

Maintaining balance

We've all heard the saying, "If you don't use it, you lose it."

When talking about balance, this especially proves to be true because while it is a pillar of fitness, it isn't a forefront practice for most. We all know that in order to keep our strength we must strength train and push our muscles to be challenged. The same goes for our aerobic training. In order to increase our aerobic capacity, we need to push ourselves hard enough to not have the ability to speak in sentences, but rather we should speak in short phrases. Unfortunately, when we talk about balance, it is hard to tell when we work hard enough to challenge ourselves. Or so it seems.

There are many factors that come into play that could be causing this to happen.

1. Your vision may decrease, which can lead to falls due to not seeing clearly.
2. Your core strength may be too weak to maintain proper posture.
3. You may have spinal degeneration, making it harder to stand tall.
4. Our ability to lift our feet decreases, causing us to stumble.
5. Our reaction time decreases, making it hard to catch ourselves before we fall.
6. Some medications can have side effects, causing dizziness or decreased balance.
7. Low blood pressure can lead to light headedness, increasing the risk of falls.
8. You may notice some numbness (neuropathy) in your feet, making it hard to balance.

9. You may have inner-ear problems or vertigo, causing dizziness.

It is important that we scan our bodies and become aware of what we are doing or not doing in those moments when we lose our balance. The more we walk around being mindful of our movements, the greater chance we have of correcting ourselves before we fall.

You may be asking, "Since I don't have great balance, how am I supposed to work on improving?" Like all training, know that it is OK to start small and embrace safe-failure. Safe-failure means taking necessary precautions to not fall, but expecting to wobble and shake. This may mean to not start in the middle of the room with nothing to grasp. You will want to stand next to a wall, counter or piece of furniture that is a comfortable height for you to easily grab or to lightly hold onto as you train your balance.

Also, don't set high expectations of having your leg far from the floor at the beginning of your balance training. Maybe you start by standing on the ball of one foot or keeping just one toe on the floor while the other foot is planted on the floor. You can also test your balance by just standing and rotating through your torso, swinging back and forth, if you feel this would be safe for you. Or simply close your eyes with both feet on the floor, either seated at the edge of a chair or standing, adding different challenges by how close and how far your feet are from one another.

The important thing is to constantly train. Train your muscles to be strong. Train your cardiovascular health; train your mind and don't forget to train your balance, even if it's just a couple minutes a day.

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DESIREE PEARCE

Medicare takes aim at boomerang hospitalizations of nursing home patients

BY JORDAN RAU AND HEIDI DE MARCO
KAISER HEALTH NEWS VIA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Oh my God, we dropped her!" Sandra Snipes said she heard the nursing home aides yell as she fell to the floor. She landed on her right side where her hip had recently been replaced.

She cried out in pain. A hospital clinician later discovered her hip was dislocated.

That was not the only injury Snipes, then 61, said she suffered in 2011 at Richmond Pines Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center in Hamlet, N.C. Nurses allegedly had been injecting her twice a day with a potent blood thinner despite written instructions to stop.

"She said, 'I just feel so tired,'" her daughter, Laura Clark, said in an interview. "The nurses were saying she's depressed and wasn't doing her exercises. I said no, something is wrong."

Her children also discovered that Snipes' surgical wound had become infected and infested with insects. Just 11 days after she arrived at the nursing home to heal from her hip surgery, she was back in the hospital.

The fall and these other alleged lapses in care led Clark and the family to file a lawsuit against the nursing home. Richmond Pines declined to discuss the case beyond saying it disputed the allegations at the time. The home agreed in 2017 to pay Snipes' family \$1.4 million to settle their lawsuit.

While the confluence of complications in Snipes' case was extreme, return trips from nursing homes to hospitals are far from unusual.

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COURTESY PHOTO

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Patients, caught in the middle, may suffer. One in 5 Medicare patients sent from the hospital to a nursing home boomerang back within 30 days, often for potentially preventable conditions such as dehydration, infections and medication errors, federal records show.

Such rehospitalizations occur 27 percent more frequently than for the Medicare population at large.

Nursing homes have been unintentionally rewarded by decades of colliding government payment policies, which gave both hospitals and nursing homes financial incentives for the transfers. That has left the most vulnerable patients often ping-ponging between institutions, wreaking havoc with patients' care.

(Story continues below)

"There's this saying in nursing homes, and it's really unfortunate: 'When in doubt, ship them

out,'" said David Grabowski, a professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School. "It's a short-run, cost-minimizing strategy, but it ends up costing the system and the individual a lot more."

In recent years, the government has begun to tackle the problem.

In 2013, Medicare began fining hospitals for high readmission rates in an attempt to curtail premature discharges and to encourage hospitals to refer patients to nursing homes with good track records.

Starting this October, the government will address the other side of the equation, giving nursing homes bonuses or penalties based on their Medicare rehospitalization rates. The goal is to accelerate early signs of progress: The rate of potentially avoidable readmissions dropped to 10.8 percent in 2016 from 12.4 percent in 2011, according to Congress' Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.

'Little Women' and author Alcott resonate 150 years later

CONCORD, Mass. (AP) — A century and a half before the #MeToo movement gave women a bold, new collective voice, Louisa May Alcott was lending them her own.

Society had far different expectations of women in 1867, when publisher Thomas Niles asked Alcott to write a "girls' story." At a time when women were expected to marry, often did not hold employment and could not vote, Alcott had her doubts about the success of "Little Women."

Since then, the coming-of-age book has been translated into more than 50 lan-

guages and made into films, a musical and a recently aired PBS "Masterpiece" miniseries. The novel constantly finds new audiences as women worldwide confront sexual misconduct, misogyny and pay inequity.

Mayela Boeder, 34, of Appleton, Wisconsin, read "Little Women" as a girl and thinks it's still relevant.

"You could say that strong females in literature, TV and every other medium have slowly shaped the minds of modern strong women," she says.

"We grew up with Buffy, Hermione, Katnis, Jo, Lizzie Bennet, Sara Crewe, among

others," she said, "and so we have almost been groomed to fight for what's right and to not let others take advantage of us."

Alcott drew heavily from her experiences living in poverty with progressive parents Bronson and Abigail Alcott and three sisters in Concord, Massachusetts. Although her transcendentalist father led his family through 30 homes, one stands out as the place where "Little Women" was written: Orchard House.

Alcott was 26 when her family moved into the then-dilapidated house in 1858. The enterprising family turned the tenant farmhouse, once slated for destruction, into a place where Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and other literary neighbors would drop by for intellectual discussions. Bronson encouraged his wife and daughters to join and built Louisa a desk at a time when writing was considered by scientists to be injurious to the female psyche.

Looking back, says Orchard House Executive Director Jan Turnquist, the Alcotts were feminists. "They believed all humans have agency," she said.

She tells of how Louisa May Alcott was the first woman to register to vote in Concord in 1879, when Massachusetts gave women the right to vote in town elections on education and children issues.

In 1880, Alcott and 19 other women attended the Concord town meeting and cast their ballots. In a letter to periodical Woman's Journal, Alcott wrote of voting: "No bolt fell on our audacious heads, no earthquake shook the town."

Alcott did other unconventional things. At 30, she served as a nurse in the Civil War. She traveled alone when most women could not. And she wrote stories that are the equivalent of a modern-day James Patterson thriller at a time when female authors were not popular.

Although there's no evidence Alcott was ever sexually assaulted, she was

harassed and had to endure misogyny as an ambitious, unmarried woman.

After writing the first part of "Little Women" in 1868, Alcott received a flood of letters asking if the main character, Jo March, would marry neighbor boy Laurie. Pulitzer Prize-winning Alcott historian John Matteson said, "Her publisher said, 'You have to marry her off,' and wanted the character to marry Laurie."

Alcott was mortified that her mother had to scrape to keep the family going financially. "She knew what a trap marriage could be," Matteson said. "She very much intended not to marry Jo off at all."

Alcott appeased Niles, the publisher, by writing in Professor Friedrich Bhaer, a homely German professor, as a husband.

One of Alcott's goals was to lift her family out of poverty. She took jobs as a teacher, seamstress, writer and, in one instance, a live-in companion for the sick sister of a man named James Richardson.

Instead of having her tend

to his sister, Richardson had 18-year-old Alcott do house-keeping and spend evenings listening to him reading romantic poetry. He started slipping suggestive notes beneath her bedroom door and added backbreaking work to her chores as she rejected his advances. She quit, making only \$4 for the seven-week stay.

While she hesitates to call that a #MeToo encounter, Turnquist says it was "sleazy and not appropriate," and bordered on sexual harassment.

Alcott wrote an essay on the experience, which friend James Field, editor of The Atlantic, assessed and said: "Stick to your teaching. You can't write."

Nevertheless, she persisted.

"She would be so supportive of the #MeToo Movement and equal pay for equal work," Turnquist said.

To celebrate the sesquicentennial, Orchard House will host many events, including a conversational series to discuss the book's modern-day relevance.

SENIOR EVENTS

- Join The Hub on Smith for "Bluegrass and Brats" Tuesday from 7-9 p.m. Guitar, mandolin, banjo, fiddle and bass players will gather to share music, humor and jam etiquette. Brats are served for \$2 each in the café at The Hub, located at 211 Smith St.

- June 26 at 6:30 p.m., Mark and Jeanine Jackson will present "From C Rations to State Dinners" at The Hub on Smith. The Jacksons, two U.S. diplomats, will present a program on their military and foreign service careers spanning nearly 40

years of overseas government assignments in more than a dozen countries. Jeanine Jackson is a native of Sheridan. The presentation will be held in the café of The Hub. It is free and open to all. Contact Jane Perkins or Jean Harm with questions.

- The Hub on Smith has organized a hike on the Steamboat Point Loop Trail for June 26. Participants will depart The Hub at 9 a.m. and leave the Bighorns by 3 p.m.

Steamboat Point is a notable southwest-facing rock wall that rises

up more than 600 feet above the surrounding area and the nearby U.S. Highway 14. While this rock face looks like a somewhat formidable climb from below, there is a fairly easy 1.7-mile trail that leads around it to the summit. Those planning to participate should bring their own lunch and water. There is no fee, but suggested contributions are welcome.

Sign-up at The Hub on Smith at (307) 672-2240 or with the Wyoming Wilder Association at (307) 672-2751 by June 21.



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