

FORMATION

For more information about balance disorders and treatment options, visit www.balanceandmobility.com, an internet resource for people with balance disorders.

Contact your local care provider:



BALANCE AND MOBILITY IN DAILY LIFE



An informational resource provided courtesy of NeuroCom® International, Inc.



WWW.BALANCEANDMOBILITY.COM

BALANCE IN DAILY LIFE

Balance is vital to normal every day life activities such as getting out of a chair and walking, bending over to put on your shoes, washing your hair, driving a car, or going grocery shopping. Just about everything you do in your daily life, whether for work or leisure, requires balance control — most of the time you don't have to think about it. When balance problems develop, however, they can cause profound disruptions in your daily life. In addition to increased risk for falls, balance disorders can shorten your attention span, disrupt normal sleep patterns, and cause excessive fatigue. People with balance and dizziness problems can have difficulty with even the simplest of tasks.

The good news is there are medical professionals who are specially trained in the evaluation and treatment of balance disorders. These professionals can implement effective treatment plans for individuals who experience balance problems or dizziness.

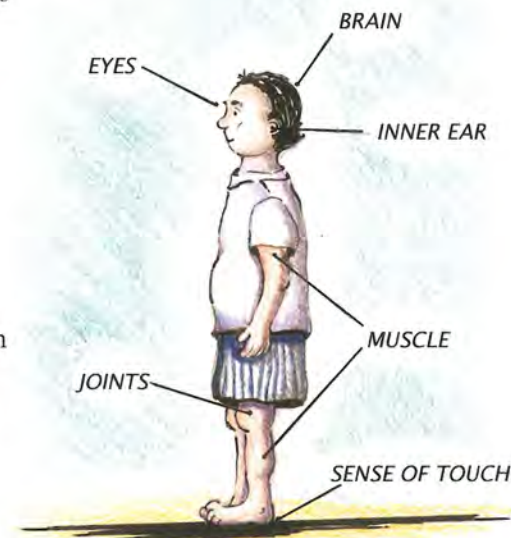


THE BALANCE CONTROL PROCESS

Ability to maintain balance is a complex process that depends on three major components: your sensory systems for accurate information about your body's position; your brain's ability to process this information; and your muscles and joints for coordinating the movements required to maintain balance.

The sensory systems include your sense of touch/position (feet, ankles, joints), your vision and your inner ear motion sensors. For example, we rely on our feet and joints to tell us if the surface we are standing on is uneven or moving. We rely on our eyes to tell us if the environment around us is moving or still. And we rely on our inner ear motion sensors to tell us if we are upright or leaning, standing still or moving.

In a normal healthy individual the senses of touch/position, vision and inner ear motion sensors work together in harmony with the brain. A person with a balance disorder, however, may have a problem in any one or a combination of these systems.



BALANCE SENSORS

ARE YOU HEADED FOR A FALL?

When we are young it is easy to blame sudden falls on environmental factors, such as loose carpets, slippery floors, uneven surfaces, or just plain recklessness! But as we grow older, a sudden fall should raise the question that something might be wrong. Loss of balance and mobility are *not* inevitable as we grow older! Sudden falls in older individuals, however, are of concern. The incidence of balance problems is known to increase significantly with age as well as the risk for serious injury.

So how do you know if you are at risk for falling? There are several known risk factors, both related to yourself (physical fitness/ailments, psychological and social factors) and your environment (the surfaces you walk on, obstacles, lighting, etc.), that can increase your susceptibility to falling. Some common indications include symptoms of dizziness or unsteadiness, taking one or more medications, a recent period of bed rest or inactivity, loss of strength or feeling in the legs or feet, or a loss of confidence in your ability to get around. There are also many subtle indicators that you or your physician may not even be aware that you have. To complicate the matter, falls are typically not the result of a single cause or risk factor. More often, they are the result of a combination of factors.



IDENTIFYING & TREATING BALANCE DISORDERS

Because of the complexity of balance control, not all balance problems are the same. In addition, the wide variety of balance problems can make it difficult to determine the cause of a balance disorder and



which treatment options are the most appropriate. In the past 20 years, significant advances in the evaluation and treatment of balance disorders have proven to be highly effective and

offer relief to those suffering from imbalance or dizziness. If you are suffering from a balance disorder, it is important that you seek out medical professionals who are qualified in this area.

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GETTING HELP

If you have experienced a recent fall, feel unsteady on your feet, have spells of dizziness, or have other reason to believe you might have a balance problem, you should talk to your doctor. While your family physician may not be a balance specialist, he or she can refer you to a qualified medical professional who is equipped to do a complete balance assessment to determine the underlying cause(s) of your problem.

Assisted by the medical history provided by your doctor, the specialist will perform specific tests to determine your ability

to maintain your balance, as well as your risk for falling. Computerized equilibrium tests can evaluate the sensory and motor parts of your balance system. Sensory tests assess the three sensory systems (inner ears, eyes, and sense of touch in your feet and joints) that contribute to balance control. Motor tests measure your ability to execute coordinated movements, both voluntary and involuntary, to maintain your balance. These tests will help define the cause of your balance problem and will help the balance specialist customize your treatment for maximum benefit.



BALANCE SELF TEST

To help determine if you may be at risk for a fall, take the Balance Self Test. Answer yes to one or more of the questions below. The best way to determine if you have a problem, however, is to see your physician who might recommend you get a balance screening test.

1. Have you fallen more than once in the past year?
2. Do you take medicine for two or more of the following diseases: heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, anxiety or depression?
3. Do you feel dizzy or unsteady or make sudden changes in movement such as bending down or quick turning?
4. Do you have black-outs or seizures?
5. Have you experienced a stroke or other neurological problem that has affected your balance?
6. Do you experience numbness or tingling of sensation in your legs and/or feet?
7. Do you use a walker or wheelchair or do you need assistance to get around?
8. Are you inactive? (Answer yes if you do not participate in a regular program of exercise, such as walking 20-30 minutes at least three times a week.)
9. Do you feel unsteady when you are walking or climbing stairs?
10. Do you have difficulty sitting down or rising from a seated or lying position?