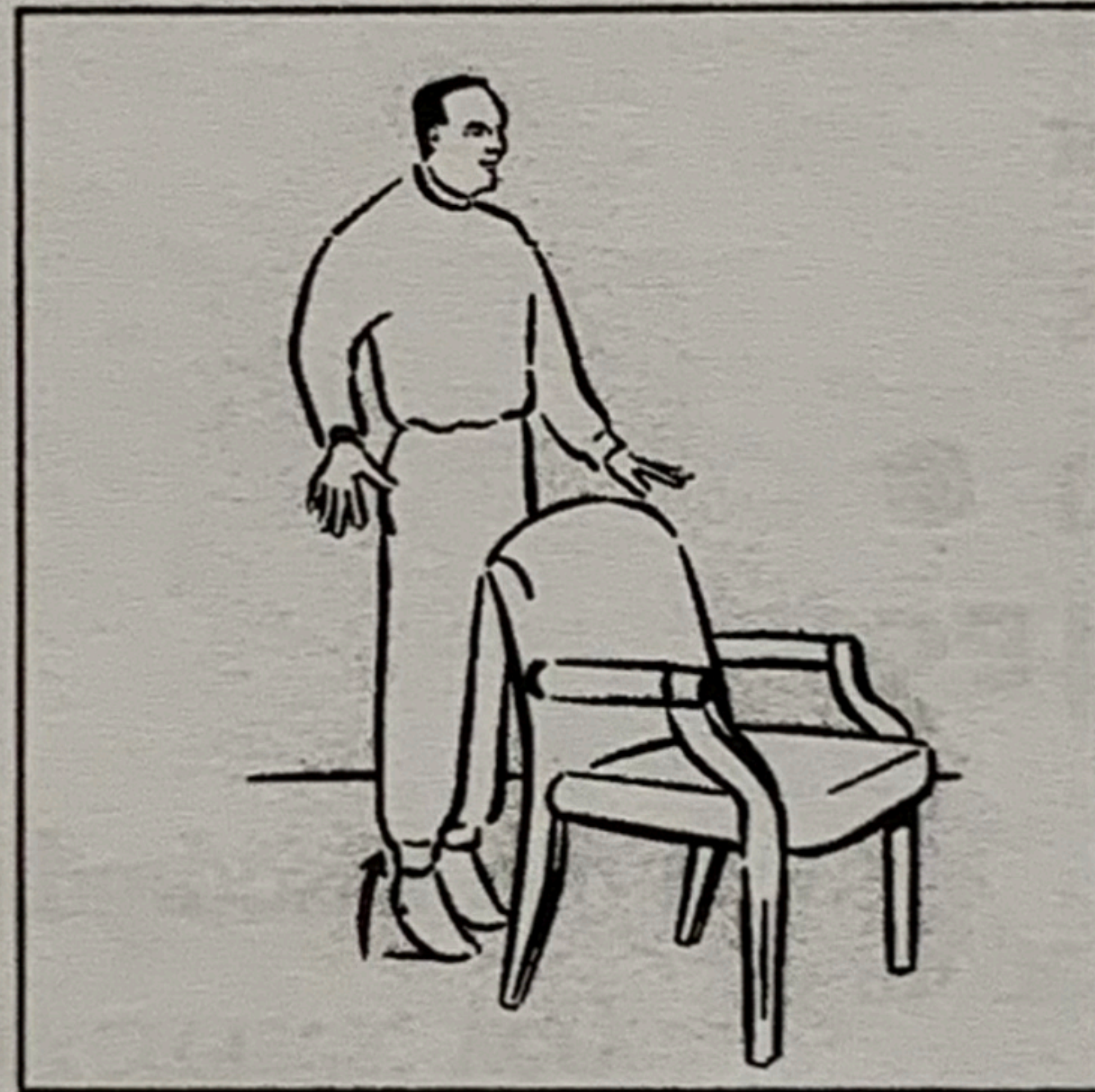
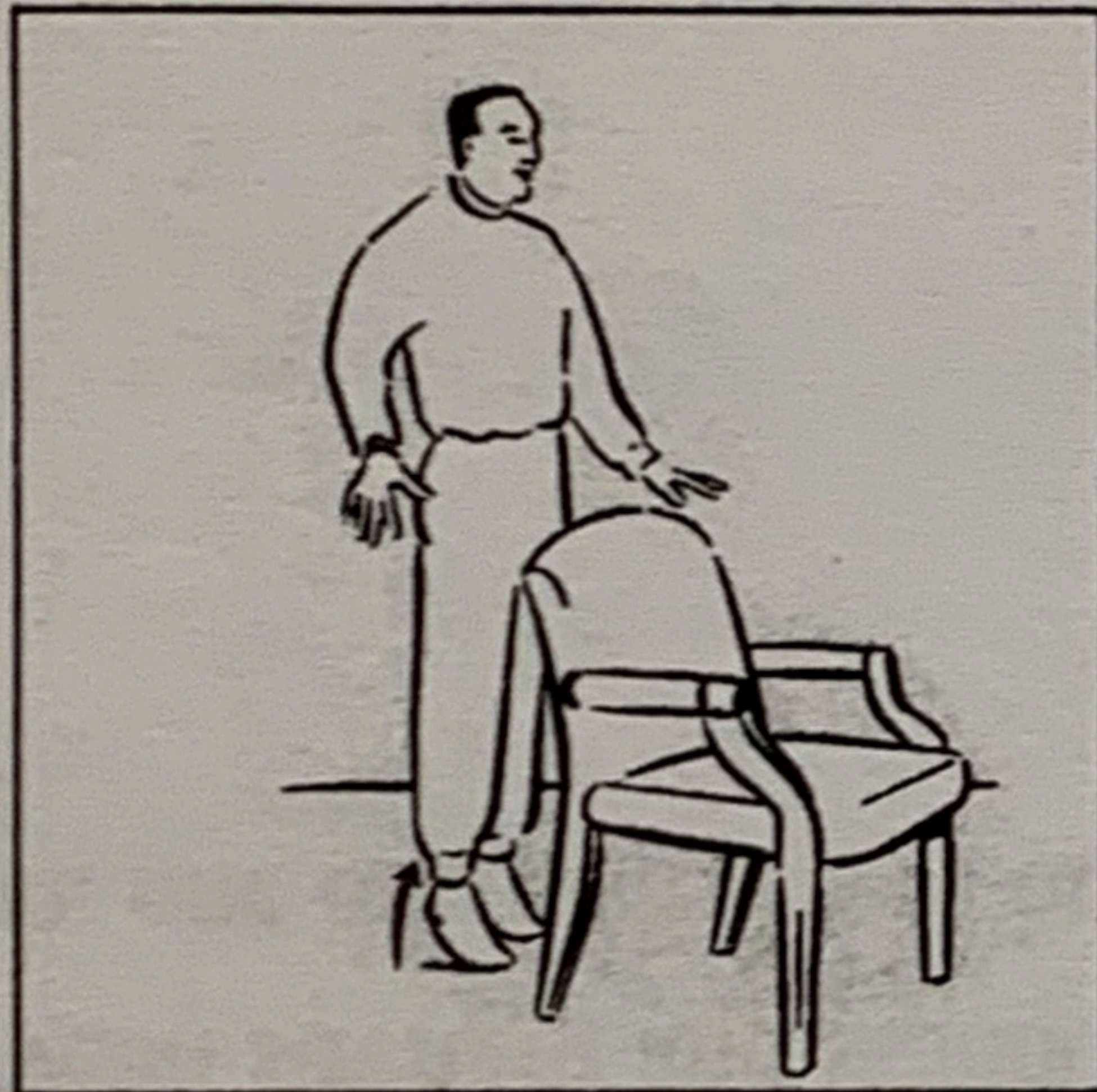
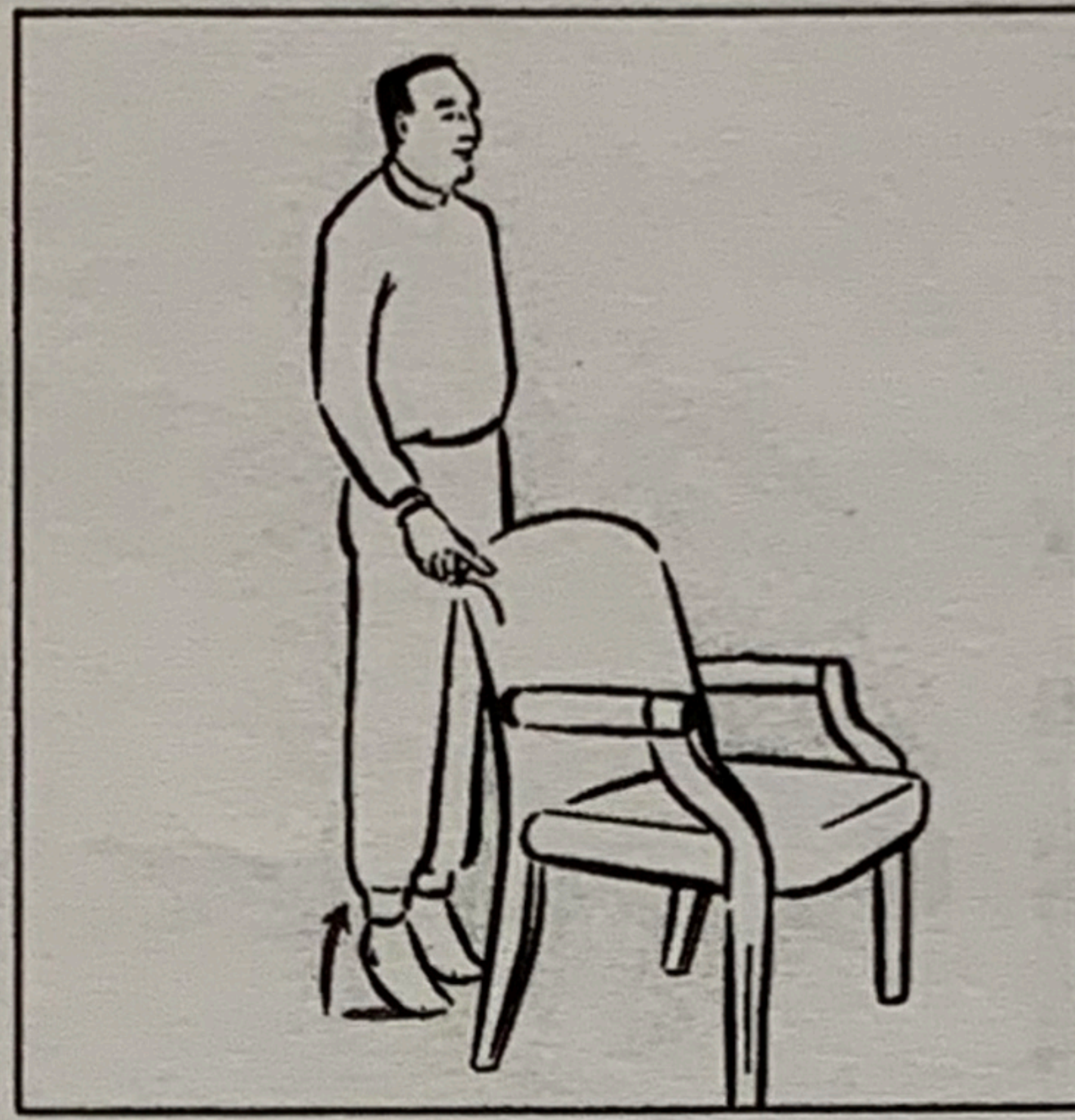
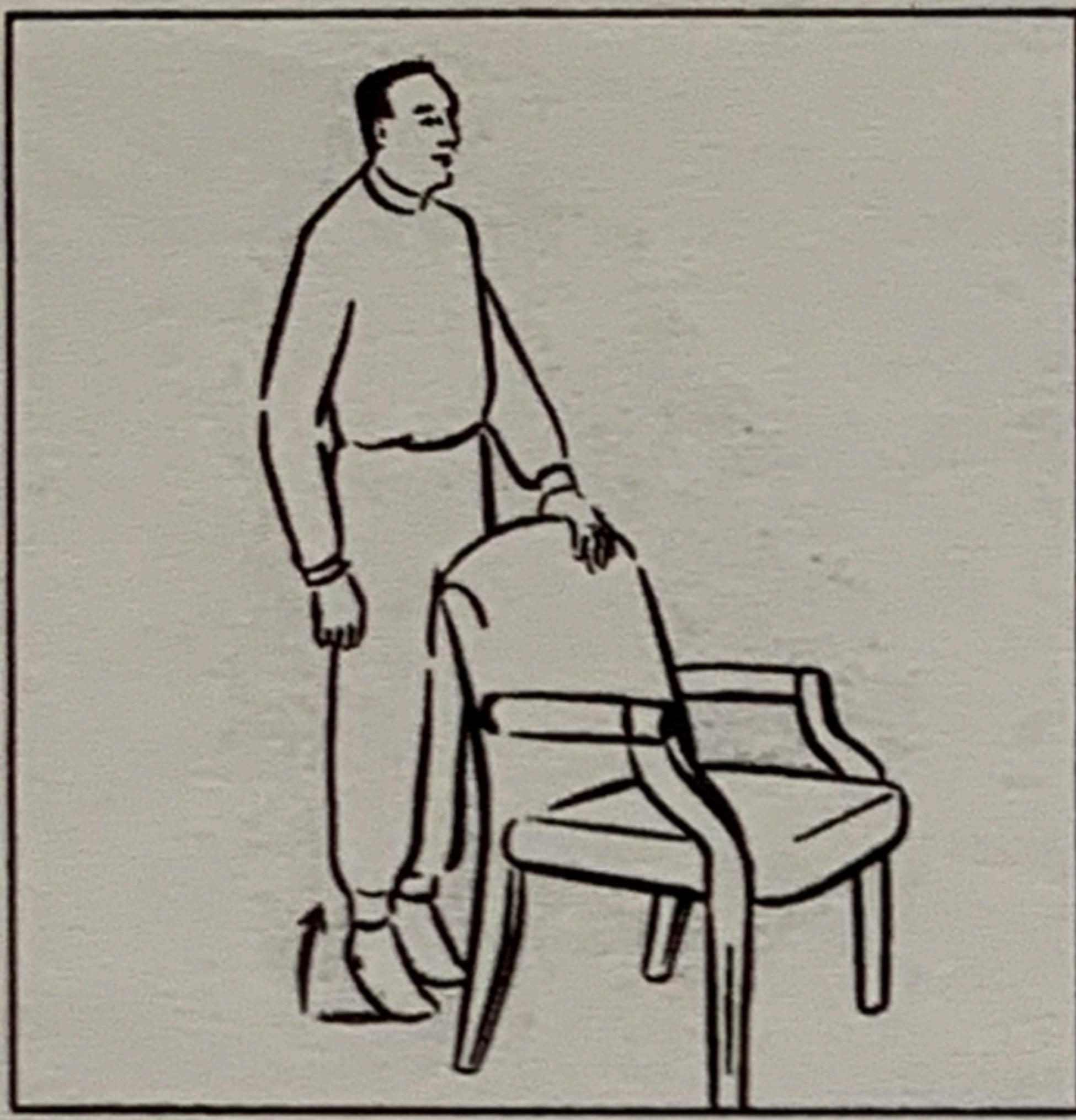
Safety

- ② If you have had a hip replacement, check with your surgeon before doing lower body exercises.
- ② If you have had a hip replacement, don't cross your legs or bend your hips past a 90-degree angle.
- ② Always warm up before stretching exercises (do them after endurance or strength exercises, for example; or, if you are doing only stretching exercises on a particular day, do a little bit of easy walking and arm-pumping first). Stretching your muscles before they are warmed up may result in injury.
- ② Stretching should never cause pain, especially joint pain. If it does, you are stretching too far and you need to reduce the stretch so that it doesn't hurt.
- ② Mild discomfort or a mild pulling sensation is normal.
- ② Never "bounce" into a stretch; make slow, steady movements instead. Jerking into position can cause muscles to tighten, possibly resulting in injury.
- ② Avoid "locking" your joints into place when you straighten them during stretches. Your arms and legs should be straight when you stretch them, but

don't lock them in a tightly straight position. You should always have a very small amount of bending in your joints while stretching.

Progressing

You can progress in your stretching exercises; the way to know how to limit yourself is that stretching should never hurt. It may feel slightly uncomfortable, but not painful. Push yourself to stretch farther, but not so far that it hurts.



Plantar Flexion

Plantar flexion is already included in your strength exercises. When doing your strength exercises, add these modifications to plantar flexion as you progress: Hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. **Stand straight; hold onto a table or chair for balance.**
2. **Slowly stand on tip toe, as high as possible.**
3. **Hold position for 1 second.**
4. **Slowly lower heels all the way back down. Pause.**
5. **Repeat 8 to 15 times.**
6. **Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 repetitions.**
7. **Add modifications as you progress.**



Knee Flexion

Do knee flexion as part of your regularly scheduled strength exercises, and add these modifications as you progress: Hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. **Stand straight; hold onto a table or chair for balance.**
2. **Slowly bend knee as far as possible, so foot lifts up behind you.**
3. **Hold position for 1 second.**
4. **Slowly lower foot all the way back down. Pause.**
5. **Repeat with other leg.**
6. **Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.**
7. **Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.**
8. **Add modifications as you progress.**



Hip Flexion

Do hip flexion as part of your regularly scheduled strength exercises, and add these modifications as you progress:

Hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. **Stand straight; hold onto a table or chair for balance.**
2. **Slowly bend one knee toward chest, without bending waist or hips.**
3. **Hold position for 1 second.**
4. **Slowly lower leg all the way down. Pause.**
5. **Repeat with other leg.**
6. **Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.**
7. **Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.**
8. **Add modifications as you progress.**

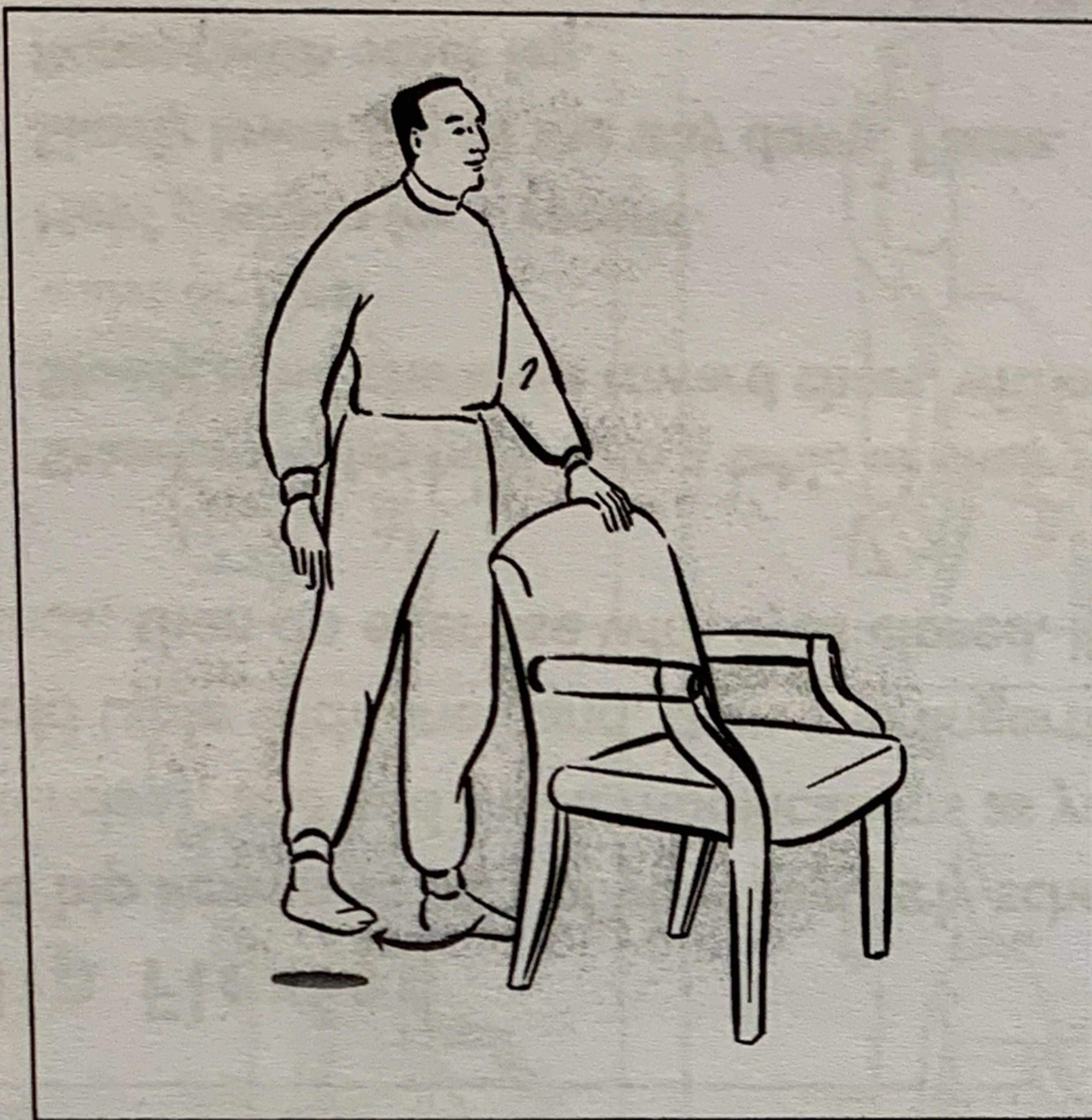


Hip Extension

Do hip extension as part of your regularly scheduled strength exercises, and add these modifications as you progress:

Hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. **Stand 12 to 18 inches from a table or chair, feet slightly apart.**
2. **Bend forward at hips at about 45-degree angle; hold onto a table or chair for balance.**
3. **Slowly lift one leg straight backwards without bending your knee, pointing your toes, or bending your upper body any farther forward.**
4. **Hold position for 1 second.**
5. **Slowly lower leg. Pause.**
6. **Repeat with other leg.**
7. **Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.**
8. **Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.**
9. **Add modifications as you progress.**

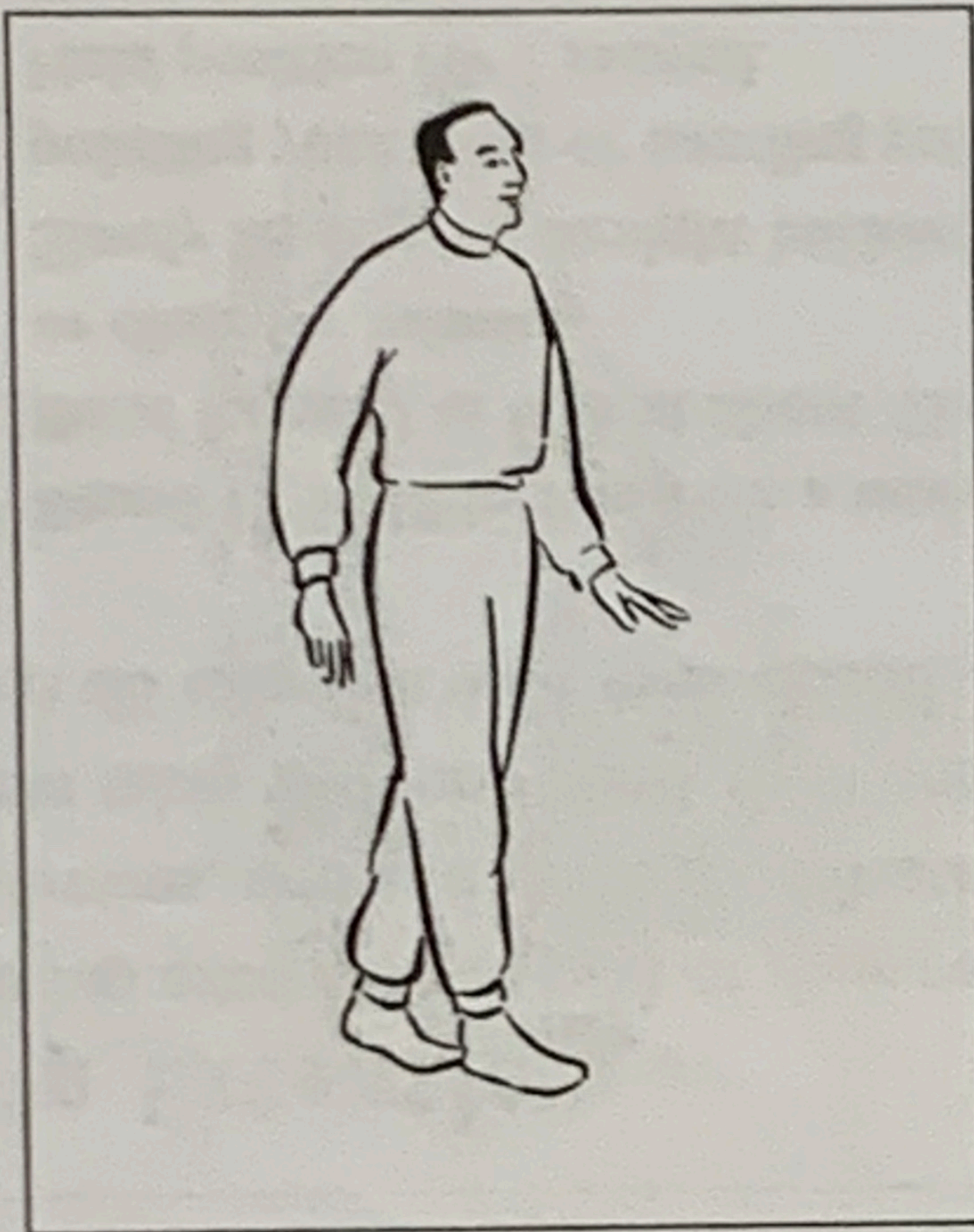


Side Leg Raise

Do leg raise as part of your regularly scheduled strength exercises, and add these modifications as you progress:

Hold table with one hand, then one fingertip, then no hands; then do exercise with eyes closed, if steady.

1. Stand straight, directly behind table or chair, feet slightly apart
2. Hold onto table or chair for balance.
3. Slowly lift one leg to side 6-12 inches out to side. Keep your back and both legs straight. Don't point your toes outward; keep them facing forward.
4. Hold position for 1 second.
5. Slowly lower leg all the way down. Pause.
6. Repeat with other leg.
7. Alternate legs until you have done 8 to 15 repetitions with each leg.
8. Rest; then do another set of 8 to 15 alternating repetitions.
9. Add modifications as you progress.



Walk heel-to-toe.

"Anytime, Anywhere" Balance Exercises

These types of exercises also improve your balance. You can do them almost anytime, anywhere, and as often as you like, as long as you have something sturdy nearby to hold onto if you become unsteady.

Examples:

- ① **Walk heel-to-toe. Position your heel just in front of the toes of the opposite foot each time you take a step. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch. (See illustration.)**
- ② **Stand on one foot (for example, while waiting in line at the grocery store or at the bus stop). Alternate feet.**
- ③ **Stand up and sit down without using your hands.**