Falls **Free**

Keys to Better Balance: Community Resource

How do you know if an exercise class is good for preventing falls?

Activity variety: The most effective classes include both strength and balance training. When consistently incorporated, strength and balance activities have been shown to reduce falls by up to 50% (Sadaqa et al., 2023). For the greatest benefit, classes should include a structured warm-up and progressively increasing levels of difficulty over time.

Balance: Balance training should be the primary focus of fall prevention exercises. Effective balance activities should challenge stability during movement, multitasking, and static positions. Examples include balancing on uneven surfaces, heel-to-toe walking, single-leg standing, reaching, weight shifting, and leg raises.

Everyday strength: Functional activities, such as carrying groceries or rising from a chair or toilet, are essential for safe and independent movement. However, this type of strength training alone is not sufficient to prevent falls.

Confidence: Research tells us that psychological factors, such as a lack of balance confidence and fear of falling are predictive for future falls. It is important to remain active both at home and within the community. Participating in activities and programs that keep us active and moving is important for both physical and psychological reasons. Experiencing a fall often increases the fear of falling. The fear of falling may lead to limiting or avoiding activity, which can result in functional decline (Landers, et al, 2016). Keep moving! And keep reading to learn more about the types of activities that provide the greatest benefit.

What can YOU do?

Activities you can do with both strength and balance include Tai Chi, ping pong, dance, pickleball, yoga, water aerobics, and select fitness classes. Research has demonstrated that Tai Chi is particularly effective

in reducing fall risk (Chen et al, 2023). Classes can often be found at senior centers, community centers, YMCAs, places of worship, and local recreation departments such as Madison School and Community Recreation (MSCR).

Are there types of activities and/or exercises that do NOT make a difference in preventing falls?

While walking is great for cardiovascular health, research has not shown it to be effective in reducing fall risk. Similarly, exercise focused on resistance and endurance activities without gradually increasing the challenge over time has not shown significant impact on preventing falls. A comprehensive fall prevention program should emphasize increasing challenge in balance, strength and functional training (CDC, 2023).

How much activity do you need to DECREASE your risk of falling?

Engaging in at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week is essential for maintaining mobility and overall strength (Sadaqa et al, 2023). This can be accumulated throughout the day, or even broken down into three, 10-minute sessions. Research recommends that adults aged 65+ should participate in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week OR 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise, OR an equivalent combination, including at least two days that involve lower body strengthening. In addition, attending classes focused on balance and strength training at least twice per week, while also practicing balance for 3 hours per week is vital in decreasing the risk of falling (CDC, 2023).

Moderate-intensity exercises may include water aerobics, riding a bike with a few hills, learning a new dance, hiking a trail, yoga, doubles tennis, pickleball, pushing a lawn mower, etc.

Vigorous-intensity exercises may include jogging or running, swimming laps, riding a bike fast with several hills, singles tennis, playing basketball, etc.