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How You Movin'?

Easy Answers With The Y Balance Test

In my practice as a Physical Therapist, I am always looking for better ways to measure a patient's progress. You want to know if the physical therapy treatment you are using is producing positive changes in the patient's pain and functional mobility. You want to be able to identify weaknesses and focus efforts on the most significant problems. One of the best methods of assessing lower extremity function is the Y Balance Test.

The Y Balance Test is a stance platform with three moveable reach boxes. Each box travels along a measuring stick. The patient stands on the platform and with the opposite foot, pushes the reach boxes down the measuring stick. A successful test involves reaching as far as possible and then successfully returning to a stable single leg stance position.



Measurements of the distances the patient is able to reach are recorded. Comparisons of reach distances are made between the right and left legs and age adjusted normative scores. As the patient moves through therapy, he or she can be reevaluated on the Y Balance Test to measure the success of treatment intervention. A great effort is made to train away any differences in reach distances between the right and left leg. Asymmetries in reach scores are correlated with greater incidences of future injury.

The Y Balance Test is a true measure of how we use our legs. Most daily activities and nearly all athletic activity is single leg biased and requires a degree of balance. Unfortunately, most clinical tests look at only one joint segment, in non-weight bearing positions. The Y Balance Test gives the clinician and patient a real world assessment of the interactive function of the foot, ankle, knee, hip, and torso in a standing position.

Y Balance Test

- Functionally relevant.
- Research proven: repeatable and reliable.
- True measure of real world lower extremity function.
- Easily understood scoring system.

Michael S. O'Hara, P.T., O.C.S., C.S.C.S.

Rebuilding Your Balance

Standing balance is probably the most important component of life long fitness. Greater strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular capacity are of little use if you are always falling down. Asymmetries between right and left leg single leg stance balance have been linked to greater incidence of injury. If you find your single leg stance balance is lacking, try incorporating some simple balance training into your fitness program.

Single Leg Stance Tubing Oscillations

Attach some dual handle resistance tubing at chest level. Stand on the right leg with the foot straight ahead and the torso tall. Pull the tubing down by your side in a fairly brisk manner for ten repetitions. Repeat this with the foot turned in, and then again for ten more repetitions with the foot turned out. Rest and then perform the exercise on the left foot.



Single Leg Stance Anterior Arm Reaches

Place a twelve inch tall target three feet in front of your stance position. Stand on the right leg and reach out and touch the top of the target with the left hand. Return to the starting position while maintaining single leg stance on the right. Try to perform ten consecutive reaches without touching down with the left foot. Rest and then repeat on the left leg.



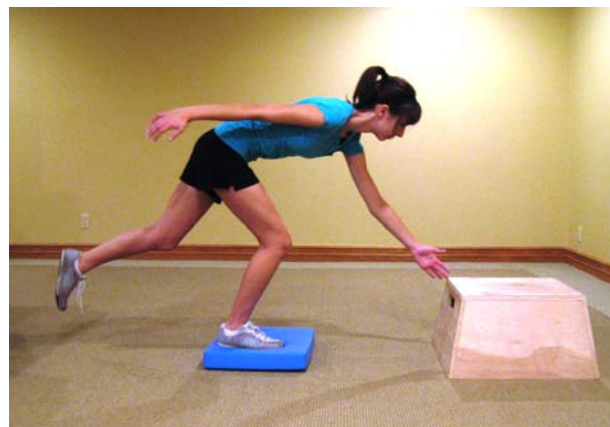
Single Leg Stance Skater Reaches

Stand on your right leg. You will reach the left foot out to the side while attempting to maintain the foot at a six inch distance off the floor. Return to the starting position while maintaining single leg stance on the right. Try to perform ten consecutive reaches without touching down with the left foot. Rest and then repeat on the left leg.



Airex Pad Single Leg Stance Balance

All three of the above exercises can be made more challenging by using an Airex pad under the stance foot. Airex pads are thick foam pads that make the floor less stable. Physical Therapists have been using Airex pads in rehab for years. Strength coaches use Airex pads with athletes that need superior ankle stability.



Pain Free Soccer Goal

Ryan injured his right knee in May 2007 while playing soccer. He had a surgical repair of his anterior cruciate ligament and a successful knee rehabilitation that ended in August 2007. Ryan returned to soccer, but over the next three years, he was bothered by pain in his right side lower back and hip. The back and hip pain was brought on by athletic activity and would go away with rest. Ryan underwent chiropractic treatment and massage, but the pain continued to be a problem. In 2011, Ryan was referred for physical therapy by his family physician.

Ryan had normal range of motion in all of his lower extremity joints. Examination of his right knee found it to be stable and pain free. Ryan had right hip pain with a full squat and with lunging forward with the right leg. His Y Balance Test revealed that when standing on his right leg, the anterior reach was 50% and posterior medial reach was 60% that of the left leg. Further Functional Movement Screen testing revealed difficulty with controlling rotation over his right hip.

Based on the results of his Y Balance Test and Functional Movement Screen, Ryan was placed on an extensive exercise program of single leg biased training to improve his right leg function. Single leg step ups, tri planar lunges, and assisted TRX squats were all part of his program. He performed a home program of balance drills and core stability activities twice a day. Ryan discontinued the leg press and knee extension exercises he had been performing as part of his prior knee rehab program. After six weeks of training, Ryan had a normal Y Balance Test. He was able to return to soccer and remain pain free.



Milford Physical Therapy Breast Cancer Fundraiser

Pilates For Pink



The staff at Milford Physical Therapy, led by Susan Fisher, MPT, sponsored a Pilates for Pink fundraiser for breast cancer research. Shape Magazine developed the program that has spread across the country. This has been an annual event at Milford Physical Therapy, and as usual, patients and training clients have been generous with their time and contributions.



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Hours
Mon-Thur: 5:30am-10pm
Friday: 5:30am-9:00pm
Saturday 8am-5pm
Sunday 8am-2pm

Wonderful Walking

"Walking Is Man's Best Medicine."—Hippocrates

Many fitness clients ask me what they can do on their off days from training. The best supplemental activity for most of these trainees is to go walking. Michigan fall weather makes it a great time to be outside. The temperatures cool, humidity drops, mosquitoes die, and the fall colors are all around us. Steady state walking is an undervalued fitness activity that has far fewer drawbacks than other forms of cardio exercise.



Over training is often a problem when people become committed to an exercise program. Walking produces minimal orthopedic stress and/or neurological fatigue. Run-

ning and high intensity interval training are often much too stressful, and the average trainee is unable to recover sufficiently and be ready for their next session in the gym. Most people can walk on Monday and then train in the gym on Tuesday and still be at their best.

Walking helps you recover from resistance training. Walking improves blood flow and reduces delayed onset muscle soreness. Combine walking with some foam rolling and you will always be ready for the key component of fitness—strength training.

Walking is just as beneficial for your cardiovascular health as more intense cardio activities. No study has demonstrated greater cardiovascular health

benefits with running, Zumba, step class, or elliptical training. Walking will not turn you into a marathoner, but your cardiovascular health will be just as good.

Walking is a critical life activity. The ability to ambulate for community distance is essential for independent living. I know many people who come to the gym and can ride a stationary bike or elliptical, but complain of excessive fatigue with walking. If you lose the ability to walk, you can easily end up in an extended care facility.

Walking is a very socially friendly exercise activity. Walking with your spouse, child, grandchild, or friend gives you uninterrupted quality time together. It is a great way to introduce someone you care for to some basic fitness.

Incorporating walking into your day often requires a shuffling of your schedule, but I believe we can all sacrifice some time away from Facebook, the Kardashians, and Snookey. I like to find a 20-30 minute route with a few hills and very little traffic. Try to find a pathway that allows you to keep moving—minimal stop lights and traffic interruptions. Perform your walk at a three to four mile per hour pace. If you do not know what this feels like, then get on a treadmill and work at that pace for one or two sessions. Make sure you stretch, and if possible, do some foam rolling after your walk.

Most of us never get any "mental quiet time". Holistic physician Dr. Andrew Weil suggests that you leave your cell phone and I-Tunes at home when you walk. Give your mind a break from the constant bombardment. Walking programs have been shown to increase the positive chemical neurotransmitters in the brain. Proper levels of neurotransmitters will improve your ability to concentrate, sleep, and elevate mood.

Michael S. O'Hara, P.T., O.C.S., C.S.C.S.