

Improve your balance with functional training

We are usually more concerned about the looks, the fat percentage, or body parts that we are not so happy with, but we rarely worry about balance as a major factor to maintain a strong body and to remain functional. As we age, we lose our balance. Like anything else, if you don't use it, you will lose it. If you don't challenge yourself to improve and maintain your balance, it will get harder to perform daily tasks later on in life.

Did this ever happen to

you? You try lifting one foot off the floor or slightly change your centre of gravity only to be surprised how close you came to falling down? It happened to me and I see it frequently in the gym when I ask people to perform a single leg dead lift just using their body weight. This is a basic exercise that I like to try once in a while to improve balance; if you add some weight, it's also a great exercise for the gluteal muscles (glutes).

Another basic exercise that many people struggle with is the

lunge; it's important to focus on our weaknesses, even if this is frustrating at times. For those of you who are familiar with training in a gym, I believe you will agree with me that it's exciting when you try a new piece of equipment or see an exercise that challenges your whole body and feels hard to perform.

Training for balance and core stability can be a great addition to a well-designed strength training programme. In order to do that, you can use a

Stability Ball, Bosu Ball or TRX Suspension Training. You can also challenge your balance by using your body weight only; from standing position, lift one foot off the floor; from all four positions, lift one limb off the floor, etc.

Usually when people are trying a Stability Ball for the first time, they are a bit sceptical about how it will feel and if they will fall. After the first few trials and with a bit of struggle, it always ends in laughter. Most times the conclusion is, "Oh,

I should do this more often; I didn't realise how different it feels." Or "Oh, I've got no balance"!

This is because, in order to perform the same movement with these types of equipment, or while shifting your body weight from its natural position, we must contract the core (lower abdominals, lower back, upper abdominals and oblique muscles), in addition to the muscles in our bodies that support it. For example, if you are standing on one leg, that

leg is supporting your whole body weight; therefore your hamstrings, quadriceps, calf muscles are working harder. It is also good for concentration. In order to maintain your balance, you need to focus. You should repeat the balance exercises frequently, at least once a week if you struggle with them; steadily increase the difficulty to keep the challenge.

I am demonstrating below a few exercises that can be performed with no equipment or with balance equipment.



1 By Manuela Nemes

Single Leg Dead Lift with Medicine Ball:

Strengthens the glutes and hamstrings while working the core. It builds on the basic dead lift by adding a leg extension movement that efficiently exercises your strength, balance and flexibility. In standing position with feet together, keep the medicine ball close to your body; lower it slowly towards your feet as you lift your leg behind you. As you return to start position, contract your hamstrings and glutes, while trying not to touch the floor. You can try performing 10 repetitions on one leg before you switch to the other side. You can also perform it without the medicine ball.



3 Single Leg Bridge on Stability Ball:

This targets hamstrings and glutes. Because it uses the weight of only one leg to support the weight of your entire body, the core muscles get a good workout. Sit tall on the ball and roll down slowly until only your shoulders touch the ball. Keep your hands on your hips to help steady your body. As you contract your abs, place your left leg across your right thigh. Lift your hips parallel with the floor as you contract your butt muscles. If you have a hard time stabilising the ball, either place it against the wall or gently touch the floor with your finger tips. Pause for a moment, and then lower your hips. Complete 10 repetitions before switching legs and repeating on the other side.



2 Lunge - Crescent lunge - Revolved lunge:

Strengthens the quadriceps muscles and glutes; a long lunge emphasises the glutes, whereas a short lunge emphasises the quadriceps. Standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, step forward, landing with the heel first. The knee should be at 90 degrees and directly above the toes to avoid adding pressure on the knee. You can hold this position or you can lower your body until the back knee is nearly touching the ground. To return to starting position, drive upward with the front leg. To challenge your balance more you can try a crescent lunge by sweeping your arms out to the sides and overhead, bringing your palms to touch. Gently bend back as if reaching over a beach ball. Leading with your chest, abs engaged, return your torso to an upright position. To perform a revolved lunge, you will twist at the waist, putting your hands together in prayer pose.



4 Plank on TRX:

It's a great core stabilisation exercise. Assume a prone position on the floor facing away from the TRX. Your forearms should be flat on the floor, shoulder width apart.

Place the insteps of both your feet in the TRX straps and lift your hips until your torso is parallel with the floor. Squeeze your glutes, draw in your core and rotate your pelvis posteriorly. In order for plank exercises to be effective, you must make sure your pelvis does not rotate anteriorly. To ensure this, keep your glutes contracted tightly the entire time you are in the plank position.

5 Boat Pose – Half Boat Pose:

Builds abdominal and core strength. From a seated position, bring legs straight up to a 45 degree angle. The torso will naturally lean back, but do not let the spine collapse. Make a "V" shape with the body. Bring the arms out straight in line with the shoulders. Balance on the sit bones. If necessary, you can bend the knees, bringing the calves parallel with the floor in a Half Boat Pose.

For more information on small group workouts focused on strengthening and stretching or for private sessions, please contact Bodysculptor Fitness Centre, Tel: 345 746-3432 or 939 5288 E: bodyscul@westartv.com

Manuela Ioana Nemes is a Vinyasa Specialist from the Academy of Holistic Fitness and ACE Certified Mat Pilates Instructor.