

How Can I Stop Falling

By Dr. Derek Conte

March 2007

Do you lose your balance often? Catching your feet on the carpet or cracks in the sidewalk or bumping into doorjamb and misjudging steps? Scary, isn't it? Falls in the elderly cause inactivity, general weakening of the body, loss of coordination, and is a major factor in the decline of mental and emotional well being.

Too often these people, healthy one day, become seriously ill after a fall and 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 and the vestibular mechanism detect acceleration, deceleration, direction of movement and also our static position at rest. 3) The muscles, tendons, ligaments and joint capsules give us a sense of weight, stretch, pressure, joint angle and even vibration.

All of this positional information, from all three pathways, is relayed to the cerebellum, midbrain and pons of the brainstem, 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 act of standing or walking is a series of minute losses balance and corrections of balance lost. This requires enormous neurological crosstalk and brainpower. Is it any surprise now that a baby needs about a year to learn to walk? Just stand still for a minute in a quiet place. Tune in to the small corrections your body automatically makes to maintain its balance. Postural problems and spinal misalignments can interfere with the nerves that carry these positional signals and increase the likelihood of a fall.

What can predispose one to fall? Being inactive over a long period causes loss of muscle tone, muscle memory, coordination and reflexes. Injuries, like sprains and strains, even when healed, can have long-lasting negative effects on balance due to loss of accurate proprioceptive input. Ear infections and/or a clogged eustachian tube can cause balance problems such as vertigo. 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 problems. This can be remedied with specific exercises to rehabilitate damaged tissues laden with sensors that relay positional information to the brain. Reintroduction of simple activities such as walking, gardening

or cycling can restore the body's balance system. Even simply standing on one foot and holding that position can help rebuild neglected pathways and protect you from a fall.

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.

Dr. Derek Conte is a founding member of Chiropractic Specialists on Concord Rd. in Smyrna. For questions, call: 404-784-6008. For more article, photos, info, visit: drderekconte.com