

# NIH Senior Health

Built with You in Mind

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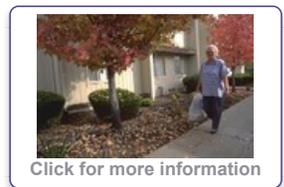
## Exercise: Exercises to Try

### Balance Exercises

To get all of the benefits of physical activity, try all four types of exercise -- endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. This section discusses balance exercises.

#### Important for Fall Prevention

Each year, more than one-third of people age 65 or older fall. Falls and fall-related injuries, such as hip fracture, can have a serious impact on an older person's life. If you fall, it could limit your activities or make it impossible to live independently. Balance exercises, along with certain strength exercises, can help prevent falls by improving your ability to control and maintain your body's position, whether you are moving or still.



#### Balance Exercises to Try

The 5 exercises that follow are aimed at improving your balance and your lower body strength. They include

1. standing on one foot
2. walking heel to toe
3. balance walk
4. back leg raises
5. side leg raises

#### Anywhere, Anytime

You can do balance exercises 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 work on your balance safely.

Balance exercises overlap with the lower body strength exercises, which also can improve your balance. Do the strength exercises -- back leg raises, side leg raises, and hip extensions -- two or more days per week, but not on any two days in a row.

#### Modify as You Progress

The exercises which follow can improve your balance even more if you modify them as you progress. Start by holding on to a sturdy chair for support. To challenge yourself, try holding on to the chair with only one hand; then with time, you can try holding on with only one finger, then no hands. If you are steady on your feet, try doing the exercise with your eyes closed.



#### Safety Tips

- Have a sturdy chair or a person nearby to hold on to if you feel unsteady.
- Talk with your doctor if you are unsure about doing a particular exercise.

### Standing on One Foot

Improve your balance by standing on one foot.

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



### Walking Heel to Toe

Improve your balance by walking heel to toe.

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 your other foot.
4. Repeat for 20 steps.



### Balance Walk

Improve your balance with the balance walk.

1. Raise arms to sides, 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 in front of the other.
4. As you walk, lift your back leg. Pause for 1 second before stepping forward.
5. Repeat for 20 steps, alternating legs.



### Back Leg Raises

Strengthen your buttocks and lower back with back leg raises.

1. Stand behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance. Breathe in slowly.
2. Breathe out and slowly lift one leg straight back without bending your knee or pointing your toes. Try not to lean forward. The leg you are standing on should be slightly bent.
3. Hold position for 1 second.
4. Breathe in as you slowly lower your leg.
5. Repeat 10 to 15 times.
6. Repeat 10 to 15 times with other leg.
7. Repeat 10 to 15 more times with each leg.



### Side Leg Raises

Strengthen your hips, thighs, and buttocks with side leg raises.

1. Stand behind a sturdy chair with feet slightly apart, holding on for balance. Breathe in slowly.
2. Breathe out and slowly lift one leg out to the side. Keep your back straight and your toes facing forward. The leg you are standing on should be slightly bent.
3. Hold position for 1 second.
4. Breathe in as you slowly lower your leg.
5. Repeat 10 to 15 times.
6. Repeat 10 to 15 times with other leg.
7. Repeat 10 to 15 more times with each leg.



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