



TBH Focus

Body | *Move It*

- Aerobic exercise boosts the brain's physical health, sharpens intellectual performance, and has been shown to lower dementia risk.
- Regular aerobic activity may contribute to the building of a protective buffer against memory loss, often referred to as “metabolic reserve.”
- Keeping physically fit helps prevent obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic conditions that in turn can increase dementia risk.

The TBH Science

As we get older, coordination and balance are prone to decline, thanks to natural changes in hearing and eyesight. Even the soles of our feet become less sensitive, which affects *proprioception*—how the brain senses where the body is positioned and moves. Other age-related factors that may affect balance are stroke; adverse reactions to blood pressure medicines; and even depression. Loss of balance can make us more likely to fall and suffer a broken bone or head injury; in fact, one in three Americans over 65 falls each year. Balance problems also make us less able to participate in the aerobic activities that can play an important role in keeping our brains healthy and our minds sharp.

The good news: There's no reason to get tripped up along the march of time! Participating in activities that challenge our sense of balance will help us remain nimble and quick well into old age. For examples, studies have found that tai chi, an ancient Chinese martial art, is highly effective for improving balance and lowering the risk of falls, thanks to its emphasis on slow, deliberate, dance-like movements. But any moves that work the hips, knees, ankles, and feet—such as the ones in this activity—can help to improve balance and coordination.

You Will Need

- The “Balancing Act” worksheets (see Resources)
- Open floor space
- Open wall area that can be used for balance
- Light weights (1 to 2 pounds)
- Small foam cushions or pillows
- Chairs for anyone who might need a bit more support for the exercises



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the importance of maintaining balance in later life. Highlight the critical role balance plays in the ability to participate in aerobic activity, which is key to brain health.
 - Have the group discuss challenges to their balance and concerns they may have about falling, as well as what they do already to better maintain their balance.
 - Invite the group to try simple balance exercises using the worksheets and resources in the Resource section.
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- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to talk about the importance of maintaining balance in later life. Highlight the critical role balance plays in the ability to participate in aerobic activity, which is key to brain health.
 - Have group do two or three of the exercises from the worksheets and resources in the Resource section.
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Balance is key to preventing falls and allowing us to enjoy aerobic activities that can help keep our brains healthy and our minds sharp as we age. Each day, do some simple balance-building exercises: Add some heel-toe walking to your stroll, or see how long you can balance on your right foot and then on your left (aim for at least 30 seconds); make it harder by standing on a small cushion or pillow.



Expert Opportunity

Invite a colleague who's trained in balance education to lead the group in the exercises.



Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.
