

Better Balance for Fall – Jen Davis

I have been thinking a lot about balance lately. You might even say, I am completely preoccupied with the complex phenomenon of balance and how to maintain it. Balance is the ability to control and maintain your body's position as it moves through space. Your brain, muscles and bones work together to maintain your body's balance and to keep you from falling.

One of the main factors that can affect balance is posture. As we age, postural changes that are subtle at first can lead to alterations in our physical capabilities. Prolonged sitting (knitting, reading, using a computer) carrying heavy bags, and simply being unaware of how we are holding ourselves leads to changes in postural alignment over time. These changes include a more forward head, rounded shoulders and an increase or decrease of the spinal curve in the lower back.

When your ears are centered over your head, that's approximately 12 pounds that your neck muscles are supporting. Each inch that your head moves forward adds 10 pounds to this weight, putting stress on your spine that can result in bone degeneration, neck pain, herniated discs, headaches, numbness and tingling.

Poor posture doesn't just stem from a habit of slumping. Inflexibility feeds into it as well. As muscles tighten up, they shorten. This curtails range of motion—that is, how far a joint can move in a given direction. The muscles known as hip flexors, for example, allow you to bend the hip and bring your knee up toward your chest. Overly tight, shortened hip flexors tug your upper body forward and disrupt your posture. Likewise, overly tight chest muscles can pull your shoulders forward. Unless you do stretches to counter this, your range of motion is likely to become increasingly limited as time passes.

If you are looking around for a mirror right now, that's great! Because, the only way to know how you are holding yourself, be it slouched or erect, is to raise your awareness. If you notice that you may, in fact need improvement and would like some simple suggestions, please come see me in the Fitness Room on the Lower Level in the Inn. Contact the front desk to schedule a convenient time for us to meet.

Once we meet for a consultation/orientation (which we ask that you do before using the room on your own), it's up to you how you would like to move forward. If you like, we can meet again for a follow-up and I can answer any questions that may have come up. Many folks ask me to advise them in dealing with a specific issue, like trouble putting on socks or how to make standing up easier. Sometimes, we decide that setting a meaningful and specific goal that may take a bit longer to accomplish is the best course.

Consider this an open invitation to visit the Fitness Room. Come once or become a regular. Schedule times to learn new skills from me, revisit the ones you haven't used in a while and continue to explore on your own. Now that the Fitness Room hours have been extended from 7am to 7pm, nothing can prevent you from coming to stretch or to meet a friend to ride on the bikes or walk on the treadmills

side by side!! I hope that you will find that the fitness room has much to offer in the way of equipment and opportunities for fitness and fellowship.

I look forward to seeing you!!