

HOW'S YOUR BALANCE ?... TAKE THESE TESTS



Diminishing balance is insidious and can occur from the 40s onwards. Falls are an ominous yet very real part of life for people over 65 and many falls can be prevented once the causes are determined. People fall for many different reasons but loss of balance is the most common cause.

Have you- or a family member noticed balance is not as good as it should be?

Here you'll discover some simple tests so you can determine whether your balance is in top shape or if you need to take action to improve it. In addition, you'll also get some easy yet effective exercises that you can practice anytime anywhere to enhance your balance.- yes even from your 40's

WHAT IS BALANCE ?

Without your having to think about it, your body does an astonishing balancing act every day combining, a delicate interplay between your eyes, ears, brain, and muscles. Visual cues from your eyes, inner ear balance mechanisms, internal spatial orientation and muscle strength are all involved in staying upright and recovering from perturbations. To the older adult, balance is simply hopefully not losing it while walking, but also being able to regain it without falling down.

Now let's move on so you can find out if your balance is up to par.

For the tests with eyes closed you'll need a partner to time you. Having someone close by is also important for your overall safety. Repeat each test 3 times, and then add up your total time and divide it by 3 to find your average balance base for that test.

TEST 1 BOTH FEET- EYES CLOSED

1. On both feet:

Stand with your bare feet together on a hard floor and your ankle bones touching.

Cross your arms and close your eyes.

Try to hold this position for as long as you can.

A healthy standard is to be able to hold this position for 60 seconds. If you can do that, then you're well on your way to establishing a solid foundation to build on.

TEST 2 ONE FOOT EYES CLOSED

2. On one foot:

Stand on one foot and bend your other knee to lift the non-supporting foot off the ground without touching the standing leg. (You should do this next to a wall or in a doorway, so you can support yourself if needed.) – if you're left-handed, stand on your left leg and lift the right foot; do the opposite if you're right-handed. You don't need to lift it high, you can probably estimate about 6 inches off the floor.

Close your eyes.

Try to hold this position for as long as you can.

As a baseline for comparison, people age sixty and younger should be able to hold this pose for 29 seconds with their eyes open and 21 seconds with their eyes closed to be considered healthy. People who are 61 and older should be able to hold the pose for 22 seconds with their eyes open and 10 seconds with their eyes closed. Anything less and there's room for improvement

TEST 3 ON THE BALL OF YOUR FOOT

3. On the ball of the foot: (for the younger testers)

Stand on one foot with your hands on your hips.

Place your non-supporting foot against the inside of the knee of your supporting leg.

Raise your heel off the ground and hold the pose for as long as you can.

A good threshold to aim for on this pose is to be able to hold it for 25 seconds on each leg.

TEST 4 STANDING REACH

4. Standing reach test. (for our older testers)

Stand next to a wall, arm raised to shoulder height. Reach forward along the wall as far as you can without falling, and note the distance between the starting position, and finishing position.

A standing reach of less than 6 inches indicates a higher risk of falling.

TEST 5 TIMED UP AND GO

5. Timed up and go test.

Place a chair against a wall and measure out 10 feet. Mark this spot. The test is how long it takes to get up out of the chair, walk 10 feet, turn around, and sit back down. If it takes longer than 14 seconds, there is a high risk for falling.

TEST 6 SIT TO STAND

6. The 5 times sit to stand test

Sit in a chair. Whenever ready, stand up and down 5 complete times as fast as possible. You have to stand up fully, and sit down with your butt touching the chair. Persons without balance problems can do this test in less than 13 seconds.

THE NEXT STEP

So you've done the tests and perhaps realized your balance is not as good as expected. Understand that these tests are not for everyone, but between the 6 of them, most people can get an idea of how well they are in balance.

Once the problem can be identified exercises can help.

Evidence shows us that home-based exercise programs containing some form of balance and strength training are the most important intervention strategy for balance loss.

Our Physios can provide a comprehensive balance and strength program to do at home or come into our friendly gym at Hindmarsh and work with one of our Physios until you feel confident enough to manage at home.

HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE EXERCISES TO GET YOU STARTED

HEEL - TOE WALK

This is the same test police give to drivers in USA. It's also an easy way to help improve your balance.

How to do it:

Begin by taking twenty steps forward, heel to toe.

Then take twenty steps walking backward.

You can use your arms to help maintain your balance, or start with one hand on a bench top.

This exercise is simple, effective, and can be done anywhere. We recommend you do this several times throughout your day.

SINGLE LEG STANDING

You can do this exercise anywhere and at any time since there is no equipment required. You can do this one while doing the dishes or waiting for the kettle.

Stand on one foot.

Begin by holding onto a wall, countertop, or chair with two hands.

When that feels easy, try using only one hand.

Work up to balancing on each foot for 20-30 seconds without any support and when that feels solid, then you try a more unstable surface such as a couch cushion for more of a challenge.

If you're looking for an additional challenge, try standing on one foot with your eyes closed.

Closing your eyes will allow you to experience the details of what your body is doing to try to maintain its balance

SIDE LEG LIFTS

Begin by standing near a wall or chair so you can catch yourself if necessary. Wear comfortable shoes, and stand with knees slightly bent.

Place both your hands on your waist.

Gently lift one leg out to the side, just a few inches off the floor.

Bring the leg back down to the starting position and repeat.

Do a set of 10, then switch to the other leg and do a set of 10 on that side.

Keep switching sides until you've done 3 sets of 10 on each side.

Practice balancing exercises for a few weeks, and then repeat the balance test.

WOBBLE BOARD EXERCISES

A wobble board is a great way to train your balance and reflexes, and it's an easily portable and storable piece of equipment that you can use at home or the office. We have one for hire at both clinics.

Here are a number of exercises you can do on the board. They begin with the easiest and progress to more difficult:

- Sit down in a chair and place the wobble board under your feet and slowly rotate it a number of times in each direction. This will begin to work on improving your ankle range of motion and control.
- Stand on the wobble board, feet shoulder-width apart. Hold on to a chair for support if needed and rock the board forward and backward, then side to side. Work on this for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Stand on the wobble board, feet shoulder-width apart. Rotate the wobble board around so the edge of the board is in contact with the floor at all times. Work on this for 2 to 3 minutes.

- Balance on the wobble board for as long as you can without the edges touching the floor. Try to do this for a minimum of 2 minutes.
- Rotate the wobble board in a circle, but do not allow the edge of the board to touch the floor. Build up to a minimum of 2 minutes.
- While balancing on the board with both feet, perform small knee bends to challenge your balance. Gradually bend your knees further into a squat.
- Still balancing with both feet, reach both arms out in front of you. Rotate your upper body around slowly from side to side.
- Balancing with both feet, throw a ball against a wall and catch it on its return. You can also do this with a partner. Once you become proficient with all these wobble board exercises, the next step is to perform some of them with your eyes closed. (not ball throwing!)

You can also build upon these exercises by trying them on one foot at a time. Just make sure to use a wall when trying this until you get your bearings. Work on building up to a minimum time of 1 minute per leg.

IF IN DOUBT - GET ADVICE

It is never too late to start exercising, if you or a member of your family are concerned with your safety and balance, we would love the opportunity to assist you. Exercise has the potential to improve your performance in balance, reaction time, awareness to know if you are starting to fall, and strength to stay upright and keep you on your feet.

Physiotherapy also plays a vital role in educating people about the falls risks, getting up off the floor, modifying the environment and improving your own physical well being.

Our program consists of an individual assessment with supervised gentle strengthening, mobility and balance exercises to maintain your independence and confidence.

We would love the opportunity to help you. Click below to request information on our BEND and Balance Classes

Bend and Balance

We are passionate about providing our patients and community with information on prevention and management of many conditions. This PDF is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or treatment and should not be interpreted as such. Always seek advice from a qualified medical professional and use of this information is at your own risk