

Exercises for Balance

Balance means “to have an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady”. Balance requires muscle strength, as well as the brain and the body to be “talking to each other” effectively through neural connections. As we get older, maintaining these capabilities through regular practise is important. By reducing our risk of falls, we reduce our risk of fractures. Try these exercises at home three times per week, or more often, and notice your steadiness, co-ordination and energy levels in day-to-day activities. Please let me know how you get on!

Beth x

Preparation

Stand or sit with your eyes closed (if you feel secure to do so). Notice your body, from your feet upwards. Gently mobilise your shoulders with some shoulder rolls, and your wrists with some wrist rotations. Get your legs moving with some gentle marching movements.

Sideways walking

- Stand tall and step sideways, by reaching one leg out to the side, planting it, then bringing the other leg to join it. Keep going for up to 10 paces, return. Repeat.
- Focus on moving from the hips, notice the feeling of the sides of the buttocks, this is where we want to feel it working.

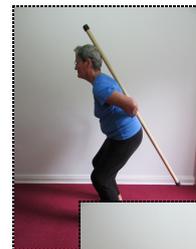
Variations: hold on to working-surface for support; take just one sideways step and then return.

Extend: hold some weights as you do this; increase number of steps; include sideways walking in your daily walks.



Squats

- Stand in front of a chair, feet shoulder-width apart.
- Exhale as you bend the ankles, hips and knees, keeping your heels down and your spine aligned as shown and knees aligned with centre of foot. Feel the buttocks stretch as your bottom approaches the chair.
- Pause with your bottom hovering above the chair, maintaining alignment.
- Return to standing, exhaling, and pressing the floor away beneath your feet. Feel the buttocks contract to get you upright again. Try a set of 8 squats. If all feels well, try another set.



Variations: Have a chair or pole in front for support; just bend the ankles, knees and hips a little and practise timing your movement with your exhale; sit down in the chair rather than pause with your bottom above it.

Extend: hold weights in your hands or at your shoulders; squat deeper; pause for longer.

Wall planks with push ups

Front wall planks with push up

- Stand facing a wall and place your palms on the wall at shoulder height.
- Maintain trunk alignment as shown (ie: bottom not sticking out or sagging towards wall!) and keep heels on floor throughout the exercise.
- As you exhale, bend your elbows, and as you exhale again, push the wall away, straightening the elbows. Up to 8 reps.
- Keep your shoulders down throughout and notice the tummy as you breathe out and maintain your alignment. The tummy is where we want to feel it working (as well as in the arms and shoulders).



Variations: to feel the tummy working without the push-up, rest your

forearms on the wall, body aligned, and focus on your breathing, for up to one minute.

Extend: Take the feet further from the wall, still maintaining trunk alignment and heels down.

Side wall planks

- Stand sideways to the wall, feet away from the wall.
- Place the near-side forearm on the wall, with elbow at arm-pit height.
- Keep shoulders down and breathe fully, maintaining trunk alignment as shown (not bending away from wall or sagging into wall). Keep shoulders aligned with the hips, not rotated. Increase the time, up to 1 minute.
- Notice your waist on the wall-side as you breathe out fully, this is where we want to feel it working.



Variations: The seated pendulum (below) is a seated

alternative. Increase or decrease the distance of your feet

from the wall to change the level of challenge (further away is more challenging).

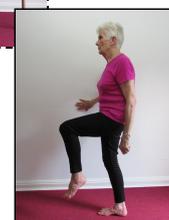
Seated pendulum

- Sit upright in a chair, feel your body-weight equally shared between your two sitting-bones. Inhale.
- As you exhale, transfer some of your weight onto your right sitting bone, maintaining your “neutral” aligned spine (ie: not side-bending, but tilting to the side like a pendulum). Return to the centre. Repeat, to the left. Notice your waist on the opposite side, this is where we want to feel it working.



Single leg balance with ankle mobility and strength

- With the support of a chair, the wall or a working surface available, ensure you feel steady on both legs and then raise one straight leg in front.
- Flex and point your foot on the raised leg side, then rotate the ankle. Start with three flex and points and a rotation in each direction.
- Rest the leg down and repeat on the other side.



Variations: Be seated to do the ankle mobility exercises and then do one-legged balance with a bent knee as shown.

Extend: Take the leg out to the side (as shown); increase the time (up to one minute for each leg); hold weights; try a balance pad (a squishy surface) to stand on.

Stepping drills

Fairy steps

- Walk heel-to-toes in a forwards direction aiming to keep in a straight line. Walk across the room then turn around and repeat.



Variation: Hold on to a working surface.

Extend: walk backwards; don't look down; eyes closed; holding weights.

Stepping up and down

- With a banister available for support and using the bottom stair, take one step up leading on your right leg, left leg follows, then down on the right, left leg follows. Repeat but with the left leg leading. Alternate.



Variations: Using a block or strong box, step up and down in different directions; hold weights or a rucksack with some weight in it; increase repetitions; move more slowly.

Relax

Seated or standing, eyes closed if that feels comfortable, notice your body from your feet up to the top of your head.

	Body awareness	Sideways walking	Squats	Wall planks with push ups	Side wall plank	Seated pendulum	Single leg balance with ankle mobility	Step drills
Relaxation	✓							
Postural stability		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Core strength		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lower limb strength		✓	✓				✓	✓
Upper limb strength				✓	✓			
Wrist resilience				✓				
Co-ordination		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

A big thank you to Flick and Kathy for modelling the exercises, to Dr Anna Protor for review and to Abigail Svarovska for photography and graphic design.