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Balance training is as important a factor in fitness as cardiovascular, resistance and flexibility training. GETTY IMAGES

STEADY NOW

Balance training isn't just for seniors

How often do you incorporate balance work into your training sessions? I'm going to take a guess and say not much. Most people don't even think about our body's ability to balance. After all, that's just a concern for the elderly, right? Well, no.

Balance training is important for everyone. It is as important a factor in fitness as cardiovascular, resistance and flexibility training. In fact, without good balance, your ability to perform the other components smoothly and with efficiency is compromised.

Good balance not only plays a significant role in strengthening and stabilizing joints, but it also increases proprioception, or the body's ability to recognize where it is in space and to help control movements. With increased proprioception, the body is able function and move efficiently.

Chances are if you are already exercising or playing a sport then you are, unconsciously, working on your balance. However, people who move less and are generally more sedentary tend to have poor balance. This increases the risk of injuries like twisted or sprained joints or fractures from falls.

Regardless of where you are in the range of poor to good balance, you



Angie Ferguson
Guest Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

can improve, enhance and maintain it with time and consistent practice. A few simple exercises you can practice daily include:

- Balance on one leg for 30 seconds.

If you start to wobble, bend the leg slightly at the knee. Keeping your abdominals pulled in and eyes focused on something straight ahead of you can make balancing slightly easier as it keeps you stable. Slowly increase the time. Your goal is to eventually remain stable for one minute.

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COMMENTARY

We can all support kids with cancer

Dr. Emad Salman
Guest Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Kids shouldn't get cancer. They shouldn't be in a hospital, suffering through the sickness, bearing mediations, enduring infusions, losing their hair and suffering the worst battle of their life at such an innocent age. But they do. We shouldn't have to note Childhood Cancer Awareness Month each September, but we do.

This year, while the world is focused on a pandemic, we have had 42 children diagnosed with cancer at Golisano Children's Hospital, an outpatient clinic that sees more than 400 visits a month and an inpatient unit with 12 beds. This summer those beds were full. We have more than 80 children on active cancer treatment at Golisano Children's Hospital.

Each child, each family, needs not just medical treatment, but unconditional support. We understand that our patient is not a diagnosis, but an individual with different feelings and needs. As a result, we've built an advanced multi-disciplinary team to provide care from every angle, including a psychologist, family educator, child life specialist, technology

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Frank Haskell looks at an image of his daughter, Barbara Haskell, that hangs in the fifth-floor wing of Golisano Children's Hospital. Barbara was the inspiration for "Barbara's Friends."

RICARDO ROLON / THE NEWS-PRESS

AWARENESS

Suicide prevention awareness is vital during pandemic

Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D.
Guest Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This awareness-raising, informational and hope-inspiring campaign is essential in "typical" times when rates of attempted and completed suicide are significant, with suicide being the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.

In the age of COVID, the risks are that much higher. While distressing in its own right, the pandemic and its associated stressors only add exponentially to the mental health concerns of our country.

In a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31 percent of U.S. adults surveyed reported clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, 26 percent reported COVID-19 related trauma or stress and 13 percent reported new or increasing use of substances to cope. Of those surveyed, 11 percent reported seri-

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Suicide

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ously considering suicide in the past 30 days. For ages 18 to 24, the number was 1 in 4, more than twice as high.

While people admit they are stressed, most people do not anticipate that their level of distress could rise to the level of suicidal thinking. However, mental health concerns like depression, bipolar disorder and stress- and trauma- related conditions, by definition, alter thinking, mood and behavior. Layer on social isolation or substance use, which has only increased in the context of this pandemic, and thoughts, mood and behavior can worsen feelings of worthlessness, helplessness and hopelessness, leading to increased risk.

Suicide prevention can be a single action by a single individual. It also requires multiple and varied actions within a community and other essential systems.

For individuals who may be struggling, consider seeking help early. A supportive individual, a mental health professional or your physician can provide support and partner with you to address your concerns. Mental health care is available and is not just for those in active crisis. Generate a list of reasons to live, keep them in the forefront of your mind, and put your energy into them. Know you are not alone. Others are experiencing similar stressors and people are available to support you. Develop a safety plan by knowing your triggers, identifying your coping resources, and knowing the people and agencies that can help you in a time of crisis. Understand that thoughts of suicide are a symptom (which is treatable) and do not necessarily reflect one's true desire. Recognize that everyone has the will to live, even if we do not always have the "why" completely figured out.

For those supporting individuals struggling with mental health concerns, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (bhelto.com) suggests you "be the one to:"

- Ask "are you thinking about sui-

cide?"

- Be there – actively, reliably and non-judgmentally
- Keep them safe
- Help them connect – whether to a mental health professional, a primary care provider, the emergency department or mobile crisis unit or a crisis lifeline. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available free 24/7 at 800-273-8255; Crisis Text Line is available free 24/7 at Text HOME to 741741
- Follow-up by checking in to remind them your care is not fleeting.

As a community, we can monitor our assumptions regarding mental health and be mindful of statements or behaviors that are judgmental or stigmatizing. It's important to adopt a mindset that "health is health" and "mental health is just as important as physical health." In fact, physical health depends on mental health.

Consider completing training in Mental Health First Aid (mentalhealthfirstaid.org), a national program to teach how to respond to the signs of mental illness and substance use in order to seek timely intervention and save lives. Many would not hesitate to complete basic life support training if they could use it to save one life. The same should be true of mental health first aid.

Lastly, be an advocate. Mental health and substance use care are grossly underfunded, leading to gaps in care and limited access to timely, comprehensive services at all levels of need. Hold your healthcare insurer to account for parity in mental and medical care. Ask elected officials what plans they have for funding and creating access for essential mental health services, including early intervention and prevention programs.

A safe, productive, financially healthy community depends on the functioning and well-being of all its members.

Courtney L. Whitt, Ph.D., Director of Behavioral Health at Healthcare Network, is a licensed psychologist specializing in integrated primary care psychology. For information on mental health assistance at Healthcare Network, visit healthcareswfl.org or call 239-658-3000

Commentary

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specialist, music therapist and full-time teacher at the hospital, as well as five oncologists and a team of specially trained nurses. This approach helps not only the child fighting cancer but the entire family.

None of this would be possible without help from generous donors. Twenty-five years ago, Frank Haskell made a promise to his dying daughter to help kids with cancer. When Barbara Haskell lost her own battle with cancer at age 36, Barbara's Friends was established as the pediatric cancer fund at Golisano Children's Hospital. Since then, it has raised more than \$20 million to help more than 10,000 children with cancer and life-threatening blood disorders.

Thanks to the support of Barbara's Friends, no child is denied treatment because of a family's inability to pay for care. Barbara's Friends helps provide all possible resources from medication to transportation, gas cards for families to get to and from treatment, meals for the parents when a child is staying overnight so they don't have to leave their bedside, a state of the art facility, equipment, medical supplies, therapy and staffing – all made possible by generous donations.

When Golisano Children's Hospital was built, we made a commitment to offer the best care close to home. If a child needs radiation therapy, that may mean daily visits for four to six weeks or more. Standard protocol for leukemia treatments often require

weekly visits for up to three years or more. Today, our team offers similar services and treatment protocols as other top centers around the country so that our families don't have to leave the state or be without their network of friends, family and colleagues who support them.

As we continue to grow as a children's hospital, we are adding more specialists. As our population continues to grow, so has the need for pediatric neurosurgery. From emergency surgery to brain tumors, kids are taken care of right here.

Pediatric cancer outcomes are more hopeful in 2020. Sixty years ago, a child diagnosed with cancer had a 10% chance of survival. Today at Golisano Children's Hospital, our children have an 84% survival rate – higher than the national average.

During Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, we have plans to make sure we can continue to provide the best treatment for area children close to home:

- Clips for Cancer, an annual event to raise money for Barbara's Friends, is being held through the month at Great Clips Salons. Members of the community volunteer to have their heads shaved by childhood cancer survivors. For information or to donate, visit barbarasfriends.org/clipsforcancer.

A cancer diagnosis turns the world upside down. It destroys the innocence of childhood, but there is hope. Our goal is not just to cure a child of cancer – but to give them their life back.

Emad Salman, M.D., regional medical officer for Golisano Children's Services, is a hematologist and oncologist specializing in pediatrics.

Fitness

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- As you improve, start moving your head from side to side and up and down. This stops your eyes from focusing on one spot and will force you to balance your body.
- Once you master head movements, take it up one level and try closing your eyes. Without the visual awareness sight provides, you will be required to sense and feel which way you are leaning.
- The next step is to hold a ball in your hands while balancing on one leg. Toss the ball either in the air slightly in front of you or against a wall and catch it. As you are now concentrating on the ball, your body will need to focus on remaining balanced.
- Finally, once you have mastery of the above, incorporate a hop. While balancing on one foot, hop into the air slightly and then land with the opposite foot. Take a second to refocus and stabilize yourself, then repeat on the other leg. Your goal is to be able to hop from one leg to the other without wobbling or stumbling for about 3 minutes.

With just five minutes of practice a day, you will very quickly notice improvements in your balance.

Angie Ferguson is an exercise physiologist and strategic intervention life



Good balance not only plays a significant role in strengthening and stabilizing joints, but it also increases proprioception, or the body's ability to recognize where it is in space and to help control movements. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

coach from Fort Myers. She is a Corrective Biomechanics Specialist, USA Triathlon Advanced Level 2 coach, USA Cycling coach, has a Specialty in Sports Nutrition certification, and a PhD in results! For more training tips, contact her at gearedup.biz.



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