

BALANCE

Many physical and physiological changes occur as we age. One common outcome of that change is the decreased ability to maintain balance during normal activities such as walking, turning, stepping over or onto, and adjusting after an abrupt or an unanticipated movement. Factors as muscle weakness, visual deficit, cognitive impairment, effects from illness such as a stroke, and changes in the vestibular (located in the ear canal) system can play a role in falls.

“Functional tasks require different types of balance control, including (1) static balance control to maintain a stable antigravity position while at rest such as when standing and sitting; (2) dynamic balance control to stabilize the body when the support surface is moving or when the body is moving on a stable surface such as sit-to-stand transfers or walking; and (3) automatic postural reactions to maintain balance in response to unexpected external perturbations, such as standing on a bus that suddenly accelerates forward.”¹

The general principle of balance is to keep your center of mass (COM, which is your body mass) over your base of support (BOS-your feet). Balance can be improved. All exercises can be made easier by use of a support such as a chair or counter and advanced to not utilizing support. Please clear your environment (loose rugs, extension cords on the floor, animals) in order that you may focus on the following exercises’ while remaining safe.

1. Feet together, advanced to semi-tandem (one foot slightly in back of the other), advanced to tandem (heel-toe). Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Stand erect and abdominals tight. Option is eyes open/eyes closed.
2. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Slowly place the right toes on the left foot. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds (advanced to moving foot up the leg to approximately shin level) three to five times. Repeat with the opposite leg.
3. Step sideways in the following pattern: right, left, right, left, right, left. Repeat series going in the opposite direction for three to five times.
4. Walk forward heel-to-toe for 10 feet. Walk backward heel-to-toe for ten feet. Repeat three to five times.²

The above are tools and certainly can be modified to your needs and level of ability. Perhaps adding a little music to your routine would make it more interesting. Dance, anyone?

1. Carolyn Kisner and Lynn Allen Colby, Therapeutic Exercises. 5th ed. (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis Company, 2007), 254.
2. Patricia A. Brill, Functional Fitness for Older Adults. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004), 100-102.

Medical Center Location

The health information contained herein is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace discussions with a healthcare provider. Decisions regarding patient care must be made with a healthcare provider, considering the unique characteristics of the patient.

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