

# Don't *Fall* For Poor Balance!

Don't fall for the idea that poor balance is an unavoidable – or worse yet – normal part of the aging process, says NCH Physical Therapist Barbara Laz. “Because it's not normal, that's for sure,” she said.

Approximately one third of people age 65 years or older fall each year in the United States. These falls account for nearly 1,000 fractured hips every day, as well as other injuries associated with osteoporosis, reports the American Academy of Family Medicine.

“I hear, ‘I'm 78 years old, of course I'm going to fall,’ but that's not really true,” said Laz, who believes that many falls are preventable by simply addressing health issues and the individual's environment.

Laz said that the fear of falling can be nearly as dangerous as actually falling because it causes many seniors to avoid activities, isolating themselves and diminishing their quality of life. “Use it or lose it,” she warned.

“The three systems that work together in the body to influence balance are the visual system, the vestibular system, and the somatosensory system, which includes the sensory information gained from the legs and feet,” said Laz.

The balance assessment tool at NCH Briggs Wellness Center provides detailed data about how well these systems are working together. This information helps therapists formulate exercises and other therapies to help improve

balance, said NCH Physical Therapist Matthew Condo.

“Exercises such as standing on one foot can be helpful, but dangerous,” cautioned Condo. “I'd be hesitant to offer home exercises for people to improve balance on their own because of the risks if they're feeling unsteady,” he said.

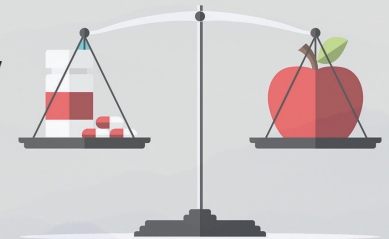
“In addition to exercise and maintaining proper foot health, proper shoes are also important for seniors and anyone else who may be at risk of unsteadiness or falling,” said Laz. “Avoid common convenience shoes, such as flip-flops, that do not provide non-skid soles, or fit securely above the heel,” she suggested.



Matthew Condo, PT, explains to patient Peter Peruzzi what to expect as he steps into the balance assessment equipment.

## Health Factors Include:

- Vision and eyewear
- The vestibular system of the inner ear
- Muscular strength, coordination and flexibility
- Prescription medications, blood sugar and blood pressure conditions, among others



## Environmental Factors Include:

- Cracked sidewalks
- Secured handrails in bathrooms and near steps
- Throw rugs that are secured with double sided tape
- Walkways free of wires, cords and clutter
- Proper lighting, including night-lights and conveniently located switches
- Furniture that is checked for sturdiness if used for leaning

**For more information on the NCH Outpatient Rehabilitation  
Fall prevention services call (239) 624-1600.**