

# Fall Prevention for Seniors

Falls can be disastrous for older adults, possibly leading to long-term immobility and loss of independence. To help prevent falls, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons ([www.aaos.org](http://www.aaos.org)) recommends that seniors participate in an exercise program designed to improve strength, balance, agility and coordination.

To help you ward off falls, here are some exercises from Catherine Logan, MSPT, physical therapist, personal trainer and MD candidate at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. These exercises should be performed in addition to a regular stretching and cardiovascular exercise routine. For assistance in developing a comprehensive fall prevention program, please see a certified personal trainer or fitness instructor.

## Strength Exercises

1. **chair squats** (3 sets of 8–15 reps)
  - Sit on the edge of a chair or bench. Lean the trunk forward and reach the arms out in front of the torso.
  - Push through the heels and rise to a standing position.
2. **heel raises** (3 sets of 10–15 reps)
  - From a standing position, push through the toes of both feet and raise the heels off the floor while maintaining an upright torso.
  - Pause for 1 second before slowly lowering the heels to the floor.
3. **bridge on stability ball** (3 sets of 10–15 reps)

- Lie supine on a mat with legs extended and heels placed on top of a stability ball. Arms are braced out to the sides of the body in a T position to assist with balance.
- Tighten the buttocks and abdomen, and then push through the heels to raise the buttocks off the mat, creating a straight line from heels to shoulders.
- Hold for 1–3 seconds, as tolerated, and then slowly lower back to starting position.

## Balance Exercises

The following exercises are all variations on the single-leg stance.

1. **single-leg stance, level 1** (3 reps per side)
  - Stand next to a wall or countertop, using a hand to maintain balance.
  - Stand on one leg and hold for up to 10 seconds.
2. **single-leg stance, level 2** (3 reps per side)
  - Stand next to a wall or countertop, using a hand to maintain balance.
  - Keep the eyes closed while standing on one leg.
3. **single-leg stance, level 3** (5–10 reps per side)
  - Stand next to a wall, facing the seat of a chair placed 1–2 feet in front of you.
  - Stand on one leg with the knee slightly bent, then bend at the waist and reach forward to tap the chair seat.
  - Return to the starting position and repeat without placing the lifted foot back down on the floor.

## Exercises for Agility and Coordination

1. **front leg swings** (3 sets of 8–15 reps per side)
  - Begin by standing tall next to a wall, using the hand closer to the wall to assist with balance.
  - Swing the leg farther from the wall forward, with knee straight, then back



## Tips for Preventing Falls

You can further help avoid falls by following these suggestions:

1. Remove throw rugs from your household.
2. Try a tai chi class.
3. Remove clutter from hallways, staircases and other areas of heavy traffic in the home.
4. Discuss any dizziness or vision changes—especially after a change in medication—with a physician.
5. Get regular eye examinations.
6. Keep staircases and hallways well lit, and consider installing night-lights in these areas.
7. Wear flat, rubber-soled, nonslip shoes.

behind the body while maintaining an upright posture.

2. **side leg swings** (3 sets of 8–15 reps per side)
  - Stand tall next to a wall, using the wall for balance.
  - Swing the leg farther from the wall out to the side while maintaining an upright posture.
3. **heel-toe walking** (3 times, 1–2 minutes each)
  - Take a step forward, positioning the heel of one foot in front of the toes of the opposite foot. Try to have the toes touch the heel of the shoe each time a step is taken.
  - Move forward or backward using this heel-toe pattern.

COURTESY OF

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