

[IMAGE]

Balancing the Brain

By Editorial Staff

Balance and brain health are two important health variables that can suffer dramatically as we age. Fortunately, research suggests improving one can benefit the other, particularly in terms of their interaction.

Researchers have found that senior patients who perform balance exercises improve brain neuroplasticity – essentially the brain's ability to restructure itself – and reduce cortical overactivation, both of which can benefit overall balance.

In their study, a summary of which appears in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, researchers divided older adults (average age, 65 years) into three groups: one that performed classic balance exercises, another that performed virtual reality balance exercises, and a control group. The study lasted 12 weeks, and neuroimaging studies were conducted at the beginning and end of the 12-week training period.

balancing - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark In reviewing their findings, the researchers concluded: "With age, postural control may become more consciously controlled (cortically). Systematic [balance training] of moderate intensity may reverse age-related cortical over-activations and appear to be a factor mediating neuroplasticity in older adults." They also found that classical balance exercises significantly increased serum BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), important because "aging or neurodegenerative diseases are associated with a *decrease* in BDNF expression." [Italics added]

Getting older? Ask your doctor for help developing a balance / posture program. Good for your body, good for your brain!

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