The following activities are some strategies to help improve your child’s balance. These strategies are separated by progressively increasing levels of difficulty. Only practice the activities that are appropriate for your child’s capabilities. With time, your child may be able to complete the more challenging activities. Stay close to your child during these activities, so that you can assist him or her in case of a loss of balance. Some equipment that is helpful for multisensory balance training is an exercise ball and a compliant (less stable) surface, such as a BAPS board or soft exercise mat. These can be purchased at a sporting goods store or through the internet. You can purchase an Airex balance pad, through Amazon for ~ $60. You can even place several folded towels under your child’s feet to make the surface of support less stable.

These exercises are designed to train each of the sensory systems that affect balance (somatosensory system, vestibular, and visual systems) to function more efficiently. The somatosensory system provides information on touch, pressure, and body position relative to the ground. The vestibular system provides information in regard to head position and movement. The visual system provides information in regard to the position of the body relative to the environment. The focus can be placed on the sensory systems by doing the following:

- Compromise or remove vision to improve function of the somatosensory system
- Compromise the somatosensory system (stand on a moving or compliant surface) to improve the function of the visual system
- Compromise both the somatosensory and the visual system to improve the function of the vestibular system by standing on a compliant surface and altering or removing vision.

*These exercises are suggestions and can always be modified to fulfill the specific needs and capabilities of your child. Make the exercises fun by doing things that your child enjoys. Spread these exercises throughout the day, by incorporating them into your daily lifestyle, rather than spend a solid 30 minutes on the exercises.*
Activities to help your child use their somatosensory system to control balance

Level 1 Seated Balance Activities

Exercise progressions:

a. Instruct your child to sit in a chair with no backrest with the arms in one of four positions (a. holding onto a support surface, resting on the thighs, folded across the chest, or extended out at sides) the feet are hip-width apart and in contact with a firm surface. Have your child maintain balance with vision reduced or absent for 30 seconds (blindfolds). **Instruct your child to focus on the pressure in the buttocks and feet.** Talk to your child during the activity to keep them interested. Sometimes even counting down or singing with your child can make the activity more interesting.

b. Instruct your child to close his/ her eyes, and lean the trunk forward, backward, lateral, and diagonally. To help your child do this you can use a soft stuffed animal and tell your child to lean in the direction of where they feel a tickle from their stuffed animal. Instruct your child to focus on feeling the pressure as its shift under the buttocks and from one region of the foot to another. Have your child progressively increase the angle of trunk lean so that the pressure under the buttocks and feet progresses from light to moderate to heavy.

c. Instruct your child to reach for objects of different sizes, weights, shapes, placed at various distances and heights relative to the body. You can blow bubbles and instruct your child to pop as many bubbles as he/she can while remaining seated. If your child has low vision, you can use a ball with bells. Instruct him/her to focus on using trunk movement. Progress to throwing objects to your child, varying the throwing heights, weights, and sizes of the objects. Start with larger, lighter balls and progress to smaller and heavier balls. Use bright balls or balls with bells if this works better for your child.

Level 2. Standing balance exercises

Exercise Progressions:

a. Complete all of the same tasks standing. If it benefits your child, you can have your child stand near a wall for stability or assist your child by holding his/her arm. As your child improves and becomes more confident he/she can progress to completing the activities without assistance.

b. If your child is doing very well with these activities, he/ she can progress to completing all of the same tasks with one foot. Be sure to spot your child during these activities.

Level 3. Moving exercises

Exercise Progressions

a. Instruct your child to walk across the room on a firm surface while reaching for objects that you are passing to him or her. You can use rings or koosh balls. You can walk alongside of your child and instruct your child to reach to the side. Be sure to practice this with both sides.

b. Instruct your child to walk across the room on a firm surface while throwing and catching an object with a partner. Begin with larger, lighter balls and progress to smaller, heavier balls. Some children may enjoy swinging a ribbon or yarn strips.

c. Instruct your child to walk across the room on a firm surface while wearing a blindfold. If it benefits your child, he/she can walk along a rope or a wall initially, and progress to walking independently. Your child can even
progress to walking over a rope, which can help him/her learn how to jumprope.

**Activities to help your child use their visual system to control balance:**

**Level 1: Seated Exercises**

Exercise Progressions:

a. While seated on an exercise ball (Note: the exercise ball should be of appropriate size for your child. Their knee should be at a 90º angle.) and feet on a compliant surface (BAPS Board or exercise mat). Instruct your child to look at something in front of him or her at eye level.

b. Repeat a) with only one foot on the ground

c. Instruct your child to look at the target while raising arms up and down and alternating feet on the ground. You can give your child ribbons to raise up and down. You can instruct your child to march and flap their arms like they are flying. Putting hula hoops on your child’s arms or wrists may help your child continue this motion.

**Level 2: Standing Exercises**

a. Repeat all exercise progressions performed satisfactorily in a seated position while standing on a compliant or moving surface (BAPS Board or exercise mat)

b. Introduce selected weight shifts and transfer activities (leaning from one side to another, and forward and backward) while looking at an eye level target.

**Level 3: Moving Exercises**

a. Instruct your child to walk across a compliant surface (padded mat) while focusing on a visual target immediately in front of him/her.

b. Instruct your child to walk across a compliant surface (padded mat) with alternating on toes and heels while focusing on a target directly in front of him/her.

c. Instruct your child to try this again only walking with heels and toes with one foot directly in front of the other (tandem walk). For heel walking, instruct your child to not let his/her toes touch the ground. For toe walking, instruct your child to not let his/her heel touch the ground. It may be easier for your child to understand this task by instructing them to walk along a line.

**Activities to help your child use their vestibular system to control balance**

**Level 1: Seated Exercises**

a. Instruct your child to sit on a balance ball with only one foot on the ground and the other foot raised. Place a blindfold on your child and instruct him or her to maintain the position for as long as he/she can. The time has ended if he/she moves the ball to the side or if his/her extended leg moves down. Progress to having your child do this activity with their other foot extended parallel to the other leg. To make this activity more interesting you could sing with your child or count together.

b. Instruct your child to sit on balance ball while wearing a blindfold and move his/her arms around and alternate his/her legs up and down. You could use stretching bands with their arms and instruct your child to stretch it up and
down while marching with his/her feet. Your child could also hold onto a hula hoop and move as if he/she was steering a car.

c. Instruct your child to sit on balance ball and pass a ball from one hand to the other. Tell your child to watch the ball move from side to side. If it benefits your child, you can use a ball on a string or place a ball in a sock to make catching less difficult. If your child can do this successfully, instruct him/her to gradually increase the height of the tosses. Ask your child, how high he/she can toss the ball. Children can also progress to throwing against a wall or tossing a ball back and forth with another person. They can also pass the ball in a figure 8 pattern (catch with left pass to right throw to other person’s left, they pass to right, etc).

**Level 2: Standing exercises**

a. Repeat the same steps as in the seated exercises

b. While standing on a compliant surface and wearing a blindfold, instruct your child to begin marching in place with knees coming up. As they become comfortable with this activity, instruct him/her to lift his/her knees higher.

**Level 3: Moving Exercises**

a. Instruct your child to walk across the padded mat while wearing a blindfold. Your child can begin by walking while holding onto a rope, wall, or beside you, and progress to walking independently.

b. Instruct your child to walk forward across the mat on their toes while wearing a blindfold. Your child can begin by walking while holding onto a rope, wall, or beside you, and progress to walking independently.

*Remember, you can modify any of these activities to fit the specific needs, capabilities, and personality of your child. Make these activities fun for your child. For instance, some activities may be more fun with music. You can also turn these activities into games or be completed with friends or siblings. For the walking activities, you can design obstacle courses. If you make these activities fun and enjoyable, your child will be more interested in completing them and will benefit even more from them.*

*Share these activities with your child’s physical education teacher. Instruct them to integrate some of these activities into games for the participation of all children in the class.*

Contact us or your child’s physical therapist or physical education teacher if you have further questions.

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