

# Balance training for Older Adults!

There is an important update for seniors in Canada's physical activity guidelines. It says we need to do "physical activities that challenge balance."

## Balance exercise helps prevent falls

Balance means being able to stay upright or in control of body movement. A recent research summary identified lack of balance as a big contributor to falls as we get older.<sup>1</sup>

Research has also shown the types of exercise that reduce the risk of falling.<sup>2</sup> The best programs involve:

- 👍 balance exercise
- 👍 functional exercises that mimic everyday tasks, like reaching up for the top shelf
- 👍 lower leg strength training.

## There are different types of balance training

When we think about balance training, we often think of what is called 'static balance' training — for example, trying to stand on one leg. But recent research describes other important types of balance activities:<sup>3</sup>

- 👍 Anticipatory control — adjusting balance to do a task. For instance, if you are playing catch, can you adjust your balance if you see the ball coming out of your reach?
- 👍 Dynamic stability — balance while in motion. For instance, can you walk heel to toe along a curb?
- 👍 Functional stability limits — challenging your balance. For instance, how far can you reach for something before losing your balance?
- 👍 Reactive control — balance when there is an unexpected obstacle or event. For instance, can you regain your balance if you step on a wet spot on the floor?

## More is better when it comes to balance

Working to improve balance takes a little extra effort and time. Aim to include three sessions a week of different balance activities. Each session should be 30 minutes long.<sup>4</sup> Keep in mind that balance training is **on top of** other recommended exercise: 150 minutes a week of aerobic exercise and resistance exercise twice a week.

There are some great links to balance exercise programs at the end of this article.

## How to prepare for balance training

Some people hesitate to try balance training. But increasing your balance has been shown to reduce fear of falling. That allows you to keep doing things you enjoy. Here are some tips before you begin.

- 👍 Pay attention to other factors that can play a role in balance – medications, for instance, or previous injuries. See your healthcare provider if you have questions about starting balance exercises.
- 👍 Consider making the investment of an exercise professional or a physiotherapist to safely learn about balance exercises.
- 👍 Look for fitness classes that focus a significant amount of time on balance or functional training.
- 👍 For some people, getting started will be about maintaining balance. For others, it will be about regaining balance. Be patient with yourself. For instance, you can start off using a support like a wall or a chair.

## Resources

Balance and flexibility exercises from the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging:

[https://www.uwo.ca/ccaa/programs/videos/balance\\_flexibility.html](https://www.uwo.ca/ccaa/programs/videos/balance_flexibility.html)



Learn 3 balance exercises in this video from the National Institute of Aging:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiXTIBVo1PI&t=345s>

At-home videos of exercises to prevent falls and improve balance and strength:

<https://exerciseright.com.au/home-workouts-active-ageing/>

## References

1. Jehu DA, Davis JC, Falck RS, et al. *Risk factors for recurrent falls in older adults: A systematic review with meta-analysis*. Maturitas. 2021.
2. Sherrington C, Fairhall N, Wallbank G, et al. *Exercise for preventing falls in older people living in the community: an abridged Cochrane systematic review*. British Journal of Sports Medicine 54:885-891. 2020.
3. Sibley KM, Thomas SM, Veroniki AA, et al. *Comparative effectiveness of exercise interventions for preventing falls in older adults: A secondary analysis of a systematic review with network meta-analysis*. Exp Gerontol. 2021.
4. Lesinski M, Hortobágyi T, Muehlbauer T et al. *Effects of Balance Training on Balance Performance in Healthy Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*. Sports Med. 2015;45(12):1721-1738. 2015.