

Basics of Better Balance



*How to improve your
balance, stop fearing falls,
and take back your life.*



Hi! I'm Susan.



I am a dedicated personal trainer and coach with extensive experience working with older adults who face balance challenges. I provide tailored fitness programs that enhance stability and strength to help my clients maintain an active and independent lifestyle.

Welcome!

This booklet explores maintaining physical stability, essential in daily life. Whether you're aiming to prevent falls or looking to boost well-being, this resource supports your journey. Discover practical tips, expert insights, and exercises to improve your balance and move with confidence. I hope you find this booklet informative and empowering.

The 2-3's

There are three physiological systems involved in balance, and there are three main training targets.

The three systems your body uses to maintain balance are:

- 1. Visual***
- 2. Vestibular***
- 3. Proprioceptive***

The visual system is familiar to most of us. If you are sighted, you use your eyes to orient yourself. You can look around and see the floor, the ceiling, the objects in the room around you. You know which way is up by simply seeing the world from that perspective. You also use your vision to judge distance. You can see how far away the couch is as you walk around your room or how high to pick up your foot to step over that curb.

The vestibular system is in play when your head is moving. The inner ear contains structures that send information to the brain about the positioning of your head. Your vestibular system also lets you know if you are upside down.

The proprioceptive system is in your muscles and joints and works to tell your brain the relative positioning of parts of your body. It also helps you perceive the movement of your own body.

These three systems work together. A deficiency in one can lead to problems with balance, or if there is a miscommunication among the systems, life can become quite difficult. And while the vestibular system is fully formed at birth and initially guides and trains the visual system, most people ultimately become much more reliant on their visual system. Additionally, I have found that most people are fairly unaware of the input coming from their proprioception. Because proprioception happens largely unconsciously, we still manage to navigate the world reasonably competently; however, becoming more aware of what your body is doing will help you direct it to do what you want. Finally, proprioception is a sense, like vision or hearing, that can lose acuity with age. Luckily, though, it can be trained. Using and training all three systems can help to improve one's balance.

To train for balance, we use these physiologic systems, but target three functional systems:

- 1. the foot and ankle***
- 2. core stability***
- 3. muscular power***

Feet first!



Your feet are where it all starts.

To strengthen and mobilize your feet and ankles, try these simple exercises:

- Sitting with your bare feet on the floor, scrunch up your toes as if trying to pick up something with your feet. Do this 20 times or until your feet feel a bit tired.
- Sitting or standing on one foot (*hold on for stability*), roll your ankle around as if you are drawing a circle in the air with your big toe. Do this 8 times in each direction with each foot.
- Standing with your feet directly under your hips (*hold on for stability*) rise up onto the balls of your feet. Do this 10 - 20 times.

Stand tall!



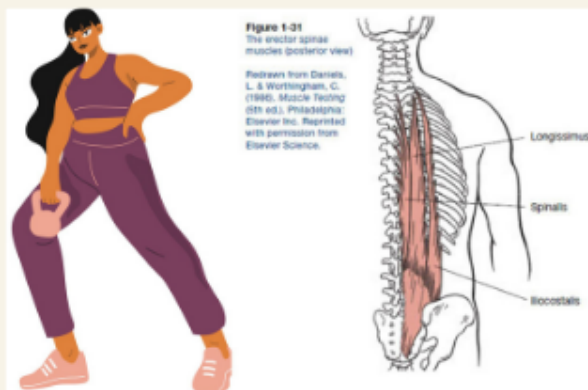
like a mountain!

To have good balance, you want to have your body positioned well over your feet. Try this visualization to engage your core and employ good posture:

- Standing with your feet directly underneath your hips, imagine your feet reaching into the ground and the top of your head reaching into the sky;
- Keep your chin down (Don't look up at the sky). Feel the back of your neck lengthening;
- Feel the sides of your waist gently pulling towards the midline of your body both in the front and the back. Notice the hugging or cinching sensation of your core muscles working.

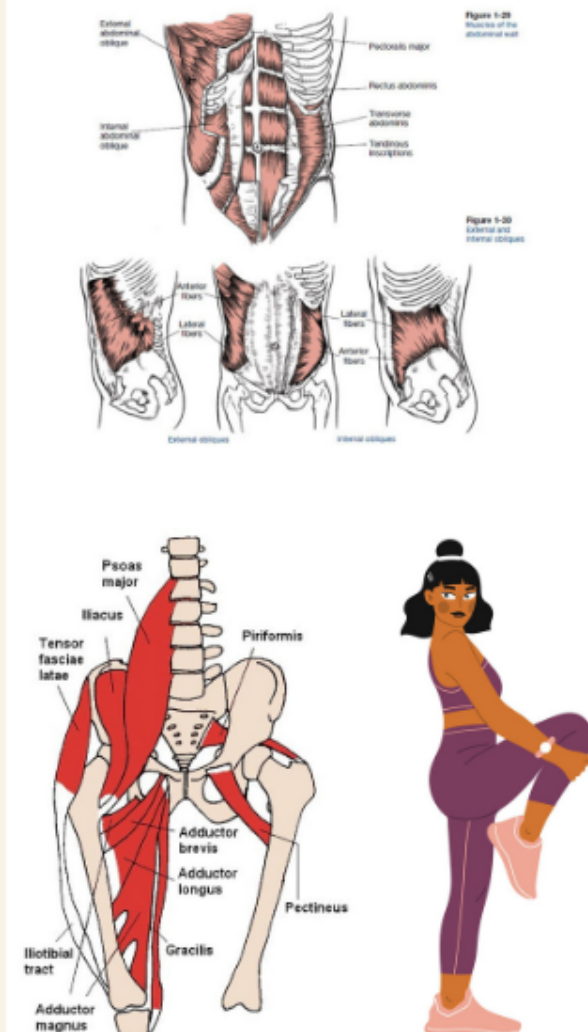
Stabilize through your core!

The muscles in the middle of your body - the back muscles, the abdominal muscles, and the muscles in your hips, all constitute the “core.”



Movements that require you to engage the core as you move are most beneficial since you're usually moving when you feel unbalanced. Try these:

- Incline plank on one foot. Place your hands or forearms on a counter or table. Bring your hips forward so that your body is straight from head to feet. Reach back and up with one leg to lift that foot off the floor, then switch legs. Alternate legs 8-15 times. (Use a higher surface to make it easier; doing it on the floor is more advanced.)
- Farmer's Carry. Hold a weight in one hand and walk. Repeat with the weight in the other hand. Do this for 20-60 seconds on each side.





strengthen

Use weights as appropriate to strengthen your legs. Try

- chair squats (sit to stand)
- calf raises
- bridges
- split squats



practice

Test your balance by shifting your weight from one leg to the other. March in place, then slow it down, gradually increasing the amount of time you are balancing on one foot.



move

Dynamic balance is the goal - moving and staying in control of your balance. Try these:

- step away and return
- walk
- climb stairs
- step over things

mindset

It is helpful to know that many things influence one's balance:

- mental or physical distractions (SQUIRREL!)
- the amount of sleep you got last night,
- whether you are hydrated adequately or not.



Some days will be better than others.

It can also help to remember that **fear** creates tension in the body that is counterproductive to balance. Practicing mindfulness cultivates a sense of awareness without judgment, being in the present moment, and attention without rigidity. As you practice mindfulness, not only do you foster a relaxed and open mental state - very conducive to learning new things and connecting with others, but also a relaxed body, allowing your muscles to soften and tension to dissipate. Ultimately, mindfulness is about finding harmony between alertness and calm, allowing us to navigate life with grace and poise.

Try this:

1. Sit in a supportive chair where you can have a few uninterrupted minutes. Set a timer for 1 - 10 minutes. (Keep it short when you first try this.)
2. Close your eyes or simply lower your gaze to the floor.
3. Notice your breath coming in and out of your body. You don't have to *DO* anything or change how you are breathing. Simply observe yourself breathing.
4. Inevitably, your mind will drift away to other things. **WHENEVER** you notice that and remember that your intention was to be paying attention to your breath, simply and *without judgement* return your attention to your breathing.

THANKS

I really hope this booklet was helpful. I want you to be able to enjoy your life, not reel it in out of fear. There's so much more to do, though, so let's get on it! Message me on Facebook, or email me at spryfitnessnc@gmail.com!

