

BALANCE

For most people, balance is a part of our lives we take for granted.

From the time we're small – running and jumping without giving a thought to the possibility of falling – to our senior years when the possibility of losing our balance and falling is very much on our minds, we largely take balance for granted. It's only when an illness or accident occur that we start thinking seriously about the importance of balance and how we can maintain it over the years. Since it plays such an integral preventative role in healthy aging, including avoiding falls, balance needs to be understood, maintained, and enhanced throughout our lives.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF IMPAIRED BALANCE AS WE AGE?

The causes of loss of balance are many and can include:

- **Dizziness.** This can be the result of a fluid imbalance in our inner ear, if we stand too quickly and our blood pressure drops, or as a side effect of medications.
- **Changes in vision.** As we grow older, our depth perception can become distorted and throw us off balance.
- **Lack of sleep.** Without enough sleep, we are less clear-headed and our muscles are sluggish, which can mean a slow reaction to ward off a possible fall.
- **Weakening of muscles and bones** as we age. Inactivity accelerates this process.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR BALANCE?

Like maintaining a healthy weight and a fit body, improving balance isn't difficult... it just takes consistency!

- **Try balance exercises.** It can be as basic as standing on one foot. Make it more challenging by raising your arms to your sides or over your head.
- **Take a T'ai Chi class.** This ancient form of low impact exercise is excellent for balance and has the additional benefit of calming your mind.
- **Just say Om.** Like T'ai Chi, yoga is an exceptional mind and body exercise that can help improve balance as well as muscle strength and flexibility.
- **Get more ZZZs.** When your body is at rest, every cell is rebuilding itself and preparing for the next day.
- **Get strong.** Consider joining a gym or working out with a trainer to improve overall body strength, including your core. Even light weights can go a long way to creating a stronger you.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF IMPROVING BALANCE?

Once you incorporate some of these tips into your daily routine, you'll begin to see the benefits of working on your balance:

- You will **feel more confident** in your body.
- **Reaction time** to a potential fall will improve, helping you to potentially steady yourself or grab onto something.
- **Muscle tone will increase**, resulting in stronger, thicker muscles which can protect bones and joints.
- **Stronger bones** are more resistant to fractures.
- You'll be **more clear-headed** and aware of your surroundings since regular exercise helps improve the flow of blood to the brain.

With regular exercise and awareness of vision and other physical issues, you can improve your balance. Make it a habit, and soon you'll find yourself striding along with confidence!