



balance



Make it a habit

Lian, age 68, has found that regular tai chi classes have improved her balance and flexibility:

‘Early every morning, I join a group of my neighbours and we practise tai chi for about an hour. We start out with a gentle warm-up and breathing exercises. Then our teacher shows us how to do certain poses and leads us step by step through the slow, flowing movements. We end with cooling-down exercises. This exercise routine has boosted my confidence and reduced my fear of falling. It also gets me out of the house and keeps my arthritis under control.’

How to improve your balance

Each year, more than 17,000 older Queenslanders go to hospital because of fall-related injuries. A simple fall can cause a serious fracture of the arm, hand, ankle, or hip. Balance exercises can help you prevent falls and avoid the disability that may result from falling.

How much, how often?

You can do the balance exercises in this section as often as you like as part of your 30 minutes of physical activity each day. They overlap with the lower-body strength exercises, which can also improve your balance. You can use the strength and balance daily record in your workbook to keep track of your balance exercises.



About balance exercises

- Having a sturdy chair, wall or a person nearby to hold on to will help you work on your balance safely.
- 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.

Progressing

These exercises can improve your balance even more if you challenge yourself and modify them as you progress. Start by holding on to a sturdy chair with both hands for support. To challenge yourself, try holding on to the chair with only one hand. With time, you can try holding on with only one finger (1), then no hands (2). If you are steady on your feet, try doing the exercise with your eyes closed (3).



Making
it real !

You're walking in the neighbourhood and you hear a bicycle bell behind you. Knowing you can turn around quickly and move out of the way without losing your balance is a great feeling!

Stand on one foot



You can do this exercise while brushing your teeth or standing in line at the shops.

1. Stand on one foot behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance.
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.

As you progress:

Level 2: Gradually decrease your hand support and eventually do the exercise with your eyes closed.

Level 3: As you progress, you could stand on foam or a similar soft, unstable surface. Ensure you hold on to a support when starting this progression level.



This exercise will make walking easier by strengthening your calves and ankles, as well as helping to improve your balance.

Toe stand



1. Stand behind a sturdy chair, feet shoulder-width apart, holding on for balance. Breathe in slowly.
2. Breathe out and slowly stand on tiptoes, as high as possible.
3. Hold position for one second.
4. Breathe in as you slowly lower heels to the floor.
5. Repeat 10–15 times.
6. Rest; then repeat 10–15 more times.

As you progress:

Level 2: Try improving your balance by gradually decreasing your hand support and eventually doing the exercise with your eyes closed. You may want to add hand weights.

Level 3: Do the exercise standing on one leg at a time. Add hand weights.



Heel-to-toe walk



Having good balance is important for many everyday activities, such as walking in the park and going up and down stairs. Do this exercise near a wall so you can steady yourself if you need to.

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. (If you are having difficulty, leave a greater space between your toe and heel and build up to closing the gap.)
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 your other foot.
4. Repeat for 20 steps.

As you progress:

Level 2: Try the exercise backwards.

Level 3: Try the exercise with your eyes closed.



Good balance helps you walk safely and avoid tripping and falling over objects in your way.
Do this exercise near a wall so you can steady yourself if you need to.

Balance walk



1. Raise arms to sides at shoulder height.
2. Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.
3. Walk in a straight line with one foot directly in front of the other.
4. As you walk, lift your back leg. Pause for one second before stepping forward.
5. Repeat for 20 steps, alternating legs.

As you progress:

Level 2: Try looking from side to side as you walk, but skip this step if you have inner-ear problems. Try the exercise backwards.

Level 3: Try the exercise with your eyes closed.