

## **Aging Gracefully – The *Right Type* of Balance Exercises**

Many of you have probably heard that balance exercises help improve balance and prevent falls. This information is not new, but do you know if you are doing the *right type* of balance exercises?

Have you ever wondered “Why is my balance good when I am standing, but poor when I start walking?” If you are someone who experiences this problem, then you might not be doing the *right type* of balance exercises.

There are two different types of balance exercise, static and dynamic. Static balance exercises challenge your balance when your base of support (the area of your body that is in contact with the ground, ie. your feet when standing) is not moving. For example, rocking hips back and forth, reaching overhead, reaching to the floor, and turning to look over your shoulder all while in the standing position.

Dynamic balance exercises challenge your balance when your base of support IS moving. So how do you make your base of support move? One way is to stand on something that is soft, such as a yoga mat, or a cushion. If you have ever stood on soft ground, you may have noticed that your feet and leg muscles have to work harder to keep your balance. That is because whatever you are standing on is not stable and either moves or causes you to move while on it and your muscles need to continually work to keep you upright.

Another way to make your base of support move is to walk. With each step, your base of support changes from two feet to one foot and moves ahead. So in order to challenge your dynamic balance try exercises with walking. Can you maintain your balance when walking forward, or backward, or stepping side to side? How about when crossing one foot in front of the other? Can you walk and maintain your balance while you turn your head from side to side? Can you maintain your balance when walking with your feet kept wide apart, or close together, or when walking heel to toe, like on a tightrope? These are all ways to challenge your dynamic balance.

Now, I am not saying that everyone will be able to do these more advanced balance exercises, or should, but if you find that the balance exercises you are doing are getting too easy, this is how you can progress them. Challenge yourself by doing all of your regular balance exercises while standing on a yoga mat or try to integrate some of the more advanced walking exercises described above. Always remember when doing balance exercises you need to keep yourself safe, so make sure you do them close to a wall, a counter, a chair, or even your walker so you can grab on to something if you do lose your balance. If you normally use a walking aid to walk then use it when trying some of the more advanced walking exercises.

If you want to improve your balance when walking, then you need to challenge your dynamic balance as well as your static balance. So, get out there and get your base of support moving!!

Have fun and enjoy the colors of the Fall!

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