

Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls

Falls were the third leading cause of accidental death in 2002

In 2002, more than 14,500 deaths were caused by slips, trips and falls. Ninety-two percent of these occurred in people 45 years of age or older. Falls were the leading cause of emergency room visits—7.2 million or 21 percent of all ER visits¹. National statistics show the unintentional-injury death rate from falls starts climbing at the age of 45. At age 75, twice as many people die from falls than in motor vehicle deaths.



Root Causes of Falls

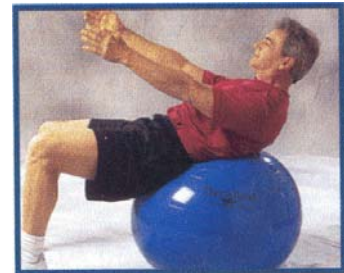
Most safety training to prevent falls is focused on the hazards: we should clean up slippery surfaces, provide handrails, maintain good housekeeping, be careful when climbing. However, little training ever mentions two of the root causes of slips, trips and falls: loss of balance and slow reflexes.

The secret to maintaining balance and quick reflexes is keeping your "fast-twitch" muscles in shape

Like strength and flexibility, the body's fast-twitch muscles rapidly diminish after age 35 as part of the aging process. Fast-twitch muscle fibers deteriorate faster than slow-twitch muscles (prime movers such as the large leg muscles) as aging progresses². Just as you can slow and reverse the aging process with strength and flexibility exercises, you can maintain and improve your fast-twitch muscles by incorporating balance exercises into your daily flexibility routine.

Balance Exercises Build Quicker Reflexes

Daily practice with the Balance Beam or Stability Ball can increase the efficiency of the neural pathways that control your body's balance and reflexes. Working with the Balance Beam a little each day will refocus a stretch to your fast-twitch muscles. It's only two inches off the ground, there's no fear of falling, but it's enough to challenge your sense of balance to help improve slowed reflexes associated with the aging process. Working out on a Stability Ball maximizes the benefits of exercise by adding the element to balance.



Use it or Lose It

"Use it or lose it" was never truer when applied to balance and quick reflexes. Taking a few minutes each day to condition these muscles *now* can not only improve balance and coordination when you need them most—to help prevent slips, trips, and falls—but also to help sustain efficiency of fast-twitch muscles later in life.

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¹ National Safety Council, 2003 Injury Facts.

² Biomechanics of Musculoskeletal Injury, Whiting & Zernicke, Human Kinetics, 1998