

Start the year in balance

Holly Kouvo, Eons contributor



The start of a new year is the time for resolutions, plans and high hopes for great things to come. But if you cannot attain and maintain a healthy mental and physical balance, 2007 will not be as enjoyable. It's time to make a resolution to bring better balance into your life -- both physical and mental.

As we age, our ability to integrate information changes and can impact our physical balance. Falls are one of the most common causes of emergency room visits and hospitalization among 50+ Americans. For people living in wintery states, this can be a treacherous time where ice and snow cause slippery conditions.

Some of the factors contributing to falls include:

- Impaired vision
- Loss of coordination
- Slower reaction times
- Certain medications
- Medical conditions such as vertigo, stroke, and arthritis
- Wearing improper footwear

If a person's bones are weakened by osteoporosis, then fractures and breaks are more likely to result from a fall.

Keeping mental balance in your life can be a challenge, too, as you try to juggle jobs, family responsibilities, volunteer activities, exercise routines, hobbies and social outings.

Take charge

Fortunately, there is a lot you can do to keep yourself in balance. If you use a few minutes each day to do the simple yoga poses and exercises described below, you can avoid a fall and keep your mind and body healthy.

#1: Warrior 1 pose

[For example see slide show](#)

This exercise -- referred to as a "pose" in yoga parlance -- improves balance as it strengthens both legs, helps build knee muscles, stretches the shoulders, and improves hip alignment.

- From a standing position raise your upper body stretching the arms above your head. Your hands should be shoulder width apart.
- Your chest should face forward. Place your left foot back behind you enough so that you have to bend the knee on your right leg.
- Pull your navel up and back to engage your lower core abdominal muscles. This will reduce pressure on your lower back.
- Your pose should look like the one in the photos above. Hold it for 15 to 20 seconds. If you lose your balance, go back to the beginning and try again.
- Reverse the pose by placing your right foot in back.
- As you become more comfortable with the pose, increase your hold time.

#2: Warrior 2 pose

[For example see slide show](#)

This pose improves balance as it strengthens both legs, helps build knee muscles, stretches the shoulders, and strengthens the arms. It also enhances groin flexibility, which is good news for runners and skiers.

- Stand straight with your arms at your sides and feet shoulder width apart, then step your left foot back about 4 feet.
- Turn your left foot out and rotate your torso to the left to square your hips. Keep your shoulders over the center of your body.
- Keep your right foot pointing outward and look straight ahead.
- Bend your right knee over your ankle until your thigh is nearly parallel to the floor.
- Raise your left arm behind you to shoulder height, palm up.
- Hold your right arm at shoulder height over your right knee, palm down.
- Your pose should look like the one in the photos above (which ever one you are most comfortable with). Hold it for 15 to 20 seconds. If you lose your balance, go back to the beginning and try again.
- Reverse the pose by starting with your right foot in back.
- As you become more comfortable with the pose, increase your hold time.

#3: Chair pose with leg raise

This pose tones and strengthens your arms and shoulders while improving strength, balance, and stability.

- With your knees and feet together, squat down several inches, as if you were going to sit in a chair.
- Raise your arms overhead, palms facing each other.
- While in the chair position, raise your right knee up so that your foot is an inch or more off the floor.
- Hold for 15 to 20 seconds, then repeat by raising your left knee. Increase your holding time as you gain comfort with the pose.

#4: Tree Pose

[For example see slide show](#)

This pose exercises your mind as well as improves balance.

- In a standing position raise one leg off the floor

- Bend your knee and place your foot on the inside of your thigh. If having your foot inside your thigh is too uncomfortable bring it further down and outside your thigh as seen in the picture above.
- Rotate your leg out until your knee and bent leg are sideways.
- Place your hands above your head with your palms together in a prayer position.
- Bend your arms slightly.
- Hold for 15 to 20 seconds, and increase the time as you get more comfortable.

#5: V-hold

This pose strengthens your abs while boosting balance.

- Sit with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Hold on to the back of your thighs.
- Tightening your abs and shifting your weight back onto your sit bones, lift your feet 5-10 inches off the floor until your calves are parallel to the floor.
- Hold for 15 to 20 seconds, and increase the time as you get more comfortable.

While holding these poses, think about things that make you happy. It may provide a bigger boost than you think; as another Eons article explains, mental exercises can help you achieve your goals ["http://www.eons.com/body/feature/mindspirit/9717"](http://www.eons.com/body/feature/mindspirit/9717)!

You can do it!

If you're wondering how to fit these exercises into your busy schedule, here are some suggestions.

30. Make exercise a priority. For example, instead of doing your exercises after visiting your grandchildren, plan to get it out of the way ahead of time.
31. Recruit a friend to try the poses and exercises with you.
32. Be a role model for busy friends and family members who will see you taking charge of your mental and physical well-being.
33. Play relaxing music and practice deep breathing while you do your poses. This will make the exercises more inviting, and you'll get an extra mental health benefit from your hard work.

Now that you are taking steps to balance your body and mind, you can really enjoy a safe and happy year.

Follow-up!

[Yoga poses.](#)

[Tips for preventing falls.](#)

[Facts about osteoporosis & bone health](#)

Holly Kouvo

Eons contributor

Holly Kouvo is an Aerobics and Fitness Association of America-certified personal trainer and aerobic instructor as well as a certified nutrition specialist. As president of Fitting Fitness In, Holly focuses on helping people who need to lose 100 pounds or more. She recently produced a video entitled "Total Body Workout...Just Easy on the Knees," the first in her Easy On™ series, which brings easy-on-the-knees exercises into people's homes. Contact her at 978-502-8781 or holly@fittingfitnessin.com.