



## What is Balance?

Balance is the body's ability to keep the centre of mass over the base of support. To enable this, our body is constantly making subtle postural adjustments. Many systems within the body contribute to our ability to maintain balance, such as the **Visual system**, **Vestibular system**, **Musculoskeletal system** (joints and muscles) and **Somatosensory system** (touch, pressure and awareness of the body in space)

## Why is it important to have good balance?

Unfortunately, as our bodies get older balance decreases, which in turn increases the risk of falling. Our bones also become weaker with age, and a fall is more likely to result in broken bones, such as a broken hip. A broken hip is a leading cause of mortality in people over the age of 75 (a very scary statistic!)

## Why does balance decrease with age?

With age there are many changes to our body's systems. For example:

- ❖ **Visual system:** reduced visual acuity, visual field and perception (distinguishing colour changes, depth changes, surface changes). This can make it difficult to judge the speed of oncoming traffic and increase the time it takes to adjust to different situations and lighting conditions.
- ❖ **Vestibular system:** this system is important for providing us with an internal reference of being balanced. This can be affected with age.
- ❖ **Musculoskeletal system:** decrease in muscle strength, flexibility and endurance. It also takes longer for muscles to react. Joints can also become stiffer, resulting in limited motion.
- ❖ **Somatosensory system:** reduced sensation and joint position sense

*All of these changes affect our ability to maintain balance and to react to situations (such as tripping over) that require us to regain our balance quickly.*

## Can I reduce my risk of falling?

There are many things you can do to improve balance and prevent yourself from falling. The important thing to remember is that balance can improve with practice, and there are strategies you can use in daily life to hopefully prevent falls. For example:

- **Eat well** (by eating healthy foods at regular intervals) and avoid dehydration.
- **Have regular check-ups** (especially for your vision)
- **Be realistic** about your physical ability. Avoid risky activities such as climbing on chairs/ladders to change light bulbs etc. Don't be afraid to ask for help from friends, family members or neighbours!
- **Take your time** arriving at your destination, getting up from bed or chairs and adjusting to different lighting situations.
- **Minimise the external causes** of falls as much as possible by being careful in slippery/ wet areas (kitchen, laundry, bathroom, wet grass, gravel), reducing clutter in the home to minimize the risk of tripping on mats/ rugs, furniture. Wear good supportive footwear and avoid loose clothing that you could trip on.

For more information, please consult your physiotherapist or contact us on ([hyperlink to email address](#))