



Improve YOUR BALANCE

BY DAYNA STODDART

Balance is the ability to maintain your centre of gravity over your base of support whether you are standing still or moving. Maintaining balance is the result of a complex interaction of many systems and subsystems of the human body. With aging, changes occur that reduce the efficiency of these systems, which jeopardizes balance and increases the risk for falls.

Statistics show that one in three people over the age of 65 will fall this year. Approximately half of the 65+ folks who have fallen will fall again in the next 12 months. Strength and balance training programs could reduce the number of falls by up to 40%. Yes, you CAN train your balance.

Very few older adults have their balance screened by a physician prior to a fall despite the fact that they may have an increased fall risk. The leading risk factors for falls include:

- the use of sedatives
- the use of at least four prescription medications
- a lack of strength in arms or legs
- poor posture
- blood pressure that drops upon standing (hypotension)
- problems with balance or gait
- medical conditions and chronic diseases (stroke, MS, Parkinson's, peripheral neuropathy, arthritis, osteoporosis, inner ear conditions, etc.).

In adulthood we stop doing some of the activities that would help us maintain good balance. Children include balance practice in their play- swinging, tumbling, spinning as well as sports, dancing and bicycling. However there are many skills that we can continue to do to maintain and improve balance.

Do you have these five skills for better balance?

- 1) Can you walk and turn your head at the same time?
- 2) Can you stand on one leg for more than 5 seconds without holding on to something?

- 3) Can you reach down and pick something up off the floor?
- 4) Can you reach up to get something off a high shelf?
- 5) Can you stretch one leg back behind you and stretch your shoulders back? (ability to extend the hip and back)

Each skill suggests a wealth of exercises and activities that fall within the scope of a multidimensional balance intervention program.

TRY THESE HOME EXERCISES

- 1) The most important muscle for balance is the dorsi-flexor muscle on the front of your ankle. It pulls the toes up and toward the shin. A great way to strengthen the muscle is tap your toes 50 times every time you sit down.
- 2) Standing Balance exercise (use support as needed: a wall or chair back). Keep it safe. Standing tall, visualize a rope attached to the crown of your head. Head is centred between shoulders, shoulders above hips and connect belly to spine. Place right foot on an exercise ball (knee above ankle). Keep ball still under right foot. Set a solid foundation under the left foot by anchoring a point under the big toe, baby toe and heel. Visualize the foot growing roots into the ground. Keep the left knee loose; do not lock it out. Focus on a point on the floor or wall, stand still and hold. Switch legs. Repeat with left foot on ball and standing on right leg.

For more information on the importance of improving your balance and posture, read the "Power of Posture" article that is posted under Health & Wellness Articles under the Activities tab and Recreation Centre tab on www.ourbgcc.com.

If you are concerned about your balance, book a complimentary balance assessment with me, your Wellness Director. daynas@rogers.com. I will guide you with appropriate recommendations and suggestions.