

# BALANCE EXERCISES FOR SENIORS

Losing your balance is a part of life. It happens all the time.

As we get older, however, things such as vision problems, inner ear problems, or weakened hips and ankles can throw off our balance more often. When young people get off balance, they can react quickly. Muscles kick in to stabilize us and we don't fall down. But as we age, we have to work a little harder to keep those muscles strong.

Janis McDonald is a certified functional aging specialist and master personal trainer. Janis, who is 65, understands seniors and helps other seniors stay active in her retirement community in San Miguel, Mexico. She operates the Website [Livelikeyoucan.com](http://Livelikeyoucan.com) and offers fitness coaching for boomers and beyond. Balance exercises can be an easy and fun part of everyday life, McDonald says. She shared these exercises that help her keep on the go. All of these exercises are good for the hips and ankles. McDonald suggests that you position yourself near a wall, chair, or counter before you start. That way you can catch yourself if you fall.

## Brushing Your Teeth Exercise

McDonald's favorite exercise is as simple as brushing your teeth.

1. Stand by a flat tabletop of counter. Lift your right foot a bit.
2. Make your body rigid as a board.
3. Begin to "rock around the clock," as McDonald says. Begin to sway in a circle with your body.
4. Sway for one minute in each direction.

## Marching Exercise

1. Stand next to a chair or counter. Don't hold on unless you need to.
2. Alternate lifting one knee as high as possible, then the other knee as high as possible.
3. Do this for one or two minutes, counting a long "one, two" each time you lift the knee.

## The Living Room Walk

1. Walk slowly across your living room.
2. While walking, slowly turn your head as right to the right as you can.
3. Walk back to your starting point, slowly turning your head as far to the left as you can.

## Chair Exercise

1. Sit in a chair that does not have arms.
2. Cross your arms across your shoulder, left hand on right shoulder, and right hand on left shoulder.
3. Stand up and sit down, keeping your head up and not looking down.
4. Do not lean forward as you stand up.

## Heel-toe Walk

Try walking a few steps on your heels, then on your toes.

## Senior Balance Challenge

McDonald says that there are many things you can buy to help with balance exercises, but for the most part, the best equipment is the floor. "It's functionally relevant. People are not going to walk down the street on a wobble board."

A high-density foam mat can be helpful, however. She likes to use the mat for what she calls the "senior balance challenge."

Here are the stages of the challenge.

1. Stand for 30 seconds, eyes closed.
2. Stand for 30 seconds, looking at the wall, on a high-density foam mat.
3. Stand for 30 seconds, eyes closed, on a high-density foam mat.

"This can be very challenging for people 65 and older," McDonald said of the final stage.