

*This resource is intended for senior athletes who exercise regularly and may not be appropriate for all older adults. Talk to your physician or physical therapist if you're interested in starting an exercise program.*

## Balance Training for Athletes Over 50

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Good balance requires the ability to pull together information from your eyes, inner ear, muscles, and joints to keep you upright and in the game. This intricate interaction is what enables you to “catch” yourself when you are suddenly thrown off balance. Paying attention to your balance can up your level of competition by making you steadier on your feet. Senior athletes tend to demand increased levels of balance control on a daily basis as they engage in more challenging activities on and off the field. Improving or maintaining your balance is one of the best things you can do to prevent a fall.

### How does balance change with aging?

As we age, our balance changes. Nerve impulses traveling to and from our brain slow down and our sensory organs (eyes and ears) give us less accurate position information. Stiffness in our muscles and joints decreases the feedback and response times needed for rapid balance adjustments. While we cannot halt normal aging, specific training can assist in overcoming some of these challenges and decrease our risk of falling.

### What can I do?

Improving balance requires strength, flexibility *and* balance activities. You can establish an individualized balance program with a physical therapist. You can also seek out an evidence-based fall prevention program in your area. Go to <https://www.ncoa.org/> and click on *Falls Prevention* at the bottom of the page to see what is available near you.





Regular and consistent balance training can significantly reduce your fall risk. The following exercises are just a few examples of what you can do on your own to start making a difference. As you practice, be safe. Make sure the environment around you is free of clutter or hazards. Stand in the corner of a room where you can touch two walls or at a kitchen counter where you can easily steady yourself. Choose exercises that fit your abilities. Know your limits and if you feel unstable, stop. You want to feel confident when practicing balance.

It is fine to start these exercises while holding on. Try holding onto the wall, a railing, or a counter until you can hold your balance without support. Start with 2-hand support, then 1-hand support, then none.

As you work your way through the following exercises, you will see that they comprise 4 stages of balance, moving from a wide stance to a narrow stance, to standing on one leg. This is designed to increase the level of difficulty. Don't progress to the next level until you're steady for at least 10 seconds.

## Static Balance Exercises

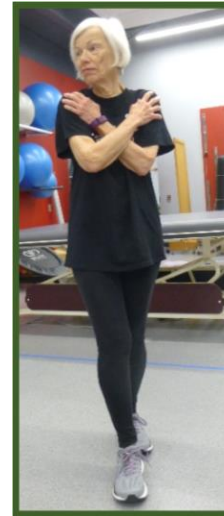
[www.cdc.gov/steady](http://www.cdc.gov/steady)

	① Stand with your feet side-by-side.
	② Place the instep of one foot so it is touching the big toe of the other foot.
	③ Tandem stand: Place one foot in front of the other, heel touching toe.
	④ Stand on one foot.

**Need a challenge?** Once you are comfortable performing the above exercises, try each one with your eyes closed.

**Always practice balance in a safe environment. Stand at a counter or in a corner so you have an easy way to stabilize yourself. If you don't feel safe, stop. It may be better for you to practice with a professional.**

## Dynamic Balance



An athlete practicing head turns in tandem stance.

Dynamic balance, or balance maintained while moving, is another key component to balance training. Do not start working on dynamic balance until you are no longer challenged by the static balance exercises shown on the left.

### Dynamic Balance Ideas:

1. Try the **static balance activities** while performing a movement related to your sport such as head turns, arm swings, or leg kicks.
2. Try heel-toe tightrope walking forward and backwards.
3. Finally, try these exercises while standing on a pillow or another unstable surface such as grass or sand.

**To receive an exercise program specifically for you, find a local physical therapist.**

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