

## It's a question of balance

The pain from the fall eventually ended. The fear didn't.

It stole their confidence.

Restricted their activities long after their physical injuries had healed.

Mary Greene, 84, was in her bedroom in her St. Catharines home. She reached for a pair of socks on the floor.

She lost her balance and hit the floor, twisting her body in such a way that she injured her back.

Seventy-eight-year-old Mary Smith was at home too, dusting her window blinds in the living room. She's not sure why, but she fell. She thought she was OK, just a little dazed. She sat on the sofa for a bit. Even phoned one of her children to explain what had happened but was pretty sure she was OK.

Maybe just a little shaken. But when she hung up the phone and tried to stand, she couldn't. She had broken her hip.

Greene and Smith are part of an outpatient program at Hotel Dieu Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Centre in St. Catharines designed to help prevent seniors from falling. The Geriatric Rehab Program was started two years ago by physiotherapist Sharon Peters. Treatment focuses on simple activities that promote balance, strength, flexibility and endurance.

Seniors practise activities like sitting in a chair, then standing without using their hands, and first squatting to sit in a chair instead of just flopping down. They practise tasks like walking toe-to-heel in a straight line and braiding their feet by crossing them one over the other as they travel sideways.

Seniors work as a group but also receive individual attention to help them reach their goals. They work on the exercises at home as well.

The idea is to help them be active, says Peters. When people stay active as they age, they maintain their ability to move well. If they move well, they're at less risk of falling. And falling when you're old can have painful, if not deadly, consequences.

Forty per cent of falls by seniors result in hip fractures. And half of those who break a hip will never walk unassisted again, according to data from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Pain, loss of independence and a lower quality of life can result. Seniors falls are responsible for 40 per cent of admissions to nursing homes.

But even if they beat the odds and recover physically, the fear of falling again could be crippling, Peters says.

The fear of falling is a double-edged sword, she says.

It may give a healthy dose of apprehension, a sort of reality check, to a senior who might be inclined to take unnecessary risks.

On the other hand, that fear may paralyze seniors to such an extreme that they stop doing all their usual activities.

And that can create a downward spiral that's often difficult to break. They're not as active because they fear falling. But if they're not as active, their chances of falling again actually increase, she says.

We want to get people after one fall or after a close call, she says.

Many of the seniors in her program are living with conditions like Parkinson's or arthritis, or are survivors of a stroke all of which increase their chances of a fall. Seniors who are on a lot of medication, who are sedentary or who have been injured in the past are also at greater risk for falling, she says.

In general, exercise is beneficial across the lifespan, but it can also improve a senior's balance and confidence, says Kimberley Gammage, associate professor in the department of physical education and kinesiology at Brock University.

She was part of a team of researchers who looked into issues of balance in older women with and without osteoporosis.

None of the participants had any underlying conditions that would affect their balance.

Participants took part in a 12-week physical activity program that included elements of cardio, strength, flexibility and balance training. To challenge their balance, they completed an obstacle course that involved activities like rocking from side to side on a rocker board and balancing on a Bosu ball, which is flat on the bottom and shaped like half an exercise ball on the top.

As they progressed through the weeks, the exercises became more challenging. At first, they had to stand on the Bosu ball with help, then by themselves, then on one foot.

Researchers wanted to know if participating in a physical activity program helps to improve balance and balance confidence. Then beyond that, what makes an exercise program attractive to a senior?

## About the Author

From [dailygleaner.canadaeast.com](http://dailygleaner.canadaeast.com):

The Bosu trainer and similar platform balance devices are designed as unstable surfaces to provide a stability challenge to muscles.

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Official Web home for Bosu Balance Trainer Pro. Information on club pricing, instructor training and workshop.

Official Web home for Fitness Quest Bosu Balance Trainer Pro. Information on Bosu Balance Trainer club pricing, Bosu Balance Trainer instructor.

Bosu Commercial Products for health clubs and fitness professionals as well as Bosu products.

Bosu Balance trainer, Bosu board, Bosu Ballast Ball bosu board, bosu balance trainer, bosu ballast ball, Brazil bosu board distributors, Brazil.

Both challenging and fun, Bosu combines cardiovascular, toning and flexibility for both standard.

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