



senior health

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Putting Balance Back In Your Life

Research shows that people over 50 are falling and getting hurt at an alarming rate. In the U.S. one out of every three people over 65 falls each year. Up to 30% of those suffer moderate to severe injuries, causing reduced mobility and independence and a greater risk of death. Even falls that aren't deadly are costly to the quality of life and to the economy, costing an estimated \$20.0 billion for people over 65 in 1994 alone. Consider the following statistics from the Keiser Institute on Aging.

Eighty five percent of falls occur at home, most commonly on stairs, going to the bathroom and or bedroom.

For most people 65 or older, 60% of fatal falls occur in the home, 30% in public places, and 10% in health care institutions.

The highest incidence of falling occurs in the 80-89 age group. Twenty to thirty percent of those who fall suffer moderate to severe injuries, causing reduced mobility and independence and a greater risk of death.

Of those admitted to the hospital after a fall, 50% will die within one year. It is apparent the devastation a fall can invoke on a person's quality of life, as well as his/her family.

However, the good news is that falls are NOT a normal part of aging and that fall prevention measures such as learning exercises for strength and balance prevent falls from happening. Through training, your body can regain much of its balance and muscular strength in as little as twelve weeks.

Here are some suggestions for improving balance:

- **Resistance Training.** Participating in a resistance-training program in its self will improve your balance. Your muscles will be much more responsive to react when having to catch or regain your balance.
- **Practice with specific devices.** For example, put a 10' piece of masking tape on the floor and practice walking on the tape as you would on a balance beam.
- **Standing with one foot approximately 6" in front of the other (semi-tandem stance).**
- **Standing with one foot in front of the other the heel of the one foot touching the toes of the other, (tandem stance).**
- **Standing with one foot lifted slightly off the floor (one-leg balance stance).**
- **Standing on top toes, (plantar-flexion).**
- **Standing on heels, (dorsi-flexion).**
- **Take a T'ai Chi or Yoga class.**
- **One of my favorite techniques is simply being "foot aware."** Try this the next time you're walking or standing around. Be aware of what your feet are doing. Take time and really feel the sensations that each part of your foot is experiencing in relation to the floor or shoes you are wearing. Because your feet are closest to the ground or earth, than any other part of your body, they can give you the best feedback about how well you are balancing. As a result this exercise can give you accurate information about how well your balance might be at the present time.

It doesn't take much. Spend a little time each day practicing and discover for yourself a better balanced life.

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Derived from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases and The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons.