

Balancing Act: Functional Tests and Assessments for Balance and Fall Risk

4 CE HOURS / .4 CEUs

PDH Academy Course #OT-1904

Course Abstract

Census data tells us that elderly populations are growing at an unprecedented rate – and we know as therapists that the elderly have the greatest risk of fall-related injury or death. This course presents a discussion of risk factors for falls, followed by an examination of evidence-based tests and assessments for balance and fall risk, including screening tools for cognitive impairment, functional tests pertaining to balance and fall risk, and questionnaires that assess confidence with mobility and concern for falling. It concludes with an overview of fall-related resources.

Target audience: Occupational Therapists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Physical Therapists, Physical Therapist Assistants (no prerequisites).

NOTE: Links provided within the course material are for informational purposes only. No endorsement of processes or products is intended or implied.



This course is offered for 0.4 CEUs (Intermediate level; Category 2 – Occupational Therapy Process: Evaluation).

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, learners will be able to:

- Identify statistics pertaining to falls and fall-related injuries
- Recognize age related physiological changes, with attention to how each contributes to fall risk
- Distinguish between screening tools for cognition
- Distinguish between screening tools for balance and fall risk
- Recall fall-related resources available to patients, caregivers, and health care workers

Timed Topic Outline

I. Statistics: Falls and Fall-Related Injuries (20 minutes)

II. Risk Factors for Falls (40 minutes)

Age-Related Physiological Changes that Contribute to Fall Risk, Relevant Research, Modifiable Risk Factors for Falls, Alignment and Posture

III. Importance of Testing, When to Test, and Which Tests to Choose (10 minutes)

- Importance of Testing, When to Test, Which Tests to Choose
- IV. Screening Tools: Cognition (10 minutes)
 - Test and Assessment Overview
 - V. Screening and Assessment Tools: Balance and Fall Risk (90 minutes)
 - Databases on Functional Testing, Test and Assessment Overview, American Physical Therapy Association Section Recommendations
 - VI. Resources for Patients, Caregivers and Health Care Workers (20 minutes)
 - Professional Resources, Evidence-Based Community Fall Prevention Programs
 - VII. Conclusion and Appendix (30 minutes)
 - VIII. References and Exam (20 minutes)

Delivery & Instructional Method

Distance Learning – Independent. Correspondence/internet text-based self-study, including a provider-graded multiple choice final exam.

To earn continuing education credit for this course, you must achieve a passing score of 80% on the final exam.

Registration & Cancellation

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Course Author Bio & Disclosure

Andrea Perrea, MPT, DHS, GCS, CSCS, is a licensed physical therapist with over 23 years of clinical experience, primarily in home care and outpatient therapy, and over 17 years teaching experience. She holds a doctorate degree in Health Science with emphasis in education and geriatrics. She is a Certified Geriatric Specialist through the American Physical Therapy Association, a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist through the National Strength and Conditioning Association, and a member of the American Physical Therapy Association, the APTA Geriatrics Section, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

Dr. Perrea has taught more than 300 continuing education courses since 2000. She taught as adjunct faculty for the Missouri Western University in the PTA program. In 2012 she instructed for the Missouri Alliance for Home Care and the Indiana Home Care Association. Dr. Perrea presented at the 2015 Rehab Summit in Orlando FL. She currently teaches courses on the following topics: Functional Testing and Skilled Documentation in Geriatric Therapy, Exercise Programs for Frail Elderly, Balance Assessments and Fall Prevention Programs, Strength Training for Function: Program Design for Frail to Fit Seniors, and Expand Your Functional Test Toolkit.

DISCLOSURE: Financial – Andrea Perrea received a stipend as an author of this course. Nonfinancial – No relevant nonfinancial relationship exists.