

Proprioception

One of the most important features of physiotherapy rehabilitation is to restore something known as proprioception. It's a very special sense that you probably don't even realise you have.

Proprioception refers to your ability to tell where your body is in space and more specifically where each body part is in relationship to each other. This is really important for things you probably take for granted. Like knowing your foot isn't twisted before stepping on it. You do this without looking and you can even walk quite well in the dark- provided there's nothing in front of you. The way your body does this is through small receptors found in the muscles and joints of the body. These are called proprioceptors and they note what position the muscle is in and send that information back up to the brain. The brain then uses this information to work out where that body part is in relation to other body parts. That's quite impressive when you think about it.

One of the side effects of having an injury is that you lose some of your proprioception. If you're just a little bit less accurate at judging where your body is in space you are surprisingly more likely to have another injury. So while often nature takes its course and does all the hard work of healing. You might notice that for a long time after the pain has gone, the area still doesn't quite "feel 100%".

The good news is that your physiotherapist can address this during your rehabilitation. They will prescribe a series of balance and control exercises along with strengthening and stretching that help to restore your proprioception. Making sure you're completely ready to get back into the activities you love without any more injuries.

Balance Tests

Balance can mean different things to different people. To a 5 year old, balance is learning to ride a bike without training wheels. To an adult, balance is about catching yourself while tripping over that bike while carrying bags of groceries! To an older adult, balance and falls prevention is about independence and quality of life.

Test yourself first then check older loved ones who may be at risk of falls in particular. If you have trouble with these, visit our Physiotherapists for a comprehensive check-up and exercise prescription.

Single Leg Standing Balance test

Just stand on one leg and time yourself. Normal balance is one minute, less than 30 seconds requires some work.

Add challenge:

- barefoot
- stand on an exercise mat
- or soft surface
- close your eyes!

Practice anywhere!

- in supermarket queue
- brushing your teeth
- talking on the phone

Standing Reach test

Stand side on next to a wall. Reach closest arm out in front and mark end of fingertips. Without moving feet, reach as far forward as you can without falling over and then mark this point. A reach of less than 6 inches indicates a higher risk of falling.

... and tests for seniors in particular...

Timed Up and Go test

Place a chair against a wall and measure out 10 feet. Mark this spot. The test is how long it takes to get up out of the chair and walk the 10 feet, turn around, walk back and sit down. If it takes more than 14 seconds, there is a high risk for falling.

The Five Times Sit-to-Stand Test

Sit in a chair. Whenever ready, stand up and down 5 complete times as fast as possible. You have to stand up fully and sit down with your bottom touching the chair. Persons without balance problems can do this in test in less than 13 seconds.