

Balance and core stability

What is balance?

Balance means your ability to stop yourself from wobbling or falling over. Our bodies keep their balance because information from your muscles, joints, eyes and ears is sorted out by your brain and used to help you move. For example, if you stand on one leg, you may put your hands out to stop you wobbling so much.

Why is balance important?

Having good balance means your muscles work well together and you are less likely to stress your joints, which can cause pain. It makes sitting, standing, walking and other activities easier.

What is core stability?

This is how steady and strong your middle (tummy, back, hips and shoulders) is.

Why is core stability important?

If your middle is strong you are less likely to get pain in your back, arms or legs. If your muscles work well together around your middle it is easier to sit, stand, walk, run, and move your arms and legs. It also makes it easier to keep your balance.

How do we check your core stability and balance?

For core stability, we watch how you sit, stand, walk and move. We may ask you to try some exercises and watch how easy or difficult you find them. For balance, we time how long you can stand on each leg with your eyes open or closed. We can then see how this compares with other people your age.

What kind of exercises help?

Here are some examples of exercises for core stability. Click on muscle strengthening to find out how many exercises to try each week.

Tummy strengthening exercise (1):

1. Lie on your back, with your knees bent up and feet flat on the floor.
2. Pull your lower tummy towards your spine. Don't flatten your back against the floor, or hold your breath. If your tummy muscles are working, you should feel the muscle tighten just inside your hip bones. Try and hold this a few seconds.

Tummy strengthening exercise (2):

1. Lie on your back, with your knees bent up and feet flat on the floor.
2. Tighten your lower tummy muscles as in exercise (1) above.
3. Slowly let one knee lower out to the side. Stop if you feel your body start to roll. Slowly bring your knee back to the middle. Try this on both legs.

Bridging:

1. Lie on your back, with your knees bent up and feet flat and slightly apart on the floor.
2. Try and use your lower tummy muscles as in exercise (1).
3. Slowly lift your bottom up off the floor. Stop when you see a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Hold a few seconds, then lower down onto the bed slowly.

Hip strengthening exercise:

1. On your hands and knees, place your hands under your shoulders and your knees under your hips.
2. Don't let your tummy sink to the floor, or arch your back.
3. Try and lift one leg up from the floor to the same height as your hip. Stop if you feel your body start to roll. Hold a few seconds, then lower. Try this on both legs.

Balance Exercise:

Try standing on one leg, and time how long you can do it.

To make this harder, try playing throw and catch whilst standing on one leg.

To make it harder again, try standing on one leg with your eyes closed, and time how long you can do it.

What is a gym ball?

A gym ball is a tool we use in strengthening core stability. We test how strong you are by seeing what you can do *without* the ball moving. For example can you sit on the ball, and stay sitting up tall whilst moving your arms or legs.