

## ARE YOU PRONE TO FALLS?

By Dr. Derek Conte

Do you lose your balance often? Catching your feet on the carpet or cracks in the sidewalk or bumping into doorjambs and misjudging steps? Scary, isn't it? Falls in the elderly are a major cause of inactivity leading to general weakening of the body and a decline in mental and emotional well being. Too often these people, healthy one day, become seriously ill after a fall and may die prematurely. Some people have wonderful balance and seem to just know how to avoid a fall. But one does not have to be older to be prone to falling down.

Balance is an amalgam of several different sensory inputs to the brain. 1) The eyes judge distance and keep level with the horizon. 2) The inner ears detect acceleration, deceleration, direction of movement and also our position at rest. 3) The muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints give us a sense of weight, stretch, pressure, joint angle and even vibration. All of this positional information is relayed to the mid-brain, cerebellum and parietal lobes of the brain for assessment and, if necessary, correction of position. The sum total of all this information is called proprioception or position-sense. The simple acts of standing and walking are a series of minute losses and corrections of balance. Just stand still for a minute and tune in to the small corrections your body automatically makes to maintain balance. Postural problems and



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spinal misalignments can interfere with the nerves that carry these positional signals and increase the likelihood of a fall. Chiropractic care can help improve posture and balance.

What can predispose one to fall? Being inactive over a long period causes loss of muscle tone, muscle memory, coordination and reflexes. Reintroduction of simple activities such as walking, gardening or cycling can restore the body's balance system. Injuries, like sprains and strains, even when healed, can have long-lasting negative effects on balance due to loss of accurate proprioceptive input. This can be remedied with specific exercises to rehabilitate damaged tissues laden with sensors that relay positional information to the brain. Ear infections and/or a clogged eustacian tube can cause balance problems (such as vertigo) as well. Opening up this tube can help discharge the infection from the middle ear and reduce pressure on the inner ear, a major balance center. Your chiropractor can help with all these.

The important thing is to remember that we are very adaptable to change and it is never too late or difficult to restore excellent function to the nervous system and the body as a whole.

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