

# Get Ready for "Falls" Season!

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It will not be long before the leaves will be changing colors and falling off the trees. The snow and ice will be soon to follow. I know it is still a couple months away, hopefully, but once the snow flies the number of injuries suffered from falls will drastically increase due to slippery conditions. Older adults and those with balance deficits and significant lower extremity/trunk weakness will be the most susceptible to sustaining serious injuries (e.g. fractures, head injuries).

Many of these falls can be prevented by improving your balance and lower extremity strength. Balance and body awareness of where you are in space are key factors that keep us upright, especially when challenged with walking on uneven terrain or in poorly lit areas. It is also equally important to be strong in the trunk, hips, knees and ankles to help maintain your balance and catch yourself when you momentarily lose your balance.

**\*Important\*** Make sure you stay close to something stable so you can grab onto it in case you lose your balance. Do balance exercises in front of a chair/couch you can fall back into if you lose your balance. Only progress to more difficult exercises when you have mastered the easier ones.

Exercises:

1. Balance for up to 30-60 seconds first with eyes open, then try with your eyes closed. If unable to do unsupported, hold onto counter/rail with both hands, then one hand, then nothing as you improve.
  - Standing with feet together
  - Standing in tandem (heel to toe with one foot directly in front of the other)
  - Balance on single leg
2. Sit to stand from chair (without using hands unless unable without using hands)
  - Feet shoulder width or wider apart, knees over (not in front of) toes
  - do not use back of legs against chair to help you stand
  - 3 sets of 10-20 repetitions
  - Progress to deep squats to chair without sitting down
3. Sidestepping in hallway keeping toes pointed straight forward
4. Walking on heels and toes for 15-30 seconds each (3 sets)

These are just a few ideas to help improve your leg strength and balance. Make sure you are safe when doing these exercises. Do not try any exercises that make you feel unsafe and may place you at risk for falling. Consult your physician/physical therapist if you feel you may be at significant risk for falling. Your physical therapist is trained to assess if you are at risk for falling and can work with you to maximize your balance and address any strength deficits to keep you safe this winter.