

GC INTEGRATIVE PHYSIOTHERAPY & WELLNESS

Steady Starts Here

Five evidence-based practices for balance and independence after 60

Gary Chen, Physiotherapist

A free guide drawn from The Steady Years

A note from Gary



Gary Chen at the GC Integrative studio

Hello, and thank you for opening this guide.

I am Gary Chen, CEO and founder of GC Integrative Physiotherapy and Wellness on the Gold Coast, and a practising physiotherapist. Over the years I have sat with many people who arrived worried that a wobble, a stumble, or a single fall meant the years ahead would only get smaller.

Here is what the research, and my time in the clinic, keeps showing me: balance is not a fixed trait you are simply born with or slowly lose. It is a skill. Like any skill, it responds to practice. The systems that keep you upright, your legs, your inner ear, your sense of where your body is in space, can all be trained well into later life. Strength can be rebuilt at almost any age.

That is a hopeful message, and it is an honest one. The five practices in this guide are gentle, well studied, and meant to be done at home. Start small. Be kind to yourself. Steady starts here.

You can learn more about our clinic and programs at gcintegrative.com.au.

Warmly,

Gary Chen, Physiotherapist
CEO & Founder, GC Integrative Physiotherapy and Wellness

1 The Weight Shift

WHY IT WORKS

Much of everyday balance comes down to one quiet skill: moving your weight smoothly from one foot to the other without losing control. This is the heart of Tai-Chi-informed movement. A 2017 systematic review and meta-analysis found that Tai Chi improves balance and reduces the risk of falls in older adults. Slow, attentive weight shifting trains the same reactions you rely on when you turn, reach, or step off a kerb.

Source: systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi for balance and fall prevention, 2017.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand tall behind a sturdy chair or kitchen bench, resting your fingertips on it for support.
2. Place your feet about hip width apart, knees soft, not locked.
3. Slowly shift your weight onto your right foot, letting the left foot feel light.
4. Pause for two calm breaths, noticing that you are still in control.
5. Shift slowly back onto your left foot. Pause again.
6. Move gently side to side like this for one to two minutes.

> **SAFETY NOTE**
>
> Keep the chair or bench within arm's reach the whole time. Move at a speed where you always feel steady, and never rush the shift.

YOUR STEADY SIGN

Over a few weeks you may notice the shift feels smoother and quieter, and you rely on your fingertips a little less.

2 The Sit-to-Stand

WHY IT WORKS

The strength to rise from a chair is one of the most useful forms of independence there is. It is also trainable. Australia and New Zealand sarcopenia guidelines, published in 2023, recommend progressive resistance training as a first-line way to preserve and rebuild muscle and strength as we age. The humble sit-to-stand is resistance training in disguise: your own body weight is the load.

Source: ANZSSFR sarcopenia consensus guidelines, 2023.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Sit toward the front of a firm, stable chair with your feet flat and slightly back.
2. Cross your arms over your chest, or keep hands ready on the armrests if you need them.
3. Lean your chest forward over your knees.
4. Press through your heels and stand up slowly and smoothly.
5. Lower yourself back down with control, rather than dropping.
6. Repeat for a comfortable number, perhaps five to ten, resting whenever you need.

> **SAFETY NOTE**
>
> Use a chair that will not slide or tip, ideally against a wall. Keep the armrests or a bench nearby so you can help with your hands on any repetition that feels hard.

YOUR STEADY SIGN

Standing up feels less like a heave and more like a rise, and you find yourself using your hands less often.

3 The Standing Balance Check

WHY IT WORKS

Balance improves when you gently challenge it. A landmark 2019 Cochrane review pooled 108 trials involving 23,407 community-dwelling older people and found that balance and functional exercise reduced the rate of falls by about 23 percent. Brief, safe balance holds are one of the simplest ways to give your body that practice.

Source: Cochrane systematic review of exercise for preventing falls, 2019.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand beside a bench or a sturdy chair, with support close by on one side.
2. Bring your feet together so they are touching. Hold steadily for up to ten seconds.
3. Next, place one foot half a step in front of the other, heel toward the back toe. Hold for up to ten seconds.
4. If that feels secure, try lifting one foot just slightly off the floor, holding lightly to your support.
5. Swap sides and repeat.
6. Practise for a minute or two, breathing calmly throughout.

> **SAFETY NOTE**
>
> Always keep one hand hovering near your support. Only progress to a harder position on a day when the easier one already feels solid.

YOUR STEADY SIGN

You can hold each position a little longer, more calmly, with a lighter touch on your support.

4 Reclaiming Confidence After a Wobble

WHY IT WORKS

After a stumble or a fall, many people quietly do less. That caution is understandable, but reduced movement can slowly erode the very strength and balance that keep you safe. Confidence is trainable too. A 2024 meta-analysis of Tai Chi found improvements not only in balance but in fall-related confidence, the everyday belief that you can move through your day without falling. Gentle, successful movement is what rebuilds that belief.

Source: systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi for balance and fall-related confidence, 2024.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose one everyday movement that has started to feel worrying, for example reaching to a low shelf or stepping over a threshold.
2. Break it into a smaller, safer version you feel sure about.
3. Practise that smaller version slowly, near support, until it feels ordinary again.
4. Add a little more range or a little less support only when the current step feels easy.
5. Notice and quietly acknowledge each success.
6. Return to the movement regularly so the confidence stays.

> **SAFETY NOTE**
> This is about graded, comfortable practice, not pushing through fear or pain. If a movement causes sharp pain or real alarm, pause and speak with a health professional.

YOUR STEADY SIGN

A movement that once made you hesitate starts to feel unremarkable again.

5 A Little Movement, Most Days

WHY IT WORKS

Consistency matters more than intensity. A 2024 study of physical activity in frailty found that higher levels of everyday activity were associated with greater odds of staying clinically stable. You do not need long or strenuous sessions. Frequent, gentle movement woven through your week does the quiet work of keeping you independent.

Source: study of physical activity and clinical stability in frailty, 2024.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Pick a regular anchor in your day, such as after breakfast or before the evening news.
2. Add a short, enjoyable movement to it: a walk to the letterbox, a few minutes in the garden, or a couple of the practices above.
3. Aim for a little movement on most days, rather than a lot on one day.
4. Keep it pleasant enough that you will actually want to return to it.
5. Note it on a calendar so you can see the pattern build.
6. Invite a friend or family member to join you when you can.

> **SAFETY NOTE**
>
> Choose activities that suit your current level, and build up gradually. On days you feel unwell, rest is part of the plan.

YOUR STEADY SIGN

Movement starts to feel like a normal part of your day rather than a task, and the week rarely goes by without it.

When to seek professional help

This guide is for general education. Some signs deserve a timely, personal check with your GP or a physiotherapist. Please make an appointment if you notice any of the following.

SIGNS WORTH A TIMELY CHECK

- A fall that caused an injury, or after which you could not get yourself up.
- New or worsening dizziness, light-headedness, or episodes of feeling faint.
- Sudden weakness, numbness, or trouble with speech or vision. For these, seek urgent medical care.
- New, severe, or unexplained pain, especially if it disturbs your sleep.
- Chest pain or unusual breathlessness during activity.
- A recent change in medication that seems to affect your balance or alertness.
- Rapid, unexplained weight loss or a clear loss of strength.

You do not need to wait for a crisis to ask for guidance. A conversation early is always reasonable.

Keep going

THE COMPLETE BOOK

The Steady Years

This guide is drawn from The Steady Years, the complete book by Gary Chen, Physiotherapist. Inside, you will find the full evidence behind balance, strength, and staying independent after 60, along with a gentle weekly program that weaves these practices together at a pace that suits you.

Read The Steady Years

Read it here: {{BOOK_URL}}

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Disclaimer: This guide is general education from published research. It is not individual medical or physiotherapy advice, and it does not diagnose, assess, or treat any person or condition. Everyone is different. Before starting any new exercise, and for any concern about your health, balance, or a recent fall, please speak with your GP or a qualified physiotherapist who can assess your individual situation.

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