

Balance, Posture and Functional Exercises

Balance exercises

Balance and leg strengthening exercises can help improve balance while decreasing the risk of falls. Many fitness centers, community centers and other organizations offer balance exercise programs, such as Tai Chi classes. Balance exercises can also be done at home.

Who should do balance exercises? Balance exercises are especially important if you have fallen during the past year or if you lose your balance while doing regular daily activities.

How often should you do balance exercises? You can do balance exercises every day. You can perform these exercises at one time or spread them throughout the day. Below is an example of a balance progression exercise you can do at home.

Balance Training Progression Exercise.* Before beginning the progression exercise, keep in mind that your legs and feet should feel a little wobbly to show that balance is being challenged. However, you should never feel like you could fall. Make sure to read all of the information about the Balance Training Progression before beginning the exercise.

- **Level 1 Feet together:** Stand with feet tight next to each other.
- **Level 2 Semi-tandem:** Stand with one foot in front but slightly to the side of the other with the inside edge of the front heel touching the inside edge of the back foot's big toe.
- **Level 3 Tandem:** Stand with one foot directly in front of the other like being on a tight rope.
- **Level 4 Single leg stance:** Stand on one leg only.

*This exercise should not hurt in any way while it is being done or cause muscle soreness lasting more than two days. All individuals should obtain permission from their healthcare provider before beginning a new exercise program.

At first, you may need to hold onto a stable chair or table with both hands. When you no longer wobble, hold on with one hand only. Then progress to doing the exercise while touching the chair or table with one fingertip only. As you become steadier, you should hold both hands two inches above the chair or table or do the exercise with your eyes closed.

Start with Level 1 and try to hold the position for 20 - 30 seconds. Once you can do this, progress to the next level. As you are able to master each level, progress to the next level until you can stand on one leg with your eyes closed with your hands two inches above the chair or table.

This exercise can be done once each day. Stop the exercise immediately if you feel like you could fall.

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Posture Exercises

Good posture includes keeping your ears over your shoulders, your shoulders over your hips, your hips over your knees and your knees over your ankles. Posture exercises can also help you reduce rounded or “sloping” shoulders. These exercises can also help you reduce the chance of breaking bones in your spine. Doing a variety of posture exercises can help to stretch and strengthen the muscles in your upper body, abdominals (tummy), back and lower body.

Who should do posture exercises? Good posture is important for everyone. Posture exercises are especially important if your head is slumping forward, your shoulders are rounded or your spine is curving forward.

How often should you do posture exercises? You can do posture exercises every day. You can perform these exercises at one time or spread them throughout the day.

Below is an example of a posture exercise that stretches the shoulders, flattens the upper back and improves rounded shoulders:

Corner Stretch Exercise Example*

1. Stand in the corner of a room with your arms bent at a 90 degree angle at shoulder level and hands touching the walls (see picture below for proper position of head, arms and legs).
2. Step one foot forward, letting that knee bend.
3. Lean onto your front leg, bringing your head and chest toward the corner. You should feel a light stretch in your shoulders. Look at the corner of the wall at chest level to avoid overextending the neck.
4. Hold for 20-30 seconds.
5. Stand up straight and switch feet.
6. Repeat the exercise on the other side.



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The Corner Stretch exercise should be done twice on each side about three times per week.

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Functional Exercises

Functional exercises are similar to the activities you do each day. These exercises can help you stay strong when doing these activities, such as getting in and out of a chair.

Who should do functional exercises? If you struggle to do every day activities, such as standing up from a chair or climbing stairs, you should do functional exercises. Also, if you have recently been inactive due to a broken bone, surgery, an illness or other reason, you may also benefit from these exercises.

How often should you do functional exercises? You can do functional exercises every day. You can do these exercises at one time or spread them throughout the day. Below is an example of a functional exercise that helps with safety when getting up from a chair to a standing position. It also helps strengthen legs.

Chair Rise Exercise Example.*

1. Sit on the front edge of a chair and rise to the standing position. Then gently sit back down without using your arms. It may be helpful to cross your arms over your chest to prevent using them.
2. Keep your knees and feet hip-width apart at all times.
3. Use the strength of your legs to stand and sit.
4. If this can't be done without using your arms, place a pillow on the seat of the chair (underneath you) to make it a bit easier.
5. The goal is to stand and sit 10 times in a row. Once a set of 10 can be comfortably completed, remove the pillow or move the exercise to a lower chair to make it harder.

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The Chair Rise Exercise can be done once each day.

