

Test Your Balance

Supplement to the Improving Your Balance Program

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These tests are from Strong Women, Strong Bones by Miriam E. Nelson, Phd with Sarah Wernick, Phd. Published in 2000 by Perigee books.

Be sure to have comfortable, supportive shoes on. Stand by a chair or counter. When you raise your hand off the chair just hover over the chair, so you can quickly grab it if you need to. You will need someone with a stop watch or secondhand clock.

Preliminary test: Stand in front of the counter with your feet side by side and touching. Can you remain in this position for 10 seconds? If not, then stop the test here. Your balance is extremely poor.

Test 1 – Tandem Stand -Stand to the side of your chair or counter and put your hand on it for support. Position one foot directly in front of the other; the heel of the front foot should be just touching the toes of the back foot. Distribute your weight evenly on your two feet. Steady yourself and let go of the counter. If you can, hold this position for 10 seconds move to the next test. If not, your balance is ranked **very poor**.

Test 2 – One-legged stand - Stand to the side of your chair with your feet together. Put you hand on the chair for support. Shift your weight to one foot. Bend the other knee to bring that foot up in back. When you're balanced on one leg, let go of the chair and hold for 10 seconds. If you pass this test move to the next. If not, your balance is ranked **poor**.

For these tests have a partner be a spotter and then switch. Try each for 10 seconds.

Test 3 - Tandem Stand with eyes closed. Same as test 1 but close your eyes right before you let go of your chair. If you pass move on and if not, your balance is ranked **fair**.

Test 4 - Tandem Stand with eyes closed and head turning. Same as test 3, but after you steady yourself and close your eyes let go and start turning your head to the left and then the right. If you pass this test move to the next. If not, then your balance is ranked as **good**.

Test 5 – One-legged stand with eyes closed. Same as test 2 but close your eyes prior to letting go. If you pass this test your balance is ranked excellent. If not, you are ranked **very good**.

Keep Track – Recheck your balance once a month and see how you are doing

Date	Balance Rank

Simple Activities for Testing Our Senses
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Proprioception

Try this simple test to see how your sense of where you are in space is. Sit in a comfortable chair that's more than an arm's length away from other objects. Close your eyes and put your left arm out to your side. Keeping your eyes closed, touch your left fingertip to your nose. Do the same with your right hand. If your fingertip landed in the wrong place, even after a few tries you should mention this to your doctor at your next checkup.

Vision

Try this quick assessment to see if you have unsteady vision. Ask yourself if you experience these minor problems more often than other people or more often than your younger self:

- Do you trip when you're walking?
- Do you bump into obstacles, such as the corner of a coffee table?
- Do you stumble because you misjudge steps or sidewalk curbs?
- Do you accidentally knock over objects, such as a wineglass or a table lamp?
- Do you hit your head when you're getting out of a car?

Answering "Yes" to any of these questions could reflect vision problems. Good vision isn't just a matter of being able to read letters on an eye chart; it has to do with depth perception and ability to see contrasts. Have your vision checked regularly, and make sure it's corrected as well as possible. This is especially important if you wear bifocals.

Vestibular System

If you scored at least a good on the balance test you could try this test for your vestibular system in the inner ear.

Stand squarely behind your chair and take a step back. Have a spotter near you. Close your eyes and march in place for one minute. Try to remain in the same spot as you march. When the minute is up, open your eyes and see if you held your position. If you drifted more than a foot to the left or right, you may have a vestibular problem. Mention this to your doctor at your next checkup.

Lower-Body Strength. Test this by sitting in a sturdy chair, can you stand up without assistance from your hands? If not, your risk for falling is 2 to 3 times higher than normal.

Ankle Strength and Flexibility. Weak, inflexible ankle joints significantly increase your risk for falls. If your ankles can't bend easily, it's easier to lose your balance and harder to catch it again. Are your ankles up to the job? Here are two tests.

Stand behind your chair, with your feet shoulder-width apart. Put your hands on the chair to balance. Stand on the balls of your feet. If your ankles are flexible, you should be able to raise your heels at least 2 inches off the ground.

Stand with your back to a wall, your feet about 4 inches away. Your shoulders and buttocks should touch the wall. Try to lift your toes and balls of your feet off the floor, so you're standing on your heels. If your ankles are strong and flexible, you'll be able to raise the balls of your feet at least 1 ½ inches off the floor. Most people find this test much more difficult than the first one.

Reflexes. Two simple tests to check reaction.

Test 1 (with a stop watch): Start and stop a stopwatch as close to 5 seconds as you can. After a couple of practice tries, if you can consistently stop the clock between 4.9 and 5.1 your reaction time is good.

Test 2 have your partner face you standing. She holds a dollar bill by the short edge and your position your fingers on either side of the middle of the bill about an inch apart. The person holding the bill counts 1, 2, 3 and then drops the bill. If you are able to catch the bill your reaction time is good. This may take a few tries.