



# Improve Balance



## CHALLENGE

Practice balance movements to prevent falls and injuries

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Improve Balance."
2. Practice movements and exercises to improve balance
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



"I have fallen, and I can't get up." This made-for-TV-product catchphrase raised awareness about the risk of falls. It also became an icon of pop culture spoofed in movies, TV shows, social media, and comic strips. But it really isn't a laughing matter.

You might think falling is just a problem old people have to worry about. But it's not.

A lot of things could cause you to lose your balance and fall. Ever had a cat run under your feet walking down the stairs? Lose your balance on the soccer field or basketball court? Or slip and fall on a wet surface?

It happens a lot, and not just to the elderly.

For example, thirty-nine-year-old Washington resident Lauren Mayer says she's tripped in New York City, fell and chipped a tooth, and even broke a toe while visiting her parents in California. Ouch.

Here's another one: At a gas station quickie mart in Ireland, a 32-year-old nurse tripped on a box and fractured her knee. It took a couple years and two surgeries to recover.

There's a million slip-and-fall videos on YouTube, and you can probably think of a few of your own viral-worthy off-balance moments.

When you lose your balance, trip, or fall, you can end up getting hurt. And while you can't always avoid a fall, exercises and movements to train your brain and your body can help.<sup>1</sup> Take the month-long health challenge to *Improve Balance* to prevent injuries and falls.

## How much do you know about the importance of balance? Take the quiz to find out:

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1.   An estimated 1 million people a year end up in the hospital because of a fall.
2.   Strength and balance exercises can help prevent falls at any age.
3.   About 85 percent of all work-related injuries are caused by falls.
4.   Activities like tai chi can train your brain and your body to improve balance.
5.   Reducing stress and distractions can help you be more aware of fall risks.

How did you do? If you answered any of these statements incorrectly, you could benefit from learning more about how to improve balance. An estimated 8 million people a year end up in the hospital because of a fall, according to the National Floor Safety Institute. Not all falls are preventable, but taking action to improve balance will reduce your risk for a fall or injury.

Answers: 1. False 2. True 3. True 4. True 5. True

## Pay Attention to Fall Risks

Nobody plans to lose their balance and fall. It just happens.

One minute you're carrying groceries up the stairs, and the next minute you're sprawled out on the ground. You get in a hurry. Something catches you off balance. And you stumble your way to the ground. You trip and fall playing a sport.

Or you fall because you're totally distracted, like the Pennsylvania woman who was texting while walking in a mall. She tripped and fell headfirst into a fountain. Yes, this really happened.

So what puts you at risk for falling?<sup>2</sup>

Here are some common causes:

- Weak muscles and bones
- Poor mind-body connection
- Excessive stress, distractions, and multi-tasking
- Slick surfaces, or objects in your path
- Slick shoes, or shoes that don't fit properly
- Vision problems
- Illness
- Side effects of some medications
- Too much alcohol

3 major benefits of balance training  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybake4vt>



**Highlining**, an extreme sport in which athletes walk along a narrow band of rope high above the ground. Don't try this at home!

**VIDEO:** Balance training exercises  
<https://tinyurl.com/ybrtxg4w>

## Going Steady: 5 Ways to Improve Balance

If you want to avoid a fall, it makes sense to pay attention to your surroundings, and avoid things that could knock you off balance.

Or as your mom probably told you a thousand times, “Watch where you’re going.” That alone will help you avoid slip-and-fall hazards.

But it’s not enough to prevent falls and injuries if you do take a spill. Practicing movements and exercises to build strength and train your brain to improve balance will help, too.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

### Here are some simple things you can do to improve balance:

If you’re already active, you might think balance isn’t something you need to worry about. Give these exercises a try, and you might discover that it is. Practice just a few minutes a day. You’ll train your brain and body to improve balance, and reduce your risk for falls and injuries.



#### ① One-Legged Wonder

Take off your shoes. Stand on one leg, shoulders back, stare straight ahead. Look up from your line of sight about six inches.

**Time:** Balance for one minute, or as long as you can. Switch legs and repeat.

**Modify:** Try it with your eyes closed. Balance with one finger on the wall if you need to. Work up to balancing longer than a minute.



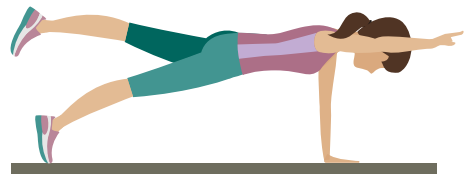
#### ② Tippy Toes to Heels

#### ③ Bird-Dog Balance

Kneel down on the floor, palms down shoulder width-apart. Keep your neck and spine neutral. Look down. Lift your left hand off the floor and extend your arm parallel to the floor. Lift your right knee, and straighten your leg backwards until it’s parallel to the floor. Repeat with opposite arm and leg.

**Time:** Hold the position for 10 seconds.

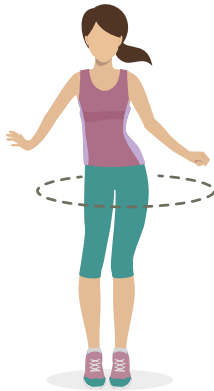
**Modify:** Work up to holding the position for a minute. Make it harder by balancing on your toes, instead of one knee.



#### ④ Hula Hips

Stand up straight, legs together, shoulders back. Imagine keeping a hula hoop going in slow motion. Make a big circle with your hips to the left, without moving your shoulders. Switch sides.

**Time:** 10 times per side  
**Modify:** Try this in the pool. Or use an actual hula hoop. Increase repetitions per side over time.



#### ⑤ One-Eyed Blinker

Stand up straight, legs together, shoulders back. Look straight ahead. Now close one eye. Pay attention to how your perception of balance changes. Repeat with the other eye.

**Time:** Start with 10 seconds per eye.

**Modify:** Work up to 30 seconds per eye or longer. Now try walking down the hall with one eye closed. Or practice this exercise sitting down first.

Home exercises to prevent falls  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9dk553x>

## References

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2. National Institutes of Health. (2018). What are ways to prevent falls and related fractures? Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases Resource Center. From: <https://tinyurl.com/y8kemaxd>
3. Sazo-Rodriguez, S., et al. (2017). The effects of progressive neuromuscular training on postural balance and functionality in elderly patients with knee osteoarthritis: A pilot study. *Journal of Physical Therapy Science*, 29(7):1229-1235. From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5509598>
4. American Heart Association. (2014). Balance exercise. From: <https://tinyurl.com/yarh9s7l>
5. Aman, J., et al. (2014). The effectiveness of proprioceptive training for improving motor function: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8:1075. From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4309156>



# Improve Balance



**CHALLENGE**  
Practice balance movements to prevent falls and injuries

**Instructions**

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Aim to practice balance exercises a few minutes a day. Find a time that works best for you.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to improve your balance.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I practiced balance exercises  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_