

IT'S ALL ABOUT BALANCE

Liz Lowe tells us why balance is important and how to improve it

Liz is a fitness professional living in Somerset. She runs outdoor bootcamp sessions, circuit training and yoga workshops in Freshford, near Bath. Liz can also be booked for personal training sessions. Visit lizlowe.journportfolio.com to find out more.



When swimmers talk about goals, 'better balance' is rarely top of the list, but this often-overlooked aspect of fitness can impact movement quality both in and out of the water.

Balance is about maintaining a steady body position and moving efficiently. It relies on continual communication between several body systems – even walking is a complex feat of balance.

The vestibular system (located in the inner ear), the joints and muscles, and the eyes all send information to the brain, which assimilates it and relays instructions back to the body. This communication ensures the correct muscles work to give stability and the eyes provide clear vision. If the brain receives conflicting messages from the various systems, we may feel dizzy or nauseous. One example of this is motion sickness, which can occur when what the eyes see conflicts with information processed by the vestibular system.

Balance and stability (of which core strength is integral) support optimal day-

to-day movement, help prevent injuries and aid sporting performance, such as efficient swimming technique. Yet, as we age, the relevant body systems function less effectively and this, combined with age-related reduction in joint mobility and muscle strength, is why falls are a leading cause of injury-related hospitalisations and death in older adults.

Research has shown that balance begins to decline around age 50, but it's never too early to train it, and the good news is we can easily incorporate balance drills into everyday life.

SOME SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE BALANCE

Take the opportunity to test your balance during your daily routines, for example standing on one leg to brush your teeth

(perhaps closing your eyes briefly) or practising heel-to-toe walking while the kettle boils.

In your workouts, try introducing more unilateral (one-sided) exercises, such as single-leg squats. Yoga and Tai Chi both contain moves to improve balance, and Pilates is excellent for developing core stability.

WE CHALLENGE YOU!

SOGGY SOCK SWAY CHALLENGE

When getting dressed after your swim, try putting socks and shoes back on while standing on one leg. This may also involve a nice single-leg squat as you retrieve them. Most shoes will provide some additional stability, so be aware that whichever side you do first will be working a little harder!

Tag @outdoorswimmer on Instagram with your photos and videos taking on the challenge!

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