



Restoring Balance and Enhancing Mobility

Life changes when you're aging, in so many expected and unexpected ways. As you reach later stages of life, it can sometimes be difficult to maintain a steady sense of balance or sustain an adequate level of mobility.

But once older adults are equipped with a proper sense of balance and empowered to improve their mobility, they can feel more confident in taking charge of their lives. Maintaining balance and mobility is a critical way to counter symptoms like decreasing muscle mass and frequent joint pain¹



Check Your Mobility

Ask yourself the following questions² from AARP to see what they could signify about your mobility:

- How symmetrical is your stride when you walk?

If you're favoring one foot over the other, you could be facing a mobility issue.

- How far apart are your feet when you're walking?

If your feet are extremely far apart, you might be experiencing balance difficulties.

- Do you have trouble pivoting when you walk?

Taking more than three steps to turn around could signal a mobility issue.

- Are you dragging or shuffling your feet?

The heel of one foot should clear the toe of the other foot when you're walking.

What Caregivers Need to See

Caregivers must be alert in recognizing deficits in a senior's balance and mobility, finding them sooner rather than later. Once deficits are recognized, caregivers and older adults can work together to address a plan of action with a doctor.

Furniture walking, which happens when older adults are always reaching for things like the back of the sofa or the wall next to them, is a red flag. It shows that balance is off. While furniture walking can help prevent older adults from falling in the short term, their balance will continue to decline if they keep relying on that crutch. But catching behaviors like this early on can prevent them from going too far.

If you notice anything amiss, make sure the older adult consults their doctor or therapist for help. "A lot of times the individual themselves may not realize their balance is off, because it's just become natural to them," says Daniel Sekora, MOTR/L, Director of Rehabilitation Services, Southmont, Presbyterian SeniorCare Network. "So, it's important for people close to them to recognize differences and encourage them to speak with a doctor. A lot of times we take it for granted."

Watch for our follow-up article on tips for improving balance and mobility, available in the next *Making Aging Easier® Newsletter!*



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1. "Importance of Balance and Mobility for Seniors," CC Young Senior Living, 2020. <https://www.ccyoung.org/news/exercises-to-improve-your-balance-and-mobility/>
 2. Barbara Stepko, "Is It Time for a Mobility Check?," AARP, 2020. <https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2020/assessing-mobility-balance/>