

Week 1: Fear of Falling and Building Confidence

A fear of falling is one of the biggest concerns for older adults and here's the surprising part is that fear itself can increase the risk of falling. When we're afraid of falling, we often start to move less. We avoid certain activities or hesitate when walking, and over time, this leads to what's called the **Fear-Fall Cycle**.

The Fear-Fall Cycle looks like this:

You start to limit your movement because of fear → this leads to a decrease in strength, balance, and coordination → which increases your fall risk even more.

But here's the good news—you're here, and you're taking the first step toward breaking that cycle. Over the 12-week **SilverSneakers® Well-Balanced** program, we'll work to reframe your mindset and rebuild your confidence. We'll shift from thinking, *"I might fall"* to, *"I am strong, steady, and capable."*

At the end of today's class, I'll be handing out a simple tool called "Check Your Risk for Falling." I encourage you to take it home, fill it out, and share your results with your healthcare provider. It's a great starting point to understand your own fall risk and where you can improve.

Now, let's get started, every movement today is a step toward feeling stronger and more confident!

Week 2: Creating Safe Spaces

Did you know that most falls actually happen at home? Often, it's because of small, preventable hazards that we may not even notice because we see them every day. Small adjustments can make a big difference in keeping you safe.

Some of the most common household hazards include:

- Loose rugs or mats that can slide under your feet
- Electrical cords stretched across walkways
- Cluttered pathways or furniture too close together
- Poor lighting, especially in hallways or stairways
- Unstable furniture or chairs without armrests

The good news is you can make simple, easy changes to reduce these risks and create a safer living space. Here are a few things you can do this week:

- Secure loose rugs or remove them entirely
- Keep cords tucked away
- Clear clutter from walkways
- Add nightlights or improve lighting in dark areas
- Consider adding grab bars in bathrooms
- And always, wear supportive, non-slip shoes—even at home

At the end of class today, I'll be handing out a "Home Safety Checklist." I encourage you to take it home and walk through your living space. Check your bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, and hallways. See if there are a few quick changes you can make this week to make your home safer.

Every small change you make is one more way to protect yourself and stay independent.

Week 3: Stability in Motion

Balance is controlled by three key systems: **vision**, **the vestibular system** (inner ear), and **somatosensory feedback** (sensation from muscles, joints, and skin). When one of these systems is compromised, fall risk increases.

- **Vision:** Our visual system, especially the eyes, help determine position and movement in space. Poor lighting or visual impairments increase fall risk.
- **Vestibular system:** The vestibular system (inner ear) helps with head movement, spatial awareness, and equilibrium. Dizziness or vertigo can also impact our balance.
- **Somatosensory system:** Sensory receptors in the feet, joints, and muscles provide feedback about body position. Reduced sensation such as neuropathy, can make balance harder.

Today, we'll train all three systems to improve balance which may reduce fall risk.

Week 4: Strong and Flexible

Flexibility plays a key role in safe movement. Stiff muscles and joints limit mobility, making daily activities-like picking up objects, reaching high shelves, or turning our head when someone calls our name- more difficult. Over time, these limitations may increase the risk of falls.

Flexibility matters for several reasons:

- Reduces stiffness and improves range of motion for bending and reaching
- Supports balance by allowing smooth, controlled movements
- Help prevent injury from sudden movements or trips

The key areas of focus are:

- **Ankles and calves** - important for stable walking and balance
 - **Hips and hamstrings** - helps with bending, stepping, and posture
 - **Shoulders and upper back** - needed for reaching and maintaining good posture
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Week 5: Everyday Health

Many people take different medications and supplements for their health. When someone is on several at the same time, doctors call that ‘polypharmacy’. Some medications can sometimes have side effects like lightheadedness or feeling less steady on your feet. When multiple medications are taken together, it’s possible for them to interact in ways that may affect balance or coordination.

That’s why health experts recommend having your medication list reviewed regularly by a doctor or pharmacist.

After today’s workout, take a few minutes to write down everything you’re currently. All prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and supplements. Bring that list to your next appointment and write down any questions you’d like to discuss with your healthcare provider.

Week 6: Tackling Hidden Habits

Many falls aren’t just accidents. Falls can often be the result of risky behaviors that can be avoided. Simple actions, like standing on a chair, climbing onto counters, or moving unsteadily after drinking alcohol, can greatly increase the chance of a fall.

Identify and Avoid Risky Behaviors

- Standing on unstable chairs or stools to reach high shelves
- Climbing onto counters or furniture
- Walking after drinking alcohol or when taking medications that may cause dizziness or affect balance

Safer Alternatives Include

- Using a sturdy step stool with hand support
- Asking for help or reorganizing items to a reachable level
- Limiting alcohol use and being aware of how certain medications might affect balance

Preventing falls means recognizing and changing risky habits, while also building the strength and stability to move with confidence.

Week 7: Walking Gait and Longevity

Gait, the way you walk — is a powerful indicator of overall health, mobility, and even life expectancy. Research shows that both walking speed and movement patterns are closely connected to independence, cognitive health, and longevity. As we age, changes such as shuffling, shorter steps, or slowed pace can increase the risk of falls.

So, what exactly is gait and why does it matter? Gait refers to the rhythm and pattern of your steps—how long your strides are, how evenly you walk, and how quickly you move.

Gait speed is especially important. A slower or uneven gait may be an early sign of balance issues, muscle weakness, or fall risk. On the other hand, walking more quickly and efficiently has been linked to better heart health, sharper cognitive function, and even a longer life.

Week 8: Power Up to Stay Independent

Muscular power is the ability to generate force quickly. It is critical for balance, fall prevention, and maintaining independence. Muscular power helps you **stand up from a chair, climb stairs, catch yourself if you trip, and carry everyday objects**. As we age, we naturally lose muscle mass and power, but regular movement and strength focused exercises can slow or reverse that process.

Why Muscle Power Is Crucial

- A reduction in muscular power increases fall risk and makes daily tasks harder.
- Strong, fast muscle response helps you react quickly to prevent a fall.
- Getting up off the floor or out of a low chair, carrying groceries or laundry, and climbing stairs or stepping over obstacles all require strength and power.

Building muscular power will support safer movement, improved confidence, and greater independence.

Week 9: Sharpen Your Reflexes

Before we begin, let's talk about how important your **reaction time** is in preventing falls. Your ability to respond quickly when something unexpected happens, like tripping or slipping, can help prevent a fall.

Why it matters:

- Fast reactions help you regain balance quickly
- Sharpens coordination and alertness
- Helps you stay steady when life throws you off balance

Improving your quickness and reaction time are key components to this program and will challenge your brain and body to move quicker and safer.

Week 10: Posture, Core and Control

Before we move today, let's talk about your **posture and core muscles**.

Good posture and core strength are essential for balance and stability. They help you:

- Keep your center of gravity over your feet
- Improve body control and reaction time
- Stay steady when changing direction or recovering from a stumble

Today, I'll remind you to stand tall, engage your core, and move with control. These small habits make a big difference in reducing fall risk.

Week 11: Footwear for Safe Steps

Today, let's talk about something simple but important, **your shoes**. Supportive footwear helps you move confidently and safely.

The type of footwear you wear plays a big role in your balance and fall risk. Unsafe shoes can make it easier to trip or slip.

Look for shoes with:

- Firm, non-slip soles
- Low heels
- Good arch and ankle support
- A secure fit (no loose shoes)

After class, check your shoes and make sure your footwear is supportive with a secure fit to help you stay steady.

Week 12: Fuel with Fluids

Before we begin today's workout, I want to remind you about the importance of **hydration**.

Staying hydrated helps prevent dizziness, lightheadedness, and low blood pressure—all of which can increase fall risk.

Hydration matters because:

- It maintains healthy blood pressure
- Reduces feelings of dizziness or faintness
- Supports muscle function and energy

A good goal is to sip water throughout the day, especially before and after exercise. I'll also cue you a minimum of three to hydrate throughout class. After today's class, I encourage you to grab a glass of water and keep hydration part of your **SilverSneakers® Well-Balanced** plan.

This class provided general wellness information only and is not medical advice. Always consult your health care provider before making any changes to your medications or healthcare routine.

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