

Improving Your Balance

Kelsie Muller
Extension Educator
Benton County

Description

Have you stopped doing things that you enjoy or restricted activities because of concerns about falling? If you have you are not alone. It is reasonable to be concerned about falls- safety is important. The good news is that there are things that you can do to improve your balance and prevent future falls.

Overview

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention more than one-third of adults ages 65 years and older fall each year. Studies indicate that up to half of community dwelling older adults experience fear of falling, and that many respond to this concern by restricting activity. Restricting activity and being inactive results in loss of muscle strength and balance. Consequently increasing the risk of falling. It can also compromise social interaction and increase the risk for isolation, depression and anxiety. Fear of falling can actually contribute to falling.

Objectives

1. Members will identify risk factors for falls.
2. Members will learn that thoughts about falling affect your actions.
3. Members will learn simple exercises to improve balance.

Leader's Guide

1. Have participants identify risk factors for falls, some that may come to mind include:
 - a. Multiple medications
 - b. Poor vision
 - c. Poor hearing
 - d. Low blood pressure
 - e. Heel cord tightness
 - f. Poor hip flexibility
 - g. Leg weakness
 - h. Poor balance
2. Discuss the following fall related attitudes (agree or disagree) and then share the facts in italics:
 - a. Falling is a natural part of growing old. (*Falls are not a part of the normal aging process*)
 - b. Most falls cannot be prevented. (*There are fall risk reducing interventions, such as home environment, reviewing medications, improving strength, flexibility, and balance.*)
 - c. If I have concerns about falling I should limit my activity. (*Restricting activity can actually make you more likely to fall.*)

- d. Being concerned about falling could lead to a safer lifestyle. (*Being concerned about falling is normal and motivates us to try new ways of doing things.*)
3. Share tips on how to improve your balance- then practice the exercises together.
 - a. You can do exercises to improve your balance almost anytime, anywhere, and as often as you like, as long as you have something sturdy nearby to hold on to if you become unsteady.
 - b. In the beginning, using a chair or the wall for support will help you stay safe while working on your balance.
 - c. Later to challenge yourself, try holding on to the chair with only one hand; then later try holding on with only a finger, then no hands.

Stand on One Foot

1. Position yourself behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance, and stand on one foot.
2. Hold position for up to 10 seconds.
3. Repeat 10-15 times.
4. Repeat 10-15 times with other leg.
5. Repeat 10-15 more times with each leg.

Heel-to-toe Walk

1. Position the heel of one foot just in front of the toes of the other foot. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.
2. Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.
3. Take a step. Put your heel just in front of the toe of the other foot.
4. Repeat for 20 steps.

If you are unsteady on your feet try doing this exercise along your kitchen counter or near a wall so you can steady yourself if you need to.

Tippy- toe Walk

1. Position yourself behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance.
2. Raise your heels and position your body weight on your toes.
3. Proceed to walk on toes in place for 30 seconds.
4. Repeat as you feel comfortable.

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Member Handout

- Exercise makes a profound difference in both physical and emotional well-being.
- Inactivity is especially dangerous to older people because the problems associated with inactivity (loss of muscle strength, balance, coordination, etc.) can present more serious consequences for older people, compared to younger people.
- Playing it safe to avoid falls by staying home and limiting activity levels is counterproductive.
- Medical research shows that everyone can grow stronger through increased activity.
- You can do exercises to improve your balance almost anytime, anywhere, and as often as you like, as long as you have something sturdy nearby to hold on to if you become unsteady.
- In the beginning, using a chair or the wall for support will help you stay safe while working on your balance.
- Later to challenge yourself, try holding on to the chair with only one hand; then later try holding on with only a finger, then no hands.

Balance Exercises

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