

BEST FOOT FORWARD – DON'T LET A FALL GET YOU DOWN

Improve your strength and Balance

Taking a tumble can cause serious injury that affects your everyday life and independence. One of the best ways you can reduce your risk of slipping, tripping and falling is to improve your strength and balance. Almost any kind of physical activity is helpful – but some activities deliver greater benefits than others.



Strong Legs for Stability

Strengthening your leg muscles can reduce the chance of falling if you do lose your balance. Strong legs will stabilize you and can make the difference between staying on your feet and hitting the ground. While any activity that uses your legs is good, it's important to find something you enjoy. The best exercise plan in the world won't help if you don't want to do it. Here are some ideas.

Brisk Walking

Walking requires no special equipment other than a pair of supportive shoes. Make an after-dinner walk part of your routine or leave the car in the driveway and take a walk to pick-up light groceries. There are many simple ways to get moving more often.

Strength Training

Exercises that target specific leg muscles can be easily done at home – there's no need to join an expensive gym. If you enjoy being with a group, community centres often have exercise programs for different age groups. Here's a simple strengthening exercise to try:

Leg extensions: this exercise can be done while watching TV or sitting at the kitchen table. While seated, straighten-out one leg and gently lift it off the ground to a height that's comfortable for you. Hold for 10 seconds if you can. Put that leg down. Extend and lift the other leg. As your strength grows, add ankle weights to give your legs even more of a work-out.



Boost Your Balance

Your sense of balance is what keeps you on your feet – without it you would not be able to stand upright. Poor eyesight, some medications and some health conditions can cause dizziness or other balance problems. Keep these tips in mind:

- Have an annual eye examination.
- Review your medications, vitamins and herbal supplements with your pharmacist or MD.
- If you feel dizzy or faint, see a health professional for an evaluation.
- Eat regularly and ensure you drink enough non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages.

Strength and balance work together to keep you steady. There are many activities that contribute to maintaining and improving balance – and help build strength:

- **Swimming** is a good choice if you enjoy the water.
- **Cycling** is appropriate for people who feel comfortable on a bike. Wear protective gear such as a helmet.
- **Tai Chi** benefits balance, strength and flexibility. It also encourages mental focus, concentration and calmness.
- **Yoga** can be adapted for any age. It offers benefits similar to Tai Chi.
- **Golf** gets you walking, and using a club requires balance and co-ordination.
- **Dancing** is a great work-out for your legs. Put on your favourite music and practice your steps in the living room.

These are just a few ideas to consider. Remember, anything that gets you on your feet and moving will help maintain strength and balance.

What's a Good Goal?

Aim for 20 minutes of exercise at least three days a week. Even better – build some activity into every day. Your independence is worth it.