

Did you know?

The buddy system works. Teaming up with a workout partner may increase your odds of sticking with an exercise program.

Tai chi. Tai chi, mentioned earlier as a way to increase flexibility, is also a popular method of improving balance. Tai chi may also help you build stamina and experience greater relaxation.

Tai chi consists of a series of graceful movements that help improve your stance and coordination. You'll learn how to turn your body more slowly. You may also gain more confidence in your movements. Each of these benefits can result in better balance.

Finding an experienced instructor is your best bet for reaping all the benefits of tai chi. If you can't find a class, consider renting or purchasing tai chi videotapes or DVDs. A number of books are available as well, although it may be more difficult to learn the movements that way.

Whether you take a class, rent a video or refer to a book, look for instruction that's geared to your age group or activity level. Start slowly and don't push yourself. Work your way up to trying all of the movements.

Anytime, anywhere. Although it's important to incorporate balance exercises into your regular exercise program, you can also incorporate them into your daily routine. Consider these balance exercises to practice throughout your day:

- Balance on one foot and then the other while waiting for the bus, doing the dishes, brushing your teeth or standing in line at the grocery store.
- Stand up and sit down without using your hands. The nice thing about this exercise is that you'll have a chair right there to catch you if you lose your balance.
- Do the balance walk. Place your heel just in front of the toes of your opposite foot with each step. Make sure your heel and toes touch or almost touch. Before doing any of these exercises, make sure something steady is nearby that you can use to catch yourself if need be.

THE NEXT STEP

There's a wide variety of exercises from which to choose when deciding what's best for your program. Including aerobic, strength, core, flexibility and balance exercises in your workout can lead to more complete fitness. It may also offer variety that can help you through the occasional slump when you'd rather skip working out. The "Exercise guide" on page 134 has more than 150 exercises with step-by-step instructions.

movement and postures, can help reduce anxiety, strengthen muscles, lower blood pressure and help your heart work more efficiently. Yoga's techniques for stretching and strengthening the body can be practiced by people of all ages. Older adults or those with stiff joints may have to adapt some of the traditional poses. If you've had joint replacement surgery, especially hip replacement, some yoga positions may put you at risk of injury and joint dislocation. If you've had such surgery, be sure to talk with your doctor before starting yoga. For more on the different types of yoga, see "Types of yoga" on page 63.

Tai chi. This ancient form of martial arts involves gentle, circular movements combined with deep breathing. Tai chi helps strengthen muscles, improve flexibility and reduce stress. Check martial arts schools for qualified instructors. Health clubs and community centers frequently offer classes with experienced instructors, as well. It's wise to check credentials before taking a class.

Feldenkrais Method. The Feldenkrais Method uses gentle movements to develop increased flexibility and coordination. Though similar to yoga, the Feldenkrais Method doesn't strive for correct positions, but instead aims for more dexterous, painless and efficient body movements. The goal is to create an awareness and quality of movement through your body feedback rather than through pre-defined postures. These techniques often are used in physical and occupational therapies.

In group "Awareness Through Movement" classes, the instructor leads you through a sequence of comfortable, easy movements — sitting in a chair, lying down or standing — that gradually progress with greater range and complexity. In private lessons, called "Functional Integration," the instructor guides these movements through gentle touch.

Certified Feldenkrais practitioners complete a four-year training program approved by the Feldenkrais Guild. To find a certified practitioner, see "Additional resources" on page 344.

Alexander Technique. More than 100 years old, the Alexander Technique is a set of skills that you can use to relieve chronic pain, prevent injury and enhance performance. Like in the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique instructors encourage you to be aware of your movements. But unlike other approaches, such as Feldenkrais, yoga or Pilates, Alexander Technique isn't a set of exercises. Instead, it's a way to heighten awareness of how you move, improve your coordination and become a more intelligent exerciser.

Certified Alexander Technique teachers must complete 1,600 hours of training over a minimum of three years in an approved program. To find a qualified teacher in your area, see "Additional resources" beginning on page 344.

Stretching is a common way to gain flexibility and can be practiced by nearly anyone. It's gentle, easy and can be done almost anywhere. It's truly one of the easiest exercises to work into your routine.