



## Best Balance Booster

One in three people over the age of 65 will suffer a fall.

A large number of adults focus on diet and exercise to stay healthy. Poor balance is one of the worst offenders to health.

In the United States, millions of people are sent to the emergency department with head injuries and broken hips. Unfortunately, imbalance is a common cause of falls, but there are many things you can do to improve your balance.

### Physical therapy

In physical therapy, balancing focuses on the ability of the brain to communicate with the joint, the balance system in the ear (vestibular system), and vision. Coordinating all three with exercises such as standing on one foot, with eyes opened and then closed will improve posture. Physical therapists also work on joint flexibility, walking, and lower-extremity exercises. Other exercises that improve balance include chair stands and squats. Make sure you get training before attempting these exercises.

### Muscle strength

“Core strength is very important for balance. If the abdominal muscles in your core are weak, they cannot support your limbs, especially when walking. If the gluteal muscles in your buttock aren’t strong, they won’t propel you forward,” says Mortiz a physical therapist at Harvard Medical School. Muscle strengthening can help. Mortiz suggest starting with gentle core exercises, like the pelvis tilt (lie on the floor with knees bent up, then roll your pelvis up.) and then moving on to more intense exercises such as wall planks (stand six inches from wall, and hold the position for 20 seconds). Leg lifts will strength the gluteal muscles, and adding resistance bands to leg lifts makes the exercises more effective.

### Tai chi and yoga

Yoga and tai chi are exercises that make you pay attention to the quality of movement, rather than the quantity, which improves balance. In tai chi, you practice slow, flowing motions and shift your weight from one limb to another. Yoga combines a series of focused breathing and postures. Both exercises increase flexibility, reflexes, range of motion, core and leg strength. The result will be you become better at balancing in a number of different positions, which help you avoid falling if you meet obstacles or uneven payment.

## Vision correctness

“If you can’t see where you are going you are going to fall, your risk goes up”, says Moritz. The fix may be as simple as a new eyeglass prescription. Get a comprehensive, dilated eye exam every one or two years, if you are 65 or older, every three years if you 55-64 years old, and 2-4 years if you’re 40-54 years old. If you have an increased risk of eye conditions, you may need an exam more often.

## Assistive walking devices

A cane or walker can assist your balance and give you more confidence walking and stability. But don’t buy a device on your own. “If it’s too high or low, that can cause a fall. You need to get measured, and training on how to use it,” says Moritz. Training takes a few physical therapy sessions. Canes are available with various grips and bases. Walkers are available with lockable brakes, for different terrains, seats, and baskets.