COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Tai chi, Otago, and A Matter of Balance: finding a fall prevention program in Tampa Bay

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Several fall prevention programs have strong research behind them, including tai chi, the Otago Exercise Program, Stepping On, and A Matter of Balance. In Tampa Bay, the quickest way to find a class is to call your local Area Agency on Aging or the Florida Elder Helpline at 1-800-963-5337. Your doctor or physical therapist can help you choose.

The proven programs, in plain terms

- **Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance.** A group tai chi program built for fall prevention. It has been linked to about 55% fewer repeat falls. Program details (NCOA)
- **Otago Exercise Program.** A home program prescribed by a physical therapist: a warm-up, 5 leg strengthening exercises with ankle weights, 12 balance exercises that progress from holding on to hands-free, and walking twice a week. It is done 3 times a week and has been linked to about 35% fewer falls in high-risk older adults. Otago patient guide, UNC (PDF)
- **Stepping On.** A 7-week group workshop that teaches practical fall prevention strategies, linked to about 30% fewer falls. Program details
- **A Matter of Balance.** A group program for people who are worried about falling. It helps people become more active and more confident. Program details (MaineHealth)

Other community programs on the CDC and NCOA lists include YMCA Moving for Better Balance, EnhanceFitness, SAIL, Fit and Strong, Healthy Steps, Bingocize (bingo plus exercise), and CAPABLE, a home program with an occupational therapist, a nurse, and a handyman.

Which one fits?

- **Worried and moving less:** A Matter of Balance is designed for you.
- **Fairly active and want to stay that way:** tai chi or Stepping On. Gym-based senior fitness classes can also help if they include real balance work.
- **Frail, recently fallen, or hard to get out:** Otago with a physical therapist, at home or in a clinic. If you are homebound, ask your doctor about home health therapy.
- **Love a social game:** Bingocize mixes fun with movement.

Whatever you choose, the dose matters. Fall prevention exercise works best at 50 hours or more over 3 to 6 months, three or more times a week, and then kept up. A short class that ends is a great start, not the finish line. Our article The exercise that actually prevents falls explains why.

Finding a class in Tampa Bay

Class schedules change, so call before you go. Start with the agency for your county:

- **Hillsborough, Polk, Manatee, Highlands, and Hardee:** Senior Connection Center, 813-740-3888.
- **Pasco and Pinellas:** Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, 727-217-8111.
- **Hillsborough County residents:** Hillsborough County Aging Services, (813) 272-5250.
- **Anywhere in Florida:** the Florida Department of Elder Affairs Elder Helpline, 1-800-963-5337.
- **Statewide fall prevention network:** the Florida State Falls Prevention Coalition, 727-560-8965.
- **Family in another state:** the Eldercare Locator, 1-800-677-1116, finds local aging services anywhere in the U.S.

The Florida Department of Health's older adult falls page and NCOA's list of evidence-based programs are also good places to look.

Questions to ask when you call

- Which evidence-based fall prevention programs are running near me, and when?
- How many weeks is the program, and how often does it meet?
- Is there a cost?
- Should I get my doctor's okay first?
- Is there transportation, or an option closer to home?

Paying for it

Ask about cost when you call. Some Medicare Advantage plans include fitness benefits or pay for community classes, so call your plan. Physical therapy, which may include an Otago program, can be covered under Medicare Part B, subject to coinsurance.

How Home Safety Solutions can help

Every in-home safety visit ends with local resources for exercise programs, equipment, and funding, matched to your balance test results. We take no referral fees, so our suggestions stay unbiased. Learn what happens during a home safety visit. Call (813) 365-9171 or email info@homesafety.solutions.

Related reading: Aging in place in Tampa Bay: the benefits, and is the house ready? · PACE and the safe home in Tampa Bay · CDC Compendium of Effective Fall Interventions · NCOA evidence-based falls prevention programs · Is it normal to fall as you get older?

This article is general education, not medical advice. Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or therapist about your own situation.

Want a plan for your own home?

Every service starts with an Initial Consultation, a 30-minute phone call with Dr. L'HommeDieu.
Book at homesafety.solutions