



Dynamic Balance



What to Do This Month

Don't try to do everything at once. Pick one exercise from below and do it every day this month. The one-foot balance is the easiest place to start: five tries on each foot, every day. When that feels easy, add another exercise. A few minutes a day is all it takes, and it adds up.

Why is balance so important as we get older?

Poor balance increases the chance of a fall. Falling is the leading cause of death by injury in people over 65 according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). One in four people over 65 fall every year and the rate of falling increases as we age. If you fall once, you are more likely to fall again. 95% of hip fractures are related to a fall.

When an older person falls and fractures their hip, there is a cascade of physical effects that make recovery difficult (1). An older person who falls and breaks their hip is often confined to bed for some period of time to allow for recovery. This increases complications related to blood circulation including an

increase in the risk of blood clots. Prolonged stays in bed can lead to bed sores which can become infected. There is also an increased risk of pneumonia and gradual loss of muscle and bone strength. Even short periods of recovery in bed, days vs weeks, can result in reduced mobility from which it is difficult to recover. Falls are best avoided.

Experts agree that good balance is the key element in avoiding falls. According to recent research, balance deteriorates faster than strength, endurance or mobility as we get older (2). This is likely because balance is dependent on multiple systems that also deteriorate as we age (2, 3). These include reduced capabilities of proprioception, vision and hearing and the vestibular and musculoskeletal systems. Other factors include medications that impact balance and tripping hazards in the home.

Practicing balance will help you develop better balance. There is convincing evidence that balance and strength training reduce the risk of falls in people over 65 (4)

Most falls happen when we are moving. So, it is a good idea to practice keeping your balance when you move. This is called **Dynamic Balance** and has become the focus of balance training.

Medical experts recommend both strength and balance exercises to decrease your chances of a fall and to reduce the severity of the injury that results from a fall. The exercises below are most often recommended by the experts and all have dynamic variations.

For safety, always keep something sturdy within reach in case you feel unsteady. A wall, a chair, a table, or a kitchen counter all work.

One-Foot Balance

This one is simple, needs no equipment, and can be done almost anywhere. It is also a common test at your annual physical, so let's start getting ready for it today.

Begin by standing near something sturdy that you can hold on to. Then lift your

dominant leg off the floor and stand on your non-dominant foot, without holding on to anything if possible. The goal is to be able to balance on one foot without assistance for 30 sec. If you are good for 5 sec and then need to reach for something to hold on to, that is fine. That is your starting point. You should do at least five tries on each foot every day and try to go longer when you feel able to do so. That is a small daily investment in avoiding a fall.

According to the UK National Health Service you should be able to stand on one foot as follows (5):



Expected One Foot

Age Standing Time

40-49 40sec

50-59 37sec

60-69 30sec

70-79 18sec

80plus 5sec

You can make the one foot balance more dynamically challenging by moving the free leg forward and back and side to side. This shifting of the center of gravity adds more challenge to the muscles of the leg holding you up and to the proprioceptive and vestibular systems that are important in balancing.

Heel-to-Toe Walking

It's harder than you think but has the advantage of being dynamic. Start by standing on both feet near a wall for assistance if necessary. Then place your left heel just in front of your right toes - close enough so that they touch. Next, move your right foot so that your right heel is in front of your left foot so that it touches your left toes. Repeat this heel-to-toe walking for 20 steps.



This exercise makes for a great balance “snack.” Do it a couple of times in the morning, in the middle of the day and in the evening. It should become easier over time so keep it up.



Sit-to-Stand

This dynamic exercise works just as it sounds. Use a simple sturdy chair, preferably without arms. But have something close by to grab if you feel unsteady. Sit on the front half of the chair with your feet flat on the floor. Cross your arms in front of your chest, lean forward and stand up. Then sit down and

repeat. This exercise has the benefit of helping with balance and strengthening your legs; two important parts of avoiding a fall. The goal is to perform this exercise without using your hands. You can make it more difficult by holding weights in your hands. Do sit to stand exercises for 30 sec at least once per day

The sit-to-stand exercise is sometimes used in annual physical exams. The standards your doctor will use will look like the chart below from the CDC: You will be instructed to do as many sit-to-stands as you can in 30 sec.

Sit-to-Stand Test - Average, "expected number of repetitions in 30 sec," scores are shown by age and gender.

Age	Men	Women
60-64	14	12
65-69	12	11
70-74	12	10
75-79	11	10
80-84	10	9
85-89	8	8
90-94	7	4

If you can't do the minimum for your age group you may have an elevated risk of falling (CDC). So, it is time to start doing some balance training.

The Lunge

This is a great exercise for many reasons. First, it is a good balance exercise. It also builds leg and hip strength and increases hip mobility. The lunge requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Finally, it can be done with various degrees of difficulty. A partial lunge is fairly easy. A deep lunge, with the knee close to the floor, can be a challenge. If you need more, you can always add weight.

Begin by standing with your feet close together but not touching. Then step forward with your left foot so that it is about one foot in front of your right foot. Bend the back knee and lower yourself down as far as you can comfortably. You may prefer to go down just a few inches at first or place your hands on your knees for support. That is fine. As you get stronger and more comfortable with the lunge you will be able to go deeper and not use your hands. The goal is to get your trailing knee just to the floor. Also, try not to let your forward knee get in front of the toes of the forward foot. That puts too much strain on your forward knee. Do several repetitions on each side. Rest for a bit and then do a few more.



The lunge has something for everyone. Do a few every day. You will be glad you did.

These days there is a lot of digital space dedicated to discussions of longevity. There are so many potions you can take and lifestyle changes you can make that it is hard to know where to start. I recommend starting with balance training to reduce the risk of a life shortening fall.

*Thanks to subscriber **Jean B** for suggesting Balance as a newsletter topic.*

Let's Get Moving!

1. Andalaro, S., et al. (2025). Hip Fracture as a Systemic Disease in Older Adults: A Narrative Review on Multisystem Implications and Management. *Med Sci (Basel)*.13(3):89. doi: [10.3390/medsci13030089](https://doi.org/10.3390/medsci13030089)
2. Rezaei, A., et al. (2024). Age-related changes in gait, balance, and strength parameters: A cross-sectional study. *PLOS ONE* 21(3): e0344583, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0310764>
3. Wang, J., et al. (2025). Age-Related Dysfunction in Balance: A Comprehensive Review of Causes, Consequences, and Interventions. *Aging and Disease*, vol 16 (2), 714-737, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14336/AD.2024.0124-1>
4. Munssf, S., et al. (2023). Effectiveness of Exercise Interventions on Fall Prevention in Ambulatory Community-Dwelling Older Adults: A Systematic Review with Narrative Synthesis. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 10.3389/fpubh.2023.1209319
5. UK National Health Service. (2023). How long can you stand like a flamingo? <https://suffolkandnortheastsex.icb.nhs.uk/news/how-long-can-you-stand-like-a-flamingo/>

Fun Fact



Miss Pepa says “Keep Moving!”

Who better than a ballet teacher to personify excellent balance. Ms. Pepa Dodge, shown above, is affectionately known to her students as Miss Pepa, and has been studying and teaching ballet for 80 years. She is 99 and still going. Along with teaching ballet she also teaches a Spanish dance class and water aerobics.

Miss Pepa’s advice for a long active life? “**Keep Moving!**”

Here is an article on Miss Pepa in her local newspaper. ([Miss Pepa Story](#))

Personal Note: Running with Roger

I did it! I went to the annual Massachusetts Senior Games competition and ran in the 50M race. It was my first race since high school.

As I was standing at the starting line I noticed that the man standing in the next lane looked to be about my age. So I said “I guess we are the only guys in the 80-84 yr bracket.” He said “I think so. I am 81. How old are you?” “80” I said.

I started thinking, this guy is my only competition, he is older than I am and he is smaller than I am. I think I can beat this guy.

That was what I was thinking when the gun went off and this guy took off like a bullet. I tried to catch him but with every step he pulled farther ahead. It was a 50 meter race and he beat me by a mile.

After the race, I congratulated him on a good race. I said, "You must have done this before." He said "Yes. I have been doing this for 36 years." "Wow!" I said, "No wonder you are so good." "Yes," he said, "I am World Champion."

Now, when someone says something like that, I pause and try to figure out if he is BSing me. It turns out that I was talking to Roger Pierce, 15 time World Champion sprinter and 12 time World Record Holder in sprint events at multiple ages.

Roger turned out to be one of the most positive-energy people I have ever met. He encouraged me to keep going with sprinting. He encouraged me to find out what my time was and beat it next time. He told me to make sure to recover properly. It takes longer at our age. Join the Mass Velocity Track Club.

Was I a winner at the Senior Games? You bet. I made a new friend, Roger Pierce.

Roger is also a fierce competitor. His plan: Go out fast and make them catch you.



What about times? I ran the 50M race in 10.40sec. I was trying to break 10sec. Roger ran it in 8.08sec. Not only was he the fastest in the 80-84yr bracket, he was faster than anyone in the 75-79 yr bracket as well.

Here is an article about Roger from The Local News ([Roger Pierce Story](#)).

And, TADA!, since there were only 2 entries in the 80-84 yr bucket, I came in second!

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