

# Fall Prevention Training for Seniors

Why does falling become such a concern as we get older? Are we more fragile, and if so why? Have our bodies changed so drastically that we can't stay upright anymore, and if so why? What is it that has so many seniors saying I have bad balance and I am afraid of falling? I will attempt to answer these questions and add an upside to this downward spiral we seem to be on.

Growing up as a kid in Illinois there wasn't a day that went by that I wasn't playing tag in the front yard, hanging from a tree (yes, there are trees in Illinois), jumping out of a tree, riding a bike, falling off a bike and getting up and doing it again. I am not a scientist although I am pretty confident I still have the same body now that I had back then. So why I ask, or better yet when do we develop this fear and tell ourselves we are too old to do that.

Over the course of our lives our bodies take a beating, but keep on going. We break bones, sprain, strain and tear muscles. From day one we fall, trip, bruise, bleed and cry for a minute and get up and do it again. Then we grow up and responsibility sets in; work, kids, more work, more kids and our lives change. We don't go out and play tag, ride a bike, play tennis or golf. We watch people play tennis and golf, ride bikes and kayaks and say, I am too old to do that. Here lies the problem. The good news is you can do something about it, it is not too late.

I believe you are never too old! Are you going to go out and move the way you once did, no probably not, but who cares? If you want to go out and ride a bike again but are afraid of falling, put on training wheels, who cares? You want to play tennis but can't get the ball over the net, get rid of the net. You want to play basketball, but can't get the ball up that high, lower the basket. You want to go for a walk in the woods but are afraid of tripping and hurting yourself, put on a football helmet and pads. (All right I

am kidding about that one). But what you can do is practice the tuck and roll technique we learned as kids.

Fall prevention and balance training are like riding a bike. We all know how to balance ourselves and we all know how to fall because we have been doing it our whole lives. You simply need to start moving again. I don't want you sitting in a chair or at an exercise machine; I already know you can do that. I want you to stand up and start to regain confidence in the things you no longer can do. I will show you progressions that are appropriate and safe for you.

I recall an 84 year old gentleman I worked on in Maine. He had replacement knee surgery twice on both knees. He complained of having no balance. Through a series of exercises involving different movement patterns, forward, backward, left right, reaction and agility drills, I improved upon his ability to stabilize his body while producing force, react to the unexpected, control the body's core and feel more confident. Over a period of several weeks, he said to me one day, "This morning was unusual because for the first time I was able to put my pants on without having to lean into the wall to stabilize myself". He balanced on a single leg! Amazing to him, expected from me and know you can do it too. Give it a try you might surprise yourself.

As I always tell the participants in my class at the senior center, if you want to fall down, look down, if you want to STAY UP, LOOK UP. They respond by saying "Then we can't see any money that might be on the ground." Thank goodness this class is over.

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