

Exercise improves balance in older people

Clinical question	Are exercise interventions effective in improving balance in older people?
Bottom line	Exercise has statistically significant positive effects on balance as opposed to usual activity for older people. The interventions that appeared to have the greatest impact involved gait, balance, coordination and functional exercises, muscle strengthening and multiple exercises. Improvements were seen in the ability to stand on one leg, reach forward without overbalancing and walking.
Caveat	Many of these mainly small studies (the largest had 620 participants) demonstrated a range of methodological weaknesses. In particular there was a lack of standardised measures to determine balance ability across the studies. Moreover, a lack of follow-up of participants makes it hard to determine any long-term effects of the interventions (the longest trials lasted 12 months but most were for only a few weeks or months).
Context	A decrease in ability to maintain balance may be associated with an increased risk of falling. In older adults, falls often lead to injury, loss of independence, associated illness and early death.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Howe TE et al. Exercise for improving balance in older people. Cochrane Reviews 2007, Issue 4. Art No : CD004963. DOI : 10.1002/14651858. CD004963.pub2. This review contains 34 studies involving 2,883 participants.
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