

Avoiding Falls — IMPROVING BALANCE

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Here is a self-test to help you find out if you have balance difficulties and are at increased risk of falling:

- Does getting up quickly cause you to feel off balance?
- Do you sway when you stand still and close your eyes?
- Are you unsteady when walking in the dark?
- Does nodding or turning your head (as in “yes” and “no”) cause you to lose your balance?
- Do you feel unsteady when walking in a strange place?
- Do you sway when you walk?
- Do you have difficulty when walking on uneven surfaces?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you may want to consult your doctor or see a balance specialist. In the very least, these signs indicate that you need to use some extra cautions to avoid falling.

Some Things To Improve Balance

Posture tips to improve your balance when standing or walking:

- Turn you toes slightly inward or straight ahead, especially if you tend to stand or walk with your feet turned out
- Keep your weight over the balls of your feet, **NOT ON YOUR HEALS**
- When standing or walking, flex your knees slightly—Do not lock your knees
- Rather than walking “heel” to “toe”, spread your feet about two or three inches
- Tuck your chin very slightly when standing or walking and when getting up from a seated position
- *Feel* your weight distribution over your feet
- *Feel* your feet in contact with the ground or floor before transferring your weight
- *Feel* how your body is aligned with gravity.

Some Tips To Avoid Falling

Practice these to improve your balance and reduce the risk of falling:

- Learn to feel the changes in your balance when you change your position

- **Be aware of your surroundings**
- **Choose a path and look ahead—Be sure that you can see the entire surface that you will be walking over—Pause and re-establish your direction at the end of your path**
- **When in a strange place, be more careful—Seeing things that you are used to causes a balance orientation that is disrupted when you are in a different setting**
- **Learn to stand and walk with your weight forward—Not on your heels**
- **When changing your position, be sure to feel your balance in the new position before you begin to walk—This applies to arising from sitting, especially early in the morning when getting out of bed**
- **If you bend over and then stand up there is a tendency to be disoriented for a moment—It is very good to have something close to use to steady yourself until upright balance is restored**
- **When walking on uneven surfaces, keep your feet a little further apart and be sure that your feet are on solid ground before transferring your weight**
- **If you wear bifocal glasses be especially careful walking down stairs.**

[Dr. Schilstra has operated a private chiropractic practice for 42 years. Among his many accomplishments, he has been the Chair of the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the World Safety Organization and the President of the California Safety Council.]

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