I have recently recovered from a bout of pneumonia, and I am feeling very frail. I am 65 years old and am worried by my weakness. What do you suggest?

Bed rest and illness very rapidly undermine our physical strength. In fact, muscle loss can be as high as 15 percent when immobilized for a week. For younger people, their strength soon returns, but as we grow older, we are much more vulnerable to this frailty. Muscular strength declines with age, and a study of 50-year-olds found that 25 years later the weakest 25 percent of the group comprised 75 percent of the dependent old folk.

Muscle power can be increased at any age. The secret is "resistance exercises." It has been, and is, very popular to do aerobic exercise, and I would recommend 30 minutes of walking every day, if possible. You should also do weight-bearing exercise. The 20 to 30 minutes of exercise, performed three or four times per week, using moderate weights will result in increased muscle power, and promote strong bones. This should be commenced at as young an age as possible (even at 65 you are a spring chicken). Consult your doctor to get clearance to start on a graduated program to build strength and endurance. Think of it as an insurance plan to reduce your likelihood of dependency on others.