**Balance.**

**How Important is it?**

Balance keeps us upright, allows us to walk without assistance and helps prevent injury.

Balance is something we learn when we first stand on our two feet as toddlers. We don’t tend to think about it anymore, not until we join the gym only to find that we can’t actually balance on one leg, or perhaps, quite out of the blue, we have a fall and can’t understand why.

Thanks to the wonders of modern science we are all living longer and in order to remain independent, mobile and injury free well into old age we need to work on our balance.

**No time?**

As a sports massage therapist I know from experience that asking people to work an exercise regime into every day life can be a challenge for them. Below are a number of balance exercises that you can do easily at home that you can slot into your day-to-day routine.

**1. On the way back from the bathroom - Walking the Line**

We’ve all heard about ‘walking the line’ for an officer of the law but have you tried it at home as sober as a judge? It’s a great way to see just how good your balance is and to work on improving it.

* Line yourself up to the edge of a floorboard or rug or just parallel to the wall.
* Make sure you are standing upright and place your right heel on the floor directly in front of your left toe.
* Then do the same with your left heel. Make sure you keep looking forward at all times. You may hold your arms out to the side for balance. Take 5 steps or more.

**2. While Cleaning your teeth - Balancing on one leg.**

If you are doing this for the first time, you may like to have a chair or a wall within an arm's reach.

* Stand with your feet together then lift one foot with the knee facing forward or to the side. Hold the position for 5 seconds with your eyes open, then 5 seconds with your eyes closed.
* Change feet and repeat for four repetitions on each foot.

**3. Waiting for the kettle to boil - Leg Swings**

Stand on your right leg and raise the left leg three to six inches off the floor. With arms at your sides, swing your left leg forward and backward, touching the floor for balance, while keeping your torso erect. Now, repeat the moves, but don't allow your foot to touch the ground. And finally, swing the left foot to the left side, holding the right arm out. Switch legs and repeat.

**4. Standing on the bus or train.**

Don’t sit down! Start off holding onto a pole then if you can let go and try to keep your balance. Grab the pole if you feel you’re about to fall.

**5. Dancing to your favourite music - One-Legged Clock With Arms**

* Stand up straight, balance on one leg with your hands on your hips.
* Look straight ahead at the wall and visualize a clock face. Point your arm straight overhead to 12 o clock, then to the side at three, and then circle low and around to nine without losing your balance.
* Switch to the opposite arm and leg and repeat.

**6. Watching Television – stand with a book on your head.**

Stand with feet facing straight ahead, place a hard backed book (not too heavy) on your head, relax your shoulders and enjoy your favourite programme. Keep going for as long as you can.

**N.B**

If you have a medical condition always check with your GP before embarking upon these exercises or any fitness program.

All the exercises here should be carried out in a slow and controlled manner. The aim is not to finish the exercises as soon as possible to get them over and done with but to improve your balance.

Tessa is our sports massage therapist. Appointments on Monday, Thursday or Friday