



A Matter of Balance

What is it?

A group-based, participatory class led by two trained lay leaders over 8 weekly or semi-weekly sessions. Initial sessions are educational and focus on the development of coping strategies to overcome the fear of falling. Components include group discussion, problem-solving, skill-building, assertive training, exercise training for strength and balance, sharing of practical solutions, and cognitive restructuring. A Matter of Balance works to reframe falls and fear of falling as something controllable. Participants use a workbook and home safety evaluation action planner to change their environment and reduce risk factors. Thirty minutes of supervised exercise is introduced in the third session. Participants set realistic goals for further increasing activity. Program includes a visit from a guest PT/OT/RN professional to discuss how to respond to a fall and to demonstrate how to get up from a fall, along with Q&A.

Who is it for?

Designed for community-dwelling seniors who are able to problem solve (age>60) and have concerns about falls and/or prior falls. Measured effects increase with age and fall risk. A Matter of Balance targets overcoming the fear of falling, thus breaking the “fear of falling cycle” by keeping people more active and engaged. A great introductory program for those not ready for longitudinal exercise programs.

What does it do?

Original trial showed improvement in confidence in ability to manage and prevent falls, as well as improvement in level of exercise, mobility, and reduction in social limitations due to concern about falling among Boston area older adults in senior housing. Large follow-up trial in 2009 confirmed these benefits among community-dwelling adults >age 70. A subsequent state-wide analysis of female participants in Texas confirmed the value of the program in reducing falls and improving mental and physical health. The program has confirmed this assumed value through claims data. In its 2013 Report to Congress, CMS found that the program demonstrated \$938 in savings per participating beneficiary in areas of unplanned hospitalization and skilled nursing facility and home health costs. The program fits well in the body of evidence supporting the value of programs for falls reduction in older adults.

> For class information and to register, visit healthylivingforme.org

How to Discuss With Patients

Older adults highly value their independence and worry about the implications of being labeled as a fall risk. They may not openly discuss their fears or concerns about falling. As such, it may be necessary for you to initiate the discussion. It is important to highlight to your patient that the goal of this program is to keep him or her independent, active, and at home for as long as possible. You should emphasize that the program will provide education and support that will help your patient stay active and reduce his or her risk of falling. It may also be useful to highlight the social benefits of the program and the fact that many patients like him or her have benefited greatly from the group classes.