

# **“9 Simple Ways To Improve Your Balance and Prevent Another Fall”**

## **1. Remove Safety Hazards in Your Home**

One of the easiest ways to reduce your risk of falling is to start by “fall proofing” your home. There are 5 main areas in your home where you can experience a fall: living areas, stairs and steps, the kitchen, the bedroom and the bathroom. Start by clearing all of your walkways in and between rooms. Do you notice any small items that you have to go around that might cause you to trip? How about any loose rugs or electrical cords?

\*After reading through the 9 Tips in this report, there is a detailed “Bonus Section” that explains how to fall proof each of the 5 areas in your home.

## **2. Strengthen Your Ankles**

Your ankles are your first line of defense to making small corrections in your balance, so you want to make sure that these muscles have good strength and are responding appropriately. The easiest way to keep your ankle muscles strong is to perform “heel raises” and “toe raises”.

Make sure you’re standing next to a firm countertop or other piece of furniture that you can hold onto if needed for balance. Then, place your feet shoulder width apart and rise up onto your toes as far as possible (heel raises). When you come down, rock back onto your heels and lift your toes as high as you can (toe raises). Go back and forth until the muscles in your ankles fatigue. This will typically take 10-30 reps, depending on the condition on your muscles. Work your way up to performing 2-3 sets at a time, once daily.

Practicing “single leg balance” is also an excellent way to strengthen your ankle muscles (as well as your hips). Safety is key with this exercise, so again make sure you’re standing next to a countertop or stable surface. Start by holding onto the countertop, then lift one foot off the ground. Slowly take your hands away from the countertop and do your best to maintain this single leg stance position for up to 30 seconds. It’s normal for your ankle to move and turn as the muscles attempt to maintain your balance. Just make sure that you feel safe and comfortable. Repeat this exercise 2-3 times on each leg, once daily.

### 3. Strengthen Your Hip and Core Muscles

Having strong hip and core muscles is vital to maintaining balance and reducing the risk of falls. And while there are a multitude of good exercises to help you improve your strength, here are 3 of the best ones:

**Squats:** While standing at your countertop begin to squat down like you are sitting back in a chair. Go down as far as you feel comfortable, making sure that you're able stand tall again using your legs. Perform 2 sets of 10-15 reps, once daily. Use the counter for balance and not to pull yourself back up. \*For added safety, you can always place a chair behind you in case you squat too low and can't get back to standing.

**Bridges:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet shoulder width apart. Push your hips and buttocks up and away from the floor as far as possible (try to keep your back straight and avoid arching it). Hold this "bridge" position for 10-20 seconds. Perform 5-10 reps, once daily.

**Side Leg Raises:** Lay on your side with you bottom knee bent forward and with your top knee straight. Make sure your top leg is in a straight line with your body and that your pelvis is rolled forward. From this position, lift your top leg straight up towards the ceiling as high as possible. Avoid letting your pelvis roll backward or lifting your leg out in front of your body. Perform 2 sets of 10-15 reps on each leg, once daily.

### 4. Improve Your Posture

As we get older and our balance starts to weaken, our posture also tends to change. Have you ever noticed someone walking hunched over, taking small steps and shuffling along? This might be the extreme version of poor posture, but most people who've experienced a fall will have some kind of negative change to their posture.

Over time, these changes in posture make it harder and harder to maintain upright balance. Are you ready to check your posture? If so, find a mirror or ask a loved one for their honest input. At the very least, try to work on standing tall, with your chest up and your head and shoulders back. If you have poor posture, this might be difficult at first, but just do your best. A good way to think of improving your posture is to imagine that there's a string attached to your chest bone...now imagine that the string is being pulled up towards the sky. If you can do this, chances are you'll find yourself in an upright, neutral posture. Not only will this improve your balance, but you'll look good too!

## 5. Review Your Medications

Have you ever noticed that one of the most commonly listed side effects on most medications is “may cause dizziness or lightheadedness”? If you take several medications, it’s very possible that one or many of them are causing you to feel dizzy or lightheaded. In addition, medications often interact with each other in negative ways, and this could be affecting your balance as well.

If you haven’t already done so recently, plan to speak with your physician about your medications soon. Ask questions about which ones might be affecting your balance, and also ask if all of your medications are still necessary. If you’ve been making positive changes in your life, you might just be ready to get rid of some of your medications. You never know until you ask!

## 6. Check Your Eyesight

Your body has 3 primary balance systems that all work together to give you optimal balance. These systems include your vision, your sensation and spatial awareness (we call this “proprioception”) and your inner ear. Over time, many people become visually dominant in regards to their 3 balance systems. And while you don’t want to be so reliant on your vision to keep you in proper balance, having good vision will be essential to help you maintain your balance and avoid falls, especially as you work to improve the other 2 balance systems.

If you have any difficulty with your vision, now is a great time to get your eyes checked. Even if you already wear prescription glasses, you’ll want to make sure that your eyesight hasn’t changed recently.

## 7. Exercise Regularly

Even if you have limited abilities when it comes to your balance, you’ll want to engage in regular bouts of exercise in order to keep your muscles strong, improve your endurance and improve your bone density. Some excellent ways to keep your body fit and limber include the following:

**Resistance training with weights or exercise bands:** this helps improve your muscle strength as well as bone density. Many exercises can be performed in sitting, so balance won’t be an issue.

**Stretching and Yoga:** keeping your joints flexible is key to good balance, especially when it comes to your ankles and hips. Yoga is an excellent way to stretch the muscles and joints throughout your body.

**Walking and Hiking:** going for a walk is one of the best ways to keep your body in shape and to improve your balance. If you don't have a walking partner and don't feel like walking alone, there are typically walking groups that you can join. And if you really want to challenge yourself, you can always consider hiking, which requires more strength to go up and down hills and also requires more balance when you're on uneven surfaces.

## 8. Test Your 3 Balance Systems

Testing your 3 balance systems is a bit tricky to do on your own, but it can be done. Remember that the 3 systems include your vision, your sensation/proprioception and your inner ear. I'll explain how to test each of the 3 below, but let me give you a word of caution first: when you test your balance on your own, you run the risk of falling. So if you're interested in performing these tests, make sure you're in a safe environment and that someone is nearby to help you correct your balance if needed.

Here are what we call the "Romberg" balance tests:

**Position 1:** stand on a firm surface with your feet together and eyes open

**Position 2:** stand on a firm surface with your feet together and eyes closed

**Position 3:** stand on an unstable surface with your feet together and eyes open

**Position 4:** stand on an unstable surface with your feet together and eyes closed

\*Use a piece of foam or a squishy pillow for an unstable surface

How to interpret the tests: a person with "normal" balance should be able to perform each of the 4 positions with minimal difficulty for 30 seconds each. If you have difficulty with the first position, which is the easiest, you likely have more than one balance system involved. If you do fine with the first position but have difficulty with the second position, it's likely that you're visually dominant and have issues with both your sensation and inner ear. If you do just fine with the first 2 positions but then have difficulty with the third, you likely have issues with your sensation/proprioception, and possibly your inner ear as well. And finally, if you have difficulty with the fourth position alone, you likely have some level of difficulty with your inner ear only.

This explanation is very confusing I'm sure, so read the final tip for a much better solution!

## 9. Schedule a **FREE “Balance and Falls Risk Assessment”**

When it comes to fully understanding how to improve your balance and pinpointing which areas are specifically impacting it, there are so many factors to consider. Throughout this report, I've mentioned the “3 Balance Systems”, which play a huge role in proper balance. And I've also mentioned things like strength, flexibility, eyesight, inner ear dysfunction and side effects from medications (and we didn't even discuss vertigo or other things like damage to your central nervous system, like a stroke!). So when it comes to fully understanding what's negatively impacting your balance, it can be quite confusing.

For those people who want a more in-depth understanding of these potential balance factors before they decide how to improve their balance, we've developed a tool to help them get started: a **FREE “Balance and Falls Risk Assessment”** with one of our specially trained physical therapists.

So if you're frustrated by not understanding why your balance has gotten so bad, and you want to get down to the **ROOT CAUSE** of your trouble before deciding how best to handle it, claiming your free assessment is likely the best place for you to start.

To claim your **FREE “Balance and Falls Risk Assessment”**, simply call our office at (817) 380-8077.

During your free assessment, we'll help you understand 2 things:

1. The **ROOT CAUSE** for your balance difficulties
2. What you can do to improve your balance immediately

So again, if you're ready to finally start taking control of your balance and are ready to get back to your active lifestyle, give us a call today at (817) 380-8077 to schedule your free 30-minute “Balance and Fall Risk Assessment”.

We look forward to helping you!

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Ried, PT, DPT

# Bonus Section

## How to “Fall Proof” the 5 Key Areas in Your Home

### Living Areas

Simple changes to your main living areas can dramatically reduce your risk for a fall in your home. Take a look at the layout of your furniture. Does it give you easy walkways, or do you find yourself walking around pieces to get where you are going? Do you have items that you can trip over that are in your way? Throw rugs can cause tripping easily if you catch your toe on them. Power cords should be tacked against the baseboard, and avoid having them run along the floor in your walking path.

### Stairs and Steps

Avoid leaving objects on the stairs at all costs! Make sure your stairs are well lit with light switches at the top and bottom. If you don't have switches at both ends, an electrician can easily install them to assist you. Simple home maintenance is important as well. When was the last time the screws were tightened on your railing? Would it better serve you to add a second railing on the opposite side of the staircase?

### Kitchen

High cabinets can create problems. Reaching high overhead challenges your balance and forces you to stand on chairs that aren't sturdy. Moving high items to lower shelves immediately reduces your fall risk. If you are unable to do so, having a sturdy step stool is a better option to reach those high places

### Bedroom

Place a lamp within reach while lying in bed so you can turn it on before you get out of bed. If the path from your bed to the bathroom is dark, have a night light that lights up when it's dim in the house. Using a motion sensitive light requires you to already be up and walking before it activates, giving you an opportunity to lose your balance in the dark.

### Bathroom

Water and slick surfaces can be a disastrous combination. Non-slip strips in your bath and shower will give you extra stability without adding the bulk of a shower mat. They are cheap and can be purchased at any hardware store. A shower chair and shower wand will reduce the length of time standing in the shower. Lastly, installing grab bars is one of the most effective ways to ensure safety when getting into and out of the bath or shower. Many carpenters can install them quickly by your tub or toilet.