

Exercises To Improve Your Balance

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Losing your balance is a part of life. It happens all the time. As we get older, however, things such as vision problems, inner ear problems, or weakened hips and ankles can throw off our balance more often. When young people get off balance, they can react quickly. Muscles kick in to stabilize them and they don't fall down. But as we age, we have to work a little harder to keep those muscles strong. Each year, more than one-third of people age 65 or older fall. Falls and fall-related injuries, such as hip fracture, can have a serious impact on an older person's life. If you fall, it could limit your activities or make it impossible to live independently.

Balance exercises, along with certain strength exercises, can help prevent falls by improving your ability to control and maintain your body's position, whether you are moving or still. Strengthening and balance exercises work together. The process of balancing will help strengthen core muscles and stronger muscles will improve balance. Spending just 5 minutes a day will help you improve your balance and prevent falls. In order to improve, balance exercises must be practice everyday.

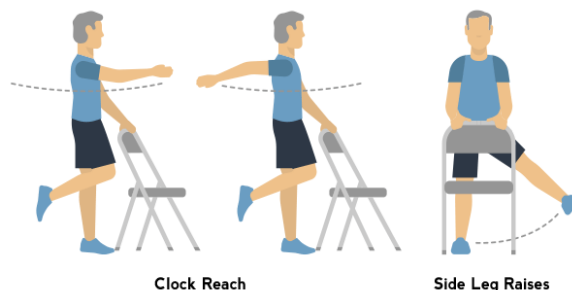
Balance exercises are easy and can be done at any level. Balance exercises are done slowly. Have a chair or counter close by so you can hold on. As you become stronger, slowly lighten your grip as you do the exercises. Before you know it you will just be using a couple of fingers and then no hands at all. As you progress you can do the same moves and increase their complexity by closing your eyes or moving your head or moving your arms.

Here are some exercises from a variety of sources

Side Leg Raises

Stand behind a chair or counter with one or both hands resting on it for support.

Lift your right leg out to the side and repeat 10 times for each leg.



Clock Reach

Begin standing, holding a chair with your left hand. Imagine a clock with 12 o'clock in front of you and 6 behind.

Stand on your left leg, bring your right arm to 12 o'clock and reach to 3 o'clock to your side, and 6 o'clock towards the back. Repeat with other side.

Leg Swings

Stand on your right leg and raise the left leg three to six inches off the floor. With arms at your sides, swing your left leg forward and backward, touching the floor for balance, while keeping your torso erect. Now, repeat the moves, but don't allow your foot to touch the ground. And finally, swing the left foot to the left side, holding the right arm out. Switch legs and repeat.

Flamingo Stand

Stand with feet together and arms relaxed at sides. Hold onto a chair for support if needed.

Bend one knee to lift the foot slightly off the ground and balance with your other leg.

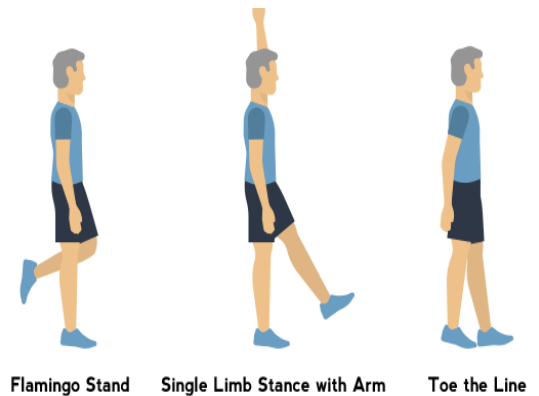
Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with other leg.

Single Limb Stance With Arm

Stand with feet together and arms relaxed at sides. Hold onto a chair for support if needed.

Raise your left arm overhead and raise your left leg forward and off the floor.

Hold for 10 seconds then repeat on other side.



Toe the line

Stand with arms relaxed at sides.

Move one foot forward, placing the heel of one foot touching or as close as possible to the toes of your other foot. Repeat for 15-20 steps.

Brushing Your Teeth Exercise

Stand by a flat tabletop or counter. Lift your right foot a bit.

With your right arm, brush the upper left corner of your mouth (with a real or imagined toothbrush) for 30 seconds.

Now put the toothbrush in your left hand, and raise your left foot. Brush the upper right corner of your mouth for 30 seconds.

Switch again, putting the toothbrush in your right hand and lifting your left foot. Brush the lower left corner of your mouth. Repeat on the other side.

Rock Around the Clock Exercise

Stand straight with your feet together and your shoulders relaxed.

Make your body rigid as a board.

Begin to “rock around the clock. Begin to sway in a circle with your body.

Sway for one minute in each direction.

Marching Exercise

Stand next to a chair or counter. Don’t hold on unless you need to.

Alternate lifting one knee as high as possible, then the other knee as high as possible.

Do this for one or two minutes, counting a long “one, two” each time you lift the knee.

Balance Exercise - Walking Heel to Toe

Position the heel of one foot just in front of the toes of the other foot. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.

Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.

Take a step. Put your heel just in front of the toe of your other foot.

Repeat for 20 steps.



The Living Room Walk

Walk slowly across your living room.

While walking, slowly turn your head as far to the right as you can.

Walk back to your starting point, slowly turning your head as far to the left as you can.

Heel-Toe Walk

Try walking a few steps on your heels, then on your toes.

Chair Exercise

Sit in a chair that does not have arms.

Cross your arms across your shoulders, left hand on right shoulder, and right hand on left shoulder.

Stand up and sit down, keeping your head up and not looking down.

Do not lean forward as you stand up.

Balance Exercise - Balance Walk

Raise arms to sides, shoulder height.

Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.

Walk in a straight line with one foot in front of the other.

As you walk, lift your back leg. Pause for 1 second before stepping forward.

Repeat for 20 steps, alternating legs.



Strength Exercise - Back Leg Raises

Stand behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance. Breathe in slowly.

Breathe out and slowly lift one leg straight back without bending your knee or pointing your toes. Try not to lean forward. The leg you are standing on should be slightly bent.

Hold position for 1 second.

Breathe in as you slowly lower your leg.

Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Repeat 10 to 15 times with other leg.

Repeat 10 to 15 more times with each leg.



One-Legged Clock With Arms

Balance on one leg, torso straight, head up, and hands on the hips. Visualize a clock and point your arm straight overhead to 12, then to the side (three), and then circle low and around to nine without losing your balance. Increase the challenge by having a partner call out the different times to you. Switch to the opposite arm and leg and repeat.

One-Legged Squat

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Point your left foot out front, just barely touching the floor for balance and push your hips back and down into this challenging one-legged squat position. Your right knee is bent, chest upright, eyes forward, and your arms out front. Slowly push up to return to starting position. Switch feet. Be sure the knee doesn't push in front of the toes.

Single-Leg Dead Lift

Balance on your left foot, engage the abs, and bend forward at the hips while reaching toward the ground with your right hand. Hold on to a five- to 10-pound weight and raise your right leg behind you for counterbalance. Tighten the buttocks as you return to the starting position. Keep your knee relaxed and back flat throughout the movement. Switch legs.

As exercises get easier, modify them by moving arms, head or closing eyes.

For an added bonus, before each balance exercise engage your abdominals by tightening them—without holding your breath—as if preparing to take a punch. You'll activate the core muscles surrounding your spine and tone your entire abdominal area.

For added challenge and fun, include balance boards, balance cushions, or sturdy foam rollers. You can even just stand on a pillow and do some of the exercises. Keep safety in mind at all times: remove objects around you and stand near a wall or stable surface in case you lose your balance

Resources:

Exercises for Seniors the Complete Guide: <http://www.evelo.com/exercises-for-seniors/#balance>
<http://www.healthline.com/health/balance-exercises-for-seniors?print=true>

Exercises to Try: <https://nihseniorhealth.gov/exerciseandphysicalactivityexercisestotry/balanceexercises/01.html>

7 Exercises to Improve Balance: <http://www.active.com/fitness/articles/7-exercises-to-improve-balance?page=2>

Designing Balance Exercises for Older Adults: <https://www.acefitness.org/certifiednewsarticle/687/designing-balance-exercise-programs-for-older/>

Exercise: a guide from the National Institute on Aging. Publication # NIH 99-4258

Strong Women, Strong Bones by Miriam Nelson Phd 2000



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