



Asheville Physical Therapy

Balance · Orthopedics · Sports Performance

UNDERSTANDING BALANCE & FALL PREVENTION AT ANY AGE

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The more you understand balance the better equipped you are to reduce the risk of falling as well as to maximize your balance capabilities. Our bodies take in information, process it in the brain and respond accordingly. Age is not an indication of declining balance nor is it a limiting factor in improving balance. Poor balance can occur at any age. Improving balance can occur at any age.

Information is picked up by 3 different systems and sent to the brain:

1. the eyes
2. information that comes from the ground and picked up by your feet, tendons, muscles and joints, called proprioception
3. the inner ear, called the vestibular system

Many people, especially adults, tend to rely on #1, your eyes, to keep balanced. When this occurs, balance is lost very easily when there is little or no lighting, the ground is uneven, objects in your line of sight are moving and even when your head is moving to look at something other than where you are going.

The good news is there are many things that can be done through exercise and training that will improve all balance systems. These are taught in Physical Therapy.

Once the brain picks up and sorts through the information provided by the 3 systems, your body will respond to keep you balanced. If there is no response or an inadequate response, then a fall may occur.

The responses come from 4 main areas:

1. ankles
2. hips
3. a stepping response
4. lowering your center of gravity

Physical Therapy works on both systems to improve balance, the part that perceives information and the reactions to make corrections to balance. Balance should come naturally. Working too hard or “over think it” will make your balance worse. Confidence also plays a major roll in how well you are balanced. Taking preventative measures is the best way to improve balance. If you feel unsteady, have fallen or are fearful of falling, ask your physician for a referral for Physical Therapy. Physical Therapy is also appropriate for weekend warrior athletes, like weekend hikers or those that partake in part-time sports or high end athletes wanting to improve their skills.