

Linda's T'ai Chi Ch'uan

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Weekly Hand-out February 6, 2020

2 Exercises to Help Improve Your Balance

Could your exercise routine use a little balance? We all need to work on our balance. We can achieve this by wearing the right shoes, keeping our head up, chin in; maintain a tall body stance, (avoid locking your back) soft shoulders, eyes forward, pushing the tush, leading with the belly button. Balance begins with our toes. Micro movements of our toes help us maintain balance.

Adding balance and muscle-strengthening activities in our daily lives may help lower the risk of falls, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Here are three balance exercises from the National Institute on Aging (NIA) that you might add to your routine:*

Stand on one foot

- Stand on one foot behind a sturdy chair or wall, holding lightly onto its backrest for balance.
- Hold the position for up to 10 seconds.
- Repeat on the same leg 10 – 15 times.
- Shift to the other leg and repeat the exercise 10 – 15 times.
- Start over with the first leg and repeat the full cycle once more.

Heel-to-toe walk- Walk like a Cat meow

Do this exercise near a wall so that you can steady yourself if needed.

- Position the heel of one foot in a walking position
- Focus on a spot ahead (not down) of you to keep yourself steady as you walk.

- Hold your arms naturally
- Take a step. Put your heel just in front and continue with each foot
- Repeat for 20 steps.

More ways to work on balance

The HHS recommends that older adults at risk for falls do balance training on three or more days a week. Talk with your doctor about the amounts and types of activities that are right for you.

T'ai Chi is a great way to improve balance. It will build up strength in your legs.

*For safety's sake, talk with your doctor before significantly increasing your activity level.

Sources: American College of Sports Medicine; National Institute on Aging; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Is there a right way to fall?

Our first goal is to avoid falling. Know where you are walking; know where you are placing your feet; use a flashlight when it is dark. But if you feel yourself about to take a tumble, there are things you can do to help lower the chances of a serious injury.

- Crouch down. That way you won't have as far to fall.
- Try to relax your body, instead of going stiff. Go soft
- Bend your elbows, knees, and protect your head.
- Try to fall on the fleshy parts of your body — for example, on your bottom, not your side.

If you do fall, it's best not to get up right away. Take a moment to make sure you haven't injured yourself — especially your head. If you're concerned, call for help.

If you think you're OK, scoot or crawl to a couch or chair. Then use it to support yourself as you get back up. If you have a headache, feel dizzy or are in pain, talk with your doctor right away.

Dr. Reed Tuckson, M.D., a nationally recognized speaker on preventive health and clinical medicine, and a Fellow of the American College of Physicians