

## Building Better Balance: Class Format

The exercise portion of the **Free From Falls** program is called **Building Better Balance**.

A 50-minute movement segment follows and includes a variety of suggested exercises that come from each of the following exercise components:

- Revving-Up (Warm-Up)
- Balance Basics
- Fine Tuning the Senses
- Functional Frolics
- Firming Your Muscles
- Winding Down (Cool-Down)

### Revving Up (The Warm-Up)

As with all physical activity programs, an adequate warm-up is an important start to each and every class in the Building Better Balance program. Its primary physiologic purpose is to elevate the heart rate, increase the body's internal temperature, and prepare the muscles and joints for the more moderate-intensity activities to follow.

A second purpose of the "Revving Up" component is to establish an important social and emotional connection with participants and set the stage for an enjoyable and safe class. This time will also provide you with the opportunity to converse with your participants, learn their names, and get them to learn each other's names as well.

The best types of activities to present in this section are those that involve continuous movement through a comfortable range of motion. Create a safe and non-competitive environment during this time by encouraging class participants to work at their own speed and ability level. Provide chairs as additional support for participants who are less stable.

Adding music to the Revving-Up section can also enhance the experience for your participants. Be sure to select music that resonates with your participants and is at a tempo in the range of 100 to 110 beats per minute. Be sure to play it at a volume that allows you to be heard as you instruct the class. De-emphasize the need to be in time with the music or on the "right foot" at the "right time" during the performance of movement combinations.

### Balance Basics

The goal during this section of the class is to improve your participants' static and dynamic balance abilities. The emphasis in balance basics is on reacquainting participants with the fundamental principles of good balance: good postural alignment, moving from the core, visual focus and preparation for movement. Most of the participants will experience great challenges with balance and may not be able to perform challenging standing balance activities. For this reason, there are not many balance exercises, per se, but rather adding balance challenges to the strength exercises in the Firming Up Muscles section. In Balance Basics, we focus on these areas impacting balance:

- **Vestibular & Somatosensory Systems:** These challenges include having the participants perform the exercises on an unstable surface (seated or standing), such as foam pads, rolled-

up towel blankets, dyna disks or stability balls. Always be sure the exercises are performed safely, using chairs, bars or walls as added support.

- **Visual System:** These challenges include having the participants perform the exercise with altered vision, wearing sunglasses, or with their eyes closed.

Once participants have mastered or almost mastered each of the balance progressions, begin adding more challenge to the progressions by altering the position of the arms (across chest) or removing vision during the standing balance progressions (altered base of support activities), introducing head turns during the more dynamic weight shift activities, or through culminating activities where they can practice their balance skills in small groups.

## **Functional Frolics**

This section of the class is designed to build on the balance activities introduced in the Balance Basics section of the class, as well as introduce different gait activities designed to improve motor coordination, agility, and anticipatory and reactive postural control. The activities in this section are very functional in nature and should easily transfer to activities of daily living.

The functional benefits associated with every activity introduced in this section are described at the beginning of each activity. This section of the class includes partner and group activities that should be fun.

## **Firming Your Muscles**

Muscle weakness, particularly in the lower body, has been identified as an important risk factor for falls. As such, it is important that every class include a resistance-training component. A number of upper and lower body exercises that specifically target the muscle groups needed for good balance and mobility are presented in this section.

Class participants should select the appropriate level of resistance (e.g., band, hand weight or ankle weight) that allows them to perform between 8 and 12 repetitions before fatiguing. Begin with a single set of 8 repetitions of each exercise, progressing to 12 repetitions before adding a second set of repetitions.

Because the principle of *overload* applies here, it will be important that your participants add more resistance or weight as the classes progress and also systematically increase the number of repetitions and sets performed so that the muscles are progressively overloaded.

## **Winding Down (Cool Down) – 10 Minutes**

Just as it is important to adequately warm up the body at the beginning of every class, it is equally important to cool it down. During this final component, the emphasis is on lowering the heart rate, reducing the body's internal temperature and stretching the muscles that have worked continuously during class. The activities in this section include dynamic and static flexibility exercises that can be performed in a seated or standing position. Adding instrumental or relaxation music to this section helps to set just the right mood for participants.

Spend time during this final section of the class to reconnect with your participants socially and reflect on what transpired during the class. Solicit feedback from them about what activities they found to be the most challenging and enjoyable, or encourage them to share particular strategies they might have learned during the class with the group that they think will apply to daily life. This is also a good time to assign homework!

Because many of the balance activities they perform in the earlier sections of the class often demand more cognitive effort, this section provides an excellent opportunity for them to relax. Please be sure to allow enough time at the end of class for this section, and discourage participants from leaving before and/or during this important winding-down component.

## Building Better Balance Exercises by Week

As noted in the table that follows, 20 specific exercises are suggested for use each week of the program. They help to focus on the important skill development that relates to an integrated approach to enhancing posture, gait and balance. Over the course of the six weeks there are recommendations to progressively increase the challenge of each exercise as well as 12 additional supplemental exercises that could be added to the workout as it is appropriate for your group.

Each the exercise description sheet provides:

- The functional benefits of the exercise
- Instructions for the activity
- Suggested reinforcing verbal cues, modifications & progressions
- Safety guidelines and Equipment needs

Exercises	Weeks							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b><u>Revvng Up</u></b>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b><u>Firming Your Muscles</u></b>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b><u>Balance Basics</u></b>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b><u>Functional Frolics</u></b>								
Copy Cat		■		■		■		
Grocery Shopping		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b><u>Winding Down</u></b>		■	■	■	■	■	■	■