FALL PREVENTION AND BALANCE EXERCISES FOR SENIORS

Seniors wrestle with a variety of medical issues that can make it more difficult to stay steady on their feet. Each year, more than one-third of people age 65 or older fall. Of those who fall, up to 30 percent suffer moderate to severe injuries, such as hip fractures, and increase their risk of early

death, according to the CDC. Falls and related injuries can seriously impact a senior’s life, limiting certain activities or even making it impossible to live independently.

Balance exercises are crucial to help prevent falls by improving a person’s ability to control their body. Frequently doing a few simple, at-home exercises will help seniors enhance their coordination and decrease the risk of falling.

One great thing about exercises to improve balance is that they can be done as often as you wish, anytime, anywhere. Before you begin, make sure you have a sturdy chair, person, railing or countertop nearby to hold on to if you feel unsteady. It’s also a good idea to talk to your doctor about any exercise-related concerns. Don’t engage in anything that feels overly uncomfortable or unsafe.

Here are four balance exercises for older adults:

**1. Stand on one foot.**We’ll start off simple. Find a sturdy chair to stand behind and hold on to for balance. Lift one foot up and hold it for 10 seconds. Repeat this 10 to 15 times, then switch and do the same thing with the other leg. It may be easier to stand on one leg than the other – this is totally normal. Once you perfect this move, try reaching your raised foot as far as you can out to the front.

**2. Walk heel to toe.**Start by putting one heel in front of the toes of your other foot. You want your feet to touch. If they can’t touch, get them as close as you comfortably can. Choose a spot in front of you to focus on. Start walking, putting one heel in front of the toes on your other foot. Walk 20 steps like this, staring at your spot for balance.

**3. Rock from side to side.** For this exercise, begin by placing your feet hip width apart, pressing into the ground with the same force in each foot. Slowly transfer your weight to one side, lifting the opposite foot. Hold it up for for 20-30 seconds. Transfer the weight back into both feet and repeat on the other side. Repeat this process five times on both legs.

**4. Balance walk.** Pretend you’re a tightrope walker in the circus. Raise your arms out to your sides, parallel to the floor. Choose a spot ahead to focus on and walk towards. Start walking in a straight line. As you walk, lift your back leg up and hold it for a few seconds. Repeat this while alternating legs, walking 20 steps.

As your balance gets better, you can modify these exercises to make them more difficult. To challenge yourself, try holding onto the chair with only one hand. With time, try holding on with only one finger and, finally, with no hands. Once you’re steady on your feet, try doing the exercise with your eyes closed.

As you age, it’s important that you are able to balance well. Steady balance is essential to avoiding dangerous falls. Start small, doing a few repetitions of these exercises every couple days, gradually allowing your coordination to get better. [Staying active](http://www.enlivant.com/blog/keep-moving-to-stay-healthy) will help keep you or your senior loved one’s body and mind healthy and happy.

Start using these balance exercises for fall prevention today.