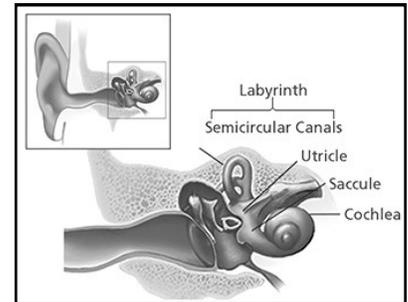


Always Walking A

Looking at the human body, have you ever wondered how we even manage to stand up and walk without falling over? Most people don't think about it. There is no need to. Our system of balance may be complex, but it is designed to work automatically and does not require our attention...unless.

Every year, more than one quarter of the seniors over the age of 65 fall at least one time. A good deal of these falls are do to poor balance or a balance disorder. These problems are not an inevitable consequence of aging, however they are pretty common among seniors. Does this mean that unsteady seniors need to accept their fate of falling? No. Fortunately, many balance issues can be lessened, or even alleviated, through an accurate diagnosis by a doctor, followed by the appropriate medical treatment and/or specific rehabilitation exercises.



The inner ear (labyrinth) contains semicircular canals that work like a carpenter's level to supply the brain with data on balance. (NIH graphic)

Teamwork

Maintaining one's balance takes a team effort. There are a variety of systems that work together to provide the brain with the information that is necessary to maintain equilibrium or stability.

- ◆ **Central Nervous System** - Coordinates, manages and responds to data fed to the brain from the rest of the body.
- ◆ **Vestibular System** - Part of the inner ear, also known as the labyrinth, that maintains stability during head and eye movements.
- ◆ **Sensory Systems** - Including sight and hearing, these systems feed the brain with critical data.
- ◆ **Proprioceptors** - System of nerve endings that provide the sensation of movement and position.
- ◆ **Muscular System** - Allows for quick response and provides the necessary strength to make corrections that maintain balance.

Keep Your Balance

Balance issues may come up at any time. Here are some suggestions that can help someone to cope with these challenges in daily life.

- ◆ When walking, set your focus on an object in the distance. Looking down at your feet can make things worse.
 - ➔ When riding in a car, look at a fixed point in the distance. When going around a curve, that point needs to be beyond the curve. Also, sitting in the front seat can be helpful.
- ◆ Change position slowly. When standing, do not take a step for 5 seconds, or until you have your balance.
- ◆ Utilize your sensory systems to the max. If that means wearing prescribed eye glasses and hearing aids, then do so.
- ◆ Use a cane, walker or walking stick to provide support and extra tactile orientation.

(Sources: BalanceandMobility.com, Medicinenet.com, NIDCD.NIH.gov)

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