

5 Expert Balance Exercises

Having a well-developed sense of balance is critical to your overall physical fitness. **These five exercises strengthen muscles as they build balance.**

What do a snowboarder, a gymnast, a ballet dancer, a circus acrobat, and a surfer have in common? **They all have impeccable balance.** And they're all part of the team that we assembled to create this full-body balance-strengthening regimen.

Combine these five exercises into one routine and you'll be training your brain and conditioning your core to stabilize you in all planes of motion: forward and backward, side to side, and rotationally. **Practice two to three times each week to build muscle memory.**

Move 1: Kneeling Alternating Superman

Recommended by Gretchen Bleiler, age 32, Olympic snowboarder.

What it works: Upper back, core.

How to do it: Get down onto your hands and knees. Lift and extend your left arm forward as you simultaneously extend your right leg behind you. Hold for five counts. Repeat with the opposite arm and leg. Alternate sides for five reps on each side.

× **Tip:** “Up the difficulty by raising the stabilizing foot off the floor, so only your hand and knee are keeping you steady,” says Bleiler. “Watch yourself in the mirror. Your back should be flat like a table; do this by squeezing your core and keeping your shoulders down and back. And your hips should be

straight, not rotated, even as you raise your leg.”

Move 2: DIY Balance-Beam Routine

Recommended by Jordyn Wieber, age 18, 2012 Olympic gold-medal-winning gymnast.

What it works: Core, quadriceps, hamstrings, calves.

How to do it: Create a 10-to 12-foot line on the floor with painter’s tape. Walk along the line on tiptoe back and forth, with arms extended to the side. Next, for 30 seconds, stand on one leg (stay on your toes) with eyes closed. Repeat with the opposite leg. Now jump up and down in place 10 times, with one foot in front of the other, as if on a balance beam.

× **Tip:** “To challenge yourself further, stand on one leg—with your foot flat, or on tiptoes as your balance improves—and lift the other leg straight back into the air with your arms extended out to the sides. Hold it for 30 seconds, then switch legs and repeat,” says Wieber.



Move 3: Standing Abs

Recommended by Mary Helen Bowers, age 34, former dancer with the New York City Ballet.

What it works: Core.

How to do it: From a standing position, bend your right knee and extend your left leg behind you, keeping your upper body elongated. Extend your left arm up and over your head as you lean your torso to the right, keeping your right arm down. Pulse for a count of 16. Return to the standing position, core centered, and straighten your knees. Repeat on the other side.

× **Tip:** Pull your abdominals in tightly as you lift your arm over your head; don't be afraid to bend as far as you can. "You'll feel your muscles pulling and stretching through the side and the core," says Bowers, who trained Natalie Portman for her role in the film *Black Swan*. As you grow more adept, add in more repetitions and a deeper side bend.

Move 4: Varied-Width Push-Up

Recommended by Elena Zhirnova, age 30, performer in Cirque du Soleil's "La Nouba."

What it works: Shoulders, chest, upper back, core, wrists.

How to do it: Get into a modified push-up position (hands and knees on the floor), then cross your ankles and position your hands directly beneath your shoulders. Lower your body to the ground for as deep a push-up as possible, then push back up to the starting position. Do five repetitions, then do five more with your hands wider than shoulder-width apart. This will

target different muscle groups. Repeat the set two times.

× **Tip:** “After about a month of this exercise, try a more advanced push-up position with your knees straight and your toes on the floor, as in a full-on push-up,” says Zhirnova, who specializes in aerial acrobatics and hand balancing. If you’re working toward doing a handstand, which requires not just balance but also a strong upper body, try changing your arm and hand positions so that your index fingers and thumbs form a diamond on the floor. This works additional arm muscles.



Move 5: Medicine-Ball Toss

Recommended by Erica Hosseini, age 26, series champion of the 2012 Association Pro Surfing competition.

What it works: Chest, back, arms, core, obliques, legs.

How to do it: Sit on an exercise ball, holding a three-pound medicine ball in your hands. Rotate your trunk to the right, then return to the center and toss the ball up lightly and catch. Repeat on the left. Do four reps on each side.

× **Tip:**

Straighten your spine, squeeze your core, keep your shoulders down and back, and look straight ahead. For a harder workout, says Hosseini, try kneeling on the ball for eight counts. When you find your balance, which can take some practice, you can gradually add the ball toss and twist.

Can't seem to steady yourself? It could be your health. Here are five conditions that can cause balance problems.

Source: [Real Simple](#), Image Credit: [Unsplash](#)