

Balance & Stability for Special Populations

by the Merrithew™ Team

When we measure the benefits of exercise, we're often looking for results in the form of pounds dropped, inches lost, and muscle gained, but when was the last time you considered improved balance and stability as a measure of success for yourself or for the clients that you train? It's easy to take balance for granted, especially when working with special populations. Special populations can refer to the active aging demographic who are at a high-risk for accidents from falling, clients who suffer from balance disorders such as vertigo, or even extreme athletes. In short, balance training is an integral yet often overlooked part of any exercise regime.

Benefits of Balance Training

Incorporating balance training into a regular workout routine provides a host of benefits, including:

- **Improved Neuromuscular Coordination:** Ideal for actively aging individuals who want to improve or maintain functionality, as well as athletes looking to take their performance and agility to the next level. Balance training improves the communication between the brain and the muscles.
- **Improved Proprioception:** Proprioception allows the body to recognize where it is in space and in relationship to its surroundings. Balance training improves this communication between the body and the brain regarding position, movement, and equilibrium while creating a better overall sense of body awareness.
- **Strengthen Postural Stabilizers:** Various stabilizing muscles throughout the body charged with maintaining optimal posture are forced to become engaged in an effort to maintain a balanced,

vertical position. This ensures that the right muscles are doing the job and prevents surrounding muscles from helping the body cheat.

- **Activate Deep Stabilizers:** Balance training forces the smaller muscles in the pelvis, lower back, hips and abdomen called 'local stabilizers' to work more effectively to help keep the joints in the best alignment possible.

Tools for Balance Training

Balance exercises can be performed as unilateral bodyweight movements. Alternatively, incorporate a variety of tools either in a structured exercise setting or outside of a fitness environment.

- **Stability Barrel™:** Work on both balance and control with this multi-purpose tool that can be used inverted or upright. Added bonus: the Stability Barrel provides exceptional proprioceptive feedback. In the inverse position, with the rounded side down, the flat

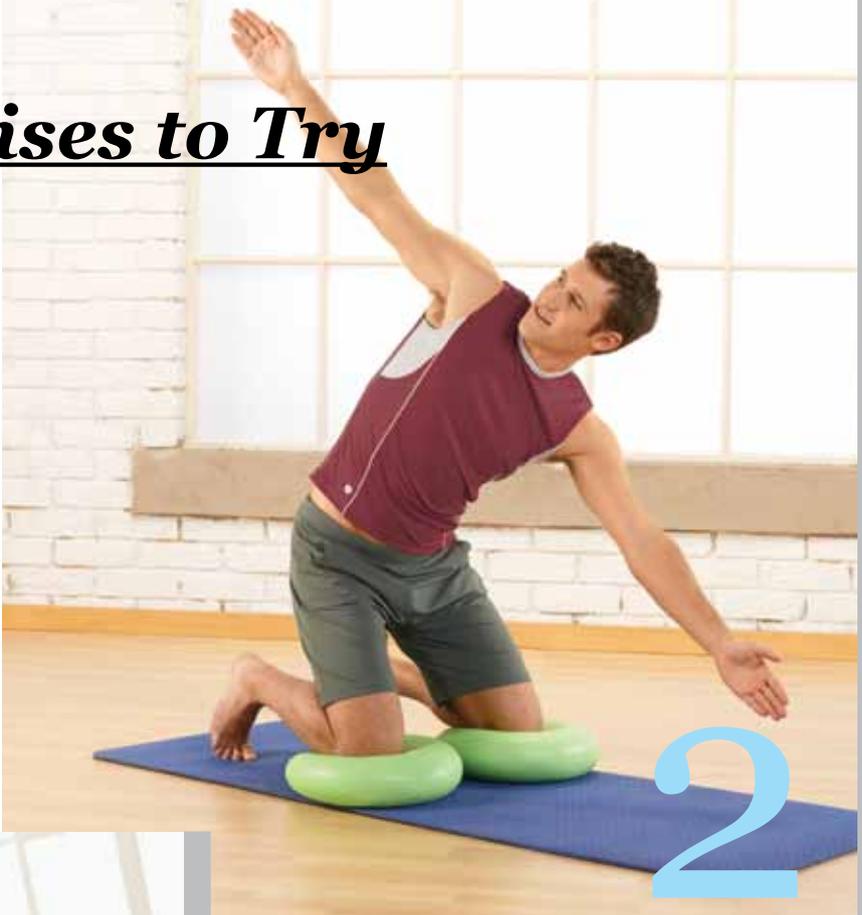


Three Exercises to Try

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◀ STABILITY BARREL PLANK—ONE LEG UP

- With feet on the Stability Barrel, flat side up, press up into a high plank position.
- Keeping the torso, shoulders, and pelvis stable, reach one leg up and hold for five seconds.
- Place the foot back down, repeating on the opposite side.



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⤴ TORSO ROTATION IN KNEELING SQUAT

- Kneel with each knee on a Stability Cushion then keep spine long and hinge forward into a kneeling squat, reaching arms forward.
- Keeping the spine long and the pelvis stable, rotate the torso to one side. Then reach your arm up and back.
- Return back to the starting position and repeat the rotation to the other side.

◀ BOSU PRO BALANCE TRAINER V-SIT

- With the BOSU Pro Balance Trainer flat side down, sit on the rounded surface slightly forward on the dome.
- Curve the lower back, keeping the abs engaged and lift legs up into a V position with the knees bent.
- Hold for 20 seconds, placing the hands on the out-sides of the knees for support, as required.



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surface creates a platform for unilateral instability that challenges overall balance, stability and body awareness.

• **BOSU® PRO Balance Trainer:** This popular tool known industry-wide trains balance, builds strength and fine tunes skills. It challenges the entire body with integrated, multi-joint movements that require muscle groups to work together. Used dome or platform side down, as a stand-alone piece of equipment or combined with other accessories, it provides a multi-directional unstable surface that reinforces balance and stability.

• **Stability Cushion™:** Add variety, functionality, and challenge to any exercise program with this cushion's unstable nature. With the ability to be used in standing, sitting, kneeling, supine and prone positions, it can do double-duty out of the gym when brought into the office for seated intervals throughout the day that challenge the core to stay engaged.

• **Balance and Therapy Domes:** Another great desk tool, balance and therapy domes, are great for joint mobilization, motor skill development and, of course, balance training. Use the domes flat-side down for moderate training and pebble-side down for an increased challenge.



MERRITHEW™, Leaders in Mindful Movement™, offers high-end programming including STOTT PILATES®, ZEN•GA™, CORE™ Athletic Conditioning & Performance Training™, Total Barre™ and Halo® Training. Backed by 25 years of experience and the latest findings in exercise science, MERRITHEW's philosophy is to deliver safe, responsible and effective exercise for people of all ages and levels of fitness.