

A Matter of Balance: Nan's Story

Eighty-one-year old Nan is unflappable. Despite numerous health challenges, she refuses to give in, and prefers to respond to each set back with optimism and action.

Nan suffered a stroke six years ago and lost her vision, ability to read and write, and balance. Following her stroke, she was determined to regain her faculties and worked hard in rehab to recover. But the stroke took its toll, and today she remains legally blind and depends on a walker outside of her home.

If the stroke was not enough, Nan is a diabetic and has undergone surgeries for other conditions, including abdominal surgery last May. "The last surgery was really a doozy," says Nan. "It's taken me a long time to bounce back, and I'm only now starting to get the hang of things. But nothing's going to get me down."

Balance has been a significant concern for Nan. "I have a fear of falling. I think about it all of the time. But if I couldn't get out of the house, I'd feel very closed in," she says.

With her singular determination, Nan took matters into her own hands to combat her fear of falling. "I found out about the Matter of Balance (MOB) program at the Senior Center. I enrolled because since my stroke, my balance is way off. I use a walker, and if I don't use a walker, I fall a lot."

Nan is not alone. According to the [National Council on Aging](#), "One in four Americans aged 65+ falls each year. Every 11 seconds, an older person is treated in the emergency room for a fall; every 19 minutes, an older person dies from a fall. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older patients."

To respond to this public health threat, researchers at Boston University's Roybal Center for enhancement of late-life function developed and tested the MOB program in the late 1990s with a grant from the National Institute on Aging.

MOB is a community-based, small-group program that helps older adults reduce their fear of falling and increase activity levels. This is how Nan describes the program.

"The classes were an hour. During the first 45 minutes we warmed up and started moving. The last 15 minutes were devoted to teaching us ways to prevent falling. Speakers came in who talked about falls and showed us ways to get up if you fall; what you can do if there's nothing nearby to hold on to; how to scoot yourself to a place where you can get up or get a hold of somebody to help you. "

Nan offers her own tips to prevent a fall or limit injury from a fall that she learned from MOB:

- **Take your time:** "Even though I knew better, I was just in too much of a hurry all the time. Slow down – that's key. Now when I answer the phone, I don't jump up to answer it anymore. I stand up and hold on to a chair. Then I start walking to get the phone."
- **Arrange the furniture to prevent falls:** "I have everything arranged in my house so I can always touch something. I 'furniture walk' in the house. Outside I use the walker."
- **Don't reach for things:** "You're not paying attention to balance when you reach."
- **Pay attention:** "If you do fall, think about how you fell, and take steps to reduce the risk in the future."

- **Stay active:** “I continue to exercise. I’m in a walking group at the senior center. I walk every Monday and Thursday for an hour.”

“I would recommend MOB,” says Nan. “The trainers personalized the class to our individual needs. For example, because of my surgery, there are a lot of foods that I can’t eat, so they customized a pamphlet for me to help me maintain proper nutrition.

The trainers were very caring and came early and stayed late to talk with us before and after the class. They didn’t rush us. They were phenomenal, and I will take it again if they allow me to.”

Nan is undeniably a “tough cookie,” but she’s proof positive that there are always steps you can take to optimize your quality of life, no matter what the challenge. Sometimes it’s as simple as A Matter of Balance.