



SELF-HELP: PATIENT'S ADVICE

## Better balance exercises ☆

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Decreased balance ability can lead to ankle sprains, knee injuries, low back pain or in the elderly potentially catastrophic falls. Balance training can prevent ankle or knee injuries and reduce the likelihood of falls in older persons. It can also be used as a treatment for frequent ankle sprains, anterior cruciate ligament injuries or osteoarthritis of the knee. Given the health risks of poor balance and the benefits of balance training it is easy to see why balance exercises are becoming very popular.

Balance exercises require no special equipment and can be performed safely and effectively at home. It only requires a few minutes a day. This self-care article will describe a simple test of your balance ability and few of the more practical balance exercises.

*Test your balance:*

- Stand on one leg and look straight ahead
- Give yourself 3 chances to last 30 s
- Start over if:
  - Your raised foot touches your opposite leg
  - Your foot moves or hops
  - You reach out to touch something
- If you are over 50 years of age and can do this on both legs you have passed
- If you are under 50 years of age you should give yourself 3 chances to balance 30 s with your eyes closed
- If you can do this on both legs you pass (Fig. 1)

*Forward lunge:*

- Stand tall and slowly lean forward from your heels
- When you feel that you are beginning to fall forward (i.e. heels lift up), step forward with one leg



**Figure 1** Single leg stance balance test. (Reproduced from Liebenson CS. Advice for the clinician and patient: sensory-motor training. Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies, 5; 1: 21–28, 2001.)

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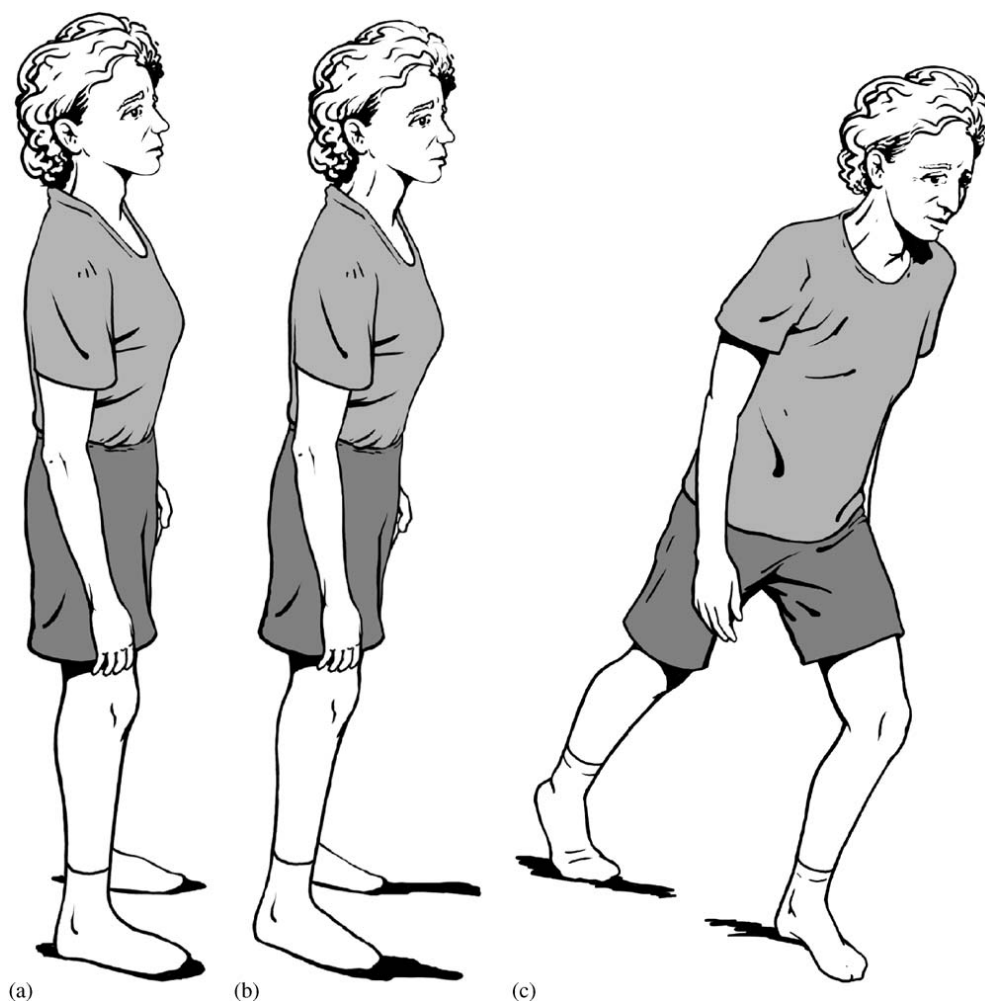


Figure 2 Falling forward lunge.

- As soon as your foot lands try to stabilize your posture, balance and hold your position
- Your opposite leg should be slightly bent at the knee and the heel should be lifted up from the floor
- Mistakes to avoid:
  - The knee on the stepping leg moving forward of the tips of your toes
  - The arch of your foot flattening (pronating)
  - The back leg being too rigid (knee locked)

*Note:* As you lean forward try to feel the “deep” muscles of the sole of your feet engage.

*Repetitions:* 10–12 on each leg.

*Frequency:* Twice a day (Fig. 2).

*What to expect:* Within a month your single leg stance balance should improve. This will be sign that your risk of musculoskeletal problems is going down. If you have trouble with these exercises consult your health care professional. There are many options for improving your balance from Tai Chi to stretching or other manual therapy methods. A key with such exercise is to remain active and continue to challenge yourself at or near your threshold so you can make progress.

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