

Balance and Stability:

How you can improve your balance and reduce your risk for falls.

BY DAYNA STODDART



The Tuesday 10:15 a.m. Virtual Balance and Core Stability class offers 30 minutes of fitness movements, strategies and exercises for improved balance, core stability and improved quality of life. This class is intended to educate and to increase your awareness and confidence in maintaining your independence and in continuing your lifestyle with hobbies and activities you enjoy. The class is open to all levels of ability, from beginners with no experience to those who have taken balance training. Balance is defined as a process of controlling the body's centre of gravity with respect to its base of support, whether the body is stationary or moving. You may be primarily concerned with maintaining your balance when walking or moving. However, maintaining a stable upright position while standing or sitting also involves active contraction of various muscle groups to control the position of the centre of gravity against the destabilizing force of gravity. Thus, balance is always a dynamic process. Balance is an integral component of fitness, as are strengthening, cardio, and stretching. As we age, balance training will reduce our risk of falling. Falls are a leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for older adults.

Check your risk of falling by completing the chart.

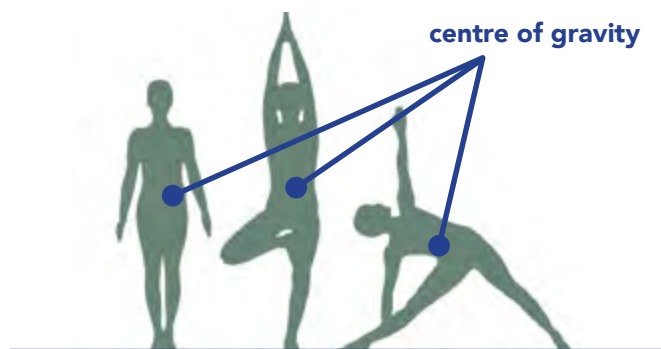


If you are concerned, know that you can make improvements by including a balance class and training in your fitness regimen on a consistent basis. We can improve our balance at any age. Age is not a factor: disuse and decreased mobility within our movement sphere are. We

know that regular physical activity is important for our health and well-being throughout our lifespan. With every decade, exercise becomes more important in terms of quality of life and independence. There is an inverse relationship between physical activity and risk of mortality. My all-time favourite quote from **Dr. Kenneth Cooper, M.D.**, also known as the "father of aerobics," speaks volumes: "We do not stop exercising because we grow old, we grow old because we stop exercising."

Dr. Cooper continues to promote living better longer. This fitness movement pioneer encourages and embodies healthy longevity. In a recent article, his message was again loud and clear, "Your physical potential as you age is greater than you have been led to believe."

Good posture is critical to good balance. Our class begins by addressing our core muscles and our posture using specific seated exercises. (Note: If you are interested in improving your posture, join the Virtual Postural Exercise prep class on Wednesdays at 9:45 a.m. You can also email me at daynas@rogers.com for a copy of my published article "The Power of Posture" in the ICAA Journal on Active Aging.) Lower body exercises warm up the joints to prepare for the standing segment. Range of motion of the ankle joints, the strength of the shin, and the flexibility of the calf muscles all contribute to balance. As we move to standing, it is safety first and foremost. You are reminded always to use support when needed, and to keep your floor space free and clear of obstacles and tripping hazards. Stepping in multiple directions and shifting our **centre of gravity** help to solidify the mind/muscle connection and to establish an automatic stepping strategy to prevent a fall if we were to lose our balance. Both static and dynamic balance exercises are



introduced with variations and modifications to adapt to individual levels of comfort and ability. Multiple systems play a role in our balance: the musculoskeletal system, the somatosensory system, the vestibular system and the visual system. We challenge these systems with many variations to our exercise regimen during this class. You are always reminded to listen to your body and to do what feels right for you, moving through the class at your own pace. You know your body best. In spring/summer 2022, we will be offering a new and exciting progressive balance training class: training the movement sphere, staying up, and robust resistance to falls. Watch for this.

BE WELL and THRIVE!

CHECK YOUR RISK FOR FALLING

CHECK: "YES" OR "NO" FOR EACH STATEMENT BELOW			WHY IT MATTERS
YES (2) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
YES (2) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing in the bathroom, especially at night increases your chance of falling.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medications can sometimes increase your chances of falling.
YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/>	NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	I often feel sad or depressed	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
TOTAL: _____		ADD UP THE NUMBER OF POINTS FOR EACH "YES" ANSWER. IF YOU SCORED 4 POINTS OR MORE YOU MAY BE AT RISK FOR FALLING.	

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. J Safety Res:2011: 42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.