

Exercising to Prevent Falls

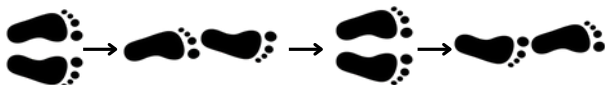
Maintaining balance, strength, and coordination are essential for preventing falls, especially as you age. Here are some exercises that focus on strength, balance, flexibility, and coordination to help you reduce the risk of falls.

Balance Exercises

These exercises improve your ability to control and maintain your body's position while standing or moving.

Standing on One Leg: Stand tall and hold onto a sturdy surface (like a countertop or chair) for support. Lift one leg off the ground, holding for 10-30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat.

Heel-to-Toe Walk: First practice this exercise lightly touching a sturdy surface. Focusing on a spot in front of you, place your right heel directly in front of left foot and touching the toe of your back foot. Return to a standing stance, with your feet shoulder-width apart and repeat on the other side. Once comfortable with this motion, stand with your arms straight out and walk forward in a straight line, placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toe of the other foot. This promotes stability and balance.



Flexibility Exercises

Flexibility helps maintain a full range of motion, reducing stiffness that could lead to a fall.

Calf Stretch: Stand facing a wall with one foot behind you. Press your back heel into the floor to stretch your calf muscles. This helps with balance and posture.

Hamstring Stretch: Sit on the ground with one leg extended and the other bent. Reach toward the toes of the extended leg to stretch your hamstring. This helps prevent falls caused by tightness in the legs.



Strength Exercises

Building muscle strength in the legs, core, and lower body is crucial for maintaining balance and stability.

Squats: Using a stable surface or chair, stand with feet hip-width apart, bend your knees, and lower your body as if you're sitting back into a chair. Keep your knees aligned with your toes and return to standing. Start with 3-5 squats in a row, increasing repetitions over time as your build strength. Squats build strength in the legs and hips.

Lunges: Step forward with one leg, lowering your body until both knees are at a 90-degree angle. Push back up to a standing position. Lunges strengthen the legs and improve coordination.

Sit to Stand: Put hands on arms of chair or cross your arms across your chest. With your legs hip-width apart and your knees directly above your ankles, push body up out of chair, partially standing. Repeat 3-5 times. This targets the hip flexors, core, and thighs.



Coordination Exercises

Coordination exercises help your body respond to sudden shifts in balance and improve reaction times.

Step Touch: Stand with your feet together. Step one foot to the side, then bring the other foot to meet it. Repeat in the opposite direction. This simple coordination exercise improves footwork and balance.

Side Leg Raises: Stand tall, and lift one leg out to the side, keeping your body upright. This improves coordination and strengthens the muscles on the outer thighs and hips.



Safety Tips

- **Start Slow:** Begin gently and increase intensity as you gain comfort.
- **Use Support:** Hold a chair or wall during balance exercises.
- **Be Consistent:** Aim for exercises 2-3 times per week.
- **Know the Signs:** Watch for history of falls, fear of falling, or physical limitations.
- **Seek Evaluation:** Primary care physicians and physical therapists can assess your fall risk.