Whether you are an all-star athlete or just beginning to exercise, balance is a skill related component of fitness that can always be improved in order to reduce the risk of falls and injuries as well as improve self-confidence, mobility, and overall daily functioning. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends balance training exercises to be performed at least 2-3 days a week for at least 20-30 minutes a day. In the exercise programs below, exercises for improving balance are described. Not only will balance be improved through the course of these exercises but also strength (especially in the legs, hips, and thighs), coordination, and speed. Move through the exercises at a comfortable pace as you become familiar with each. As you progress you may want to challenge yourself to perform them faster for a more intense workout. Each program is to be done as a circuit (one set of each exercise done until all exercises have been completed). Two to four circuits are to be performed, more may be done depending on your fitness level. The prescribed number of repetitions and/or time for each exercise is given in each exercise description. Do these exercises 2-3 days a week to improve your balance.

BEGINNER (also use for mature adult)

**CAUTION:** With all balance training, it is recommended you have a steady, stationary object to hold on to such as a chair, wall, handrail, or training partner within arm’s length or closer in case you begin to feel dizzy and/or begin to fall.

As you start these exercises you may want to hold on to your stationary object until you feel comfortable enough to progress from a full grip with both hands, to one hand, to finger tips, to letting go completely. As your performance advances, you may want to try some of the exercises with your eyes closed and/or on a more unsteady surface such as a well cushioned exercise mat or pillow and/or for a longer period of time for the timed exercises.

**STANDING WITH EYES CLOSED – 20 seconds**

- Stand with legs straight, arms held loosely by your sides
- When ready, close your eyes trying to maintain balance for allotted time
SHIFTING WEIGHT LATERALLY FROM ONE FOOT TO THE OTHER – 20 reps (10 each side)

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart
- Gently shift as much of your weight as possible to the right foot and, depending on comfort level, allowing the left foot to rise off the floor ever so slightly
- Shift movement to the left repeating the movement for the allotted reps

STEP FORWARD THEN BACKWARD – 20 reps (10 each foot)

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Take a normal step forward with one foot and pause
- Take the same foot and take a step back (without pausing in starting position) as if you were going to walk backward and pause
- Do this 10 times for each foot
BALANCING ON ONE FOOT – 20 seconds each foot

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Slowly lift one foot off the ground balancing on the other foot
- Hold for 20 seconds
- Repeat process on other foot

TOE STANDS – hold for 20 seconds

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Shift your weight onto the balls of your feet – also known as standing on the tips of your toes
- Hold position for allotted time
CIRCLE TURN – 8 turns total (4 to the left, 4 to the right)

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides

- At a comfortable speed, use your feet to turn your body 180° (or half-turn) to the left
  - Pause for 3 seconds

- Then use your feet to turn your body 180° to the right. This should put you back at the starting position
  - Pause for 3 seconds
  - Repeat process until you have completed 4 - 180° turns to the left and 4 - 180° turns to the right
STANDING IN TANDEM POSITION – 20 seconds

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Move your right heel directly in front of your left toes – a heel/toe position
- Hold for 20 seconds (you may have to hold your arms out for balance if not holding onto a stationary object)
- Then place left heel directly in front of right toe and hold the position for 20 seconds

WALKING IN TANDEM POSITION – 20 total steps

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Move your right heel directly in front of your left toes
- Instead of holding the position you will move your left heel directly in front of right toe as if walking on a tightrope (you may have to hold your arms out for balance if not holding onto a stationary object)
TORSO TONER – 10 each arm and leg (or 20 per arm/leg pair if done simultaneously)

• Start on your hands and knees

• Extend left arm in front of you aligning it horizontally with your torso, simultaneously extend right leg aligning it horizontally with your torso

• Lower left arm and right leg

• Extend right arm in front of you aligning it horizontally with your torso, simultaneously extend left leg aligning it horizontally with your torso

• If lifting one arm and one leg simultaneously is too challenging, then extend and lower one limb at a time until all limbs have completed allotted repetitions
PLANK or PARTIAL PLANK – hold for 30 seconds

- Start on your hands and knees

- Ease your weight onto your elbows, forearms extended
  - This is the partial plank and may be used if full plank is too challenging

- Extend your legs out and allowing the balls of your feet to support you with your lower body forming a “plank” from your feet to your elbows/arms
  - Hold the position for the allotted time
ADVANCED

CAUTION: With all balance training, it is recommended you have a steady, stationary object to hold on to such as a chair, wall, handrail, or training partner within arm’s length or closer in case you begin to feel dizzy and/or begin to fall.

These exercises are for individuals who have been training on a regular basis, can complete the beginner level balance exercise, and can tolerate plyometric movements (jumping, bounding) which involve impact on joints. As you start these exercises you may want to hold on to your stationary object until you feel comfortable enough to progress from a full grip with both hands, to one hand, to finger tips, to letting go completely. As your performance advances, you may want to try some of the exercises with your eyes closed and/or on a more unsteady surface such as a well cushioned exercise mat or pillow and/or for a longer period of time for timed exercises. **If you are over the age of 40 and not accustomed to vigorous activity and/or have a medical condition, please check with your physician before starting a workout program.**

SINGLE LEG DEADLIFT (dumbbells held in hands optional, begin with lightest weight possible) – 10 reps each leg

- Stand with legs slightly bent, feet shoulder width apart, arms held straight by your sides
- Slightly lift left leg and lower torso forward and down while raising left leg behind and keeping arms perpendicular to floor
- Keep back straight and knee of supporting leg slightly bent
- Once stretch is felt in supporting leg or hands contact floor, return to original position by raising torso and lowering lifted leg
- Straighten knee of supporting leg as torso becomes upright
- Repeat for allotted reps then switch legs
SINGLE LEG STANCE while performing functional activities (dribbling a ball, curling light dumbbell) – 30 seconds each leg

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart, arms held loosely by your sides
- Slowly lift one foot off the ground balancing on the other foot
- With corresponding hand (i.e., right foot raised, use right hand) dribble or hold a basketball, hold or do bicep curls with a light weight, or another functional activity
- Maintain balance on leg and activity with hand for allotted time
- Repeat using other leg and hand

STANDING ON WOBBLE BOARD – 1 minute

- Carefully stand on a wobble board holding onto a stationary object to maintain stability
- When ready, let go of stationary object and try to maintain wobble board stability for allotted time
- If wobble board loses stability, keep attempting the process until time is up. (Need more of a challenge? Balance on wobble board with one leg instead of two.)
WOBBLE BOARD STATIC SQUAT – 1 minute

- Carefully stand on a wobble board holding onto a stationary object
- When ready, let go of stationary object, find your balance, and perform a standard squat (it may help if feet are at least shoulder width apart and/or as close to the edge of the wobble board as possible without coming off).
- Once in the squat position, hold the position for the allotted time
- If wobble board loses stability, keep attempting the process until time is up

SINGLE LEG SQUATS – 10 each leg

- Stand with legs straight, feet shoulder width apart
- Shift your weight to one leg
- Raise opposite foot off floor
- Begin to squat down with support leg
- Non weight bearing leg can be extended to the front, bent to the back, or in a position you find comfortable and allows for balance
ZIGZAG SHUFFLE – 1 minute

1 - 2 -

3 - 4 -

- Place two cones or other “landmarks” approximately 5 feet from each other
- Place two more cones or “landmarks” 5 feet away from each other and 5 feet away from first pair of cones at a 45° angle. The four cones should resemble the corners of a diamond figure.
- Stand in a ready position (feet shoulder width apart, legs slightly bent, weight on balls of feet, torso relaxed) - see picture 1
- When ready, shuffle laterally (side shuffle) from one cone to the cone at a 45° angle from the starting cone - see picture 2
- As you reach each cone, pivot on one foot allowing yourself to swap which side of your body is leading the shuffle (swapping from a left side shuffle to a right side shuffle and vice versa) - see pictures 3 & 4
- Shuffle through each cone until time is up

SUPERMAN – 15 reps

- Lie face down on your stomach with arms and legs extended
- Keeping arms and legs straight but not locked and torso stationary, simultaneously lift up your arms and legs toward the ceiling. Hold for 2 to 3 seconds.
- Lower limbs but KEEP THEM JUST ABOVE THE FLOOR - Repeat for the allotted reps.
LINE HOPS – 1 minute front to back, then 1 minute side to side

Front to back - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 -

Find a stripe on the floor (i.e., a tile design, lines on a basketball court, tape) to use as a line

Place feet shoulder width apart about an inch from the line

Begin to jump forward over the line and immediately bounce backward over the line then forward again repeating in as much of a non-stop fashion as possible until time is up

Then stand sideways beside the tape with feet almost touching each other, hop sideways over the tape immediately bouncing back

Keep hopping side to side in a non-stop manner until time is up

PLANK SHIFTING LATERALLY FROM SIDE TO SIDE – 10 each arm

Get into a pushup position. Lower your upper body onto your elbows with forearms extended, maintain lower body on the balls of your feet.

Shift your weight to the right extending your left arm horizontally, aligning it with your torso - Hold for 2-3 seconds

Return left arm to starting position and extend right arm. (Need more of a challenge? Lift the opposite leg off the floor at the same time you extend your arm – i.e., lift right leg when extending left arm.)
REFERENCES


This workout was created by Adam Dodd, graduate student intern, MTSU, March 2014