

balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic

The Importance of Balance Exercises for Seniors: A Mayo Clinic Approach

balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic recognizes the critical role that maintaining good balance plays in the health and independence of older adults. As we age, natural physiological changes can affect our equilibrium, increasing the risk of falls, which can lead to serious injuries, loss of mobility, and decreased quality of life. This comprehensive article delves into the science behind balance, explores various effective exercises recommended by leading health institutions like the Mayo Clinic, and provides practical guidance on incorporating these movements into a senior's daily routine. We will cover the benefits of targeted balance training, discuss different types of exercises suitable for various fitness levels, and offer tips for safe and effective practice, empowering seniors to proactively enhance their stability and well-being.

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Understanding Balance and Aging

Balance is a complex neurological process involving the interplay of sensory information from our eyes (visual system), inner ear (vestibular system), and muscles and joints (proprioception), along with the brain's ability to process and respond to this information. As individuals age, several factors can contribute to a decline in balance.

These factors include a decrease in muscle strength, particularly in the legs and core, slower reaction times, potential vision impairment, and changes in the vestibular system. Furthermore, chronic conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, and neurological disorders can significantly impact a senior's ability to maintain stability. This makes proactive intervention through targeted exercises essential.

Why Balance Exercises are Crucial for Seniors

The benefits of engaging in regular balance exercises for seniors are multifaceted and profoundly impact their overall well-being. Primarily, these exercises are instrumental in reducing the incidence and severity of falls. Falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults, often resulting in fractures, head injuries, and even fatalities. By strengthening the systems that contribute to balance, seniors can significantly lower their risk of experiencing such debilitating events.

Beyond fall prevention, improved balance can enhance a senior's confidence and independence. The fear of falling can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, which ironically further weakens muscles and exacerbates balance issues. Performing balance exercises allows seniors to move more freely and

safely, participating in activities they enjoy without constant apprehension. This leads to a better quality of life, improved mobility, and greater social engagement.

Enhanced Mobility and Independence

A direct consequence of improved balance is the ability to move with greater ease and confidence. Seniors who can stand, walk, and navigate their environment more securely are less likely to rely on others for assistance with daily tasks. This increased autonomy fosters a sense of dignity and self-reliance, crucial components of healthy aging.

Reduced Risk of Falls and Injuries

As mentioned, the most significant benefit is the dramatic reduction in fall risk. Even minor falls can lead to sprains, bruises, or more severe injuries like broken hips or wrists. By practicing exercises that challenge and improve balance, seniors develop better reflexes and stability, making them more resilient to unexpected stumbles.

Improved Posture and Body Awareness

Many balance exercises require core engagement and mindful posture. This can lead to a noticeable improvement in overall posture, reducing back pain and making everyday movements more efficient. A heightened body awareness, or proprioception, helps seniors better understand their body's position in space, further aiding in maintaining equilibrium.

Key Principles of Balance Training

Effective balance training for seniors, as often emphasized by institutions like the Mayo Clinic, is built upon several core principles. These principles ensure that exercises are safe, progressive, and target the specific systems involved in maintaining equilibrium.

One of the most critical principles is consistency. Regular practice, even in short durations, yields far better results than infrequent, long sessions. Another vital aspect is starting with simpler exercises and gradually increasing the difficulty as balance improves. This gradual progression prevents overexertion and reduces the risk of injury.

Gradual Progression

The concept of gradual progression means starting with exercises that are easier to perform and slowly introducing more challenging variations. For example, beginning with standing on a stable surface and progressing to standing on a slightly less stable surface, or adding arm movements while balancing. This ensures continuous improvement without overwhelming the individual.

Functional Movements

Balance exercises should ideally mimic real-life movements and challenges. This means incorporating exercises that involve shifting weight, reaching, and moving through different planes of motion. Functional movements help seniors translate their improved balance into practical, everyday activities, making the training more relevant and impactful.

Core Strength and Stability

A strong core – the muscles of the abdomen and back – is fundamental to maintaining balance. Many balance exercises inherently engage these muscles, but dedicated core strengthening can further enhance stability. A strong core acts as a central anchor, providing a stable base from which the limbs can move.

Effective Balance Exercises for Seniors (Mayo Clinic Inspired)

Leading health organizations like the Mayo Clinic often highlight a range of exercises that are particularly effective for improving balance in seniors. These exercises can be adapted to various fitness levels and often require minimal or no equipment, making them accessible for home practice.

The following exercises are designed to challenge the vestibular, visual, and proprioceptive systems, working together to improve overall stability. It is always recommended to consult with a healthcare provider or physical therapist before beginning any new exercise program, especially if you have underlying health conditions.

Standing Exercises

These exercises focus on improving static balance – the ability to hold a steady position. They are foundational for building confidence and stability.

- **Single Leg Stand:** Stand near a sturdy chair or wall for support. Lift one foot off the ground, holding the position for 10-30 seconds. Gradually increase the duration. Repeat on the other leg. As you improve, try to reduce your reliance on the support.
- **Heel-to-Toe Walk:** Walk in a straight line, placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the other foot. This challenges your balance by narrowing your base of support. Focus on maintaining control and a steady gait.
- **Tandem Stance:** Stand with one foot directly in front of the other, so the heel of your front foot touches the toes of your back foot. Hold this position for 10-30 seconds, maintaining your balance. You can perform this with your hands on your hips or by your sides.

Dynamic Balance Exercises

These exercises involve movement and are crucial for improving the ability to balance while walking or performing other activities.

- **Leg Swings:** Standing near a support, gently swing one leg forward and backward, keeping it relatively straight. Focus on controlled movement rather than height. Then, swing the leg from side to side. Repeat with the other leg.
- **Calf Raises:** Stand with feet hip-width apart, holding onto a support if needed. Slowly rise up

onto the balls of your feet, holding the peak for a moment, then slowly lower your heels back down. This strengthens calf muscles, which are important for ankle stability.

- **Side Leg Raises:** Standing near support, keeping your body upright, lift one leg out to the side, keeping it straight. Lower it slowly. Repeat 8-12 times on each side. This exercise strengthens the hip abductor muscles, vital for lateral stability.

Chair-Based Exercises

For individuals who find standing exercises too challenging or who want to supplement their routine, chair-based exercises can be very effective.

- **Seated Leg Extensions:** Sit upright in a sturdy chair with your feet flat on the floor. Extend one leg straight out in front of you, holding for a few seconds, then slowly lower it. Repeat with the other leg. This helps strengthen quadriceps.
- **Seated Marches:** While seated, lift one knee towards your chest as if marching, then lower it and repeat with the other leg. This engages the core and hip flexors.
- **Sit-to-Stand:** Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Lean forward slightly and stand up, using your leg muscles. Then, slowly sit back down. This is a functional exercise that mimics everyday movements and builds leg strength and balance.

Progression and Safety Considerations

As you incorporate balance exercises into your routine, it's crucial to prioritize safety and implement a gradual progression plan. This ensures that you are continuously challenging yourself without risking injury.

Always begin by performing exercises in a safe environment. Ensure there are no tripping hazards and have a sturdy chair or wall nearby for support. Listen to your body; if you experience any pain, stop the exercise immediately. It is also highly recommended to have someone present, especially when you are first trying new or more challenging balance exercises.

Creating a Safe Exercise Environment

A safe space is paramount. This means clearing the area of any obstacles like rugs, cords, or furniture that could cause a fall. Ensure good lighting in the exercise area. If performing exercises near stairs, ensure they are well-lit and have sturdy handrails.

When to Seek Professional Help

While many exercises can be done independently, there are times when professional guidance is invaluable. If you have experienced a recent fall, have a significant balance disorder, or are unsure about proper form, consulting a physical therapist is highly recommended. They can assess your specific needs and create a tailored exercise program.

Integrating Balance Exercises into Daily Life

The most effective way to improve and maintain balance is by making it a consistent part of your daily routine. This doesn't necessarily mean dedicating long blocks of time to specific exercise sessions. Instead, look for opportunities to incorporate balance-challenging activities throughout your day.

Simple actions, such as standing on one foot while brushing your teeth, or walking heel-to-toe across a room, can contribute to better balance. The key is to be mindful of your movements and look for small ways to challenge your stability regularly. This consistent, low-level challenge is often more sustainable and effective in the long run.

Short, Frequent Sessions

Instead of trying to fit in a lengthy workout, break up your balance practice into shorter, more frequent sessions. For example, do a few calf raises while waiting for the kettle to boil or practice a single-leg stand for 30 seconds while waiting for a commercial break to end.

Active Lifestyle Choices

Embracing an active lifestyle inherently promotes better balance. Activities like walking, gardening, or even dancing require and improve balance. Encourage yourself to be more active in general, and you will naturally enhance your overall stability and coordination.

The Role of Physical Therapy and Professional Guidance

For individuals experiencing significant balance issues or recovering from an injury, physical therapy plays a pivotal role. Physical therapists are highly trained professionals who can conduct a thorough assessment of your balance, strength, flexibility, and gait.

Based on this assessment, they can design a personalized exercise program that is safe, effective, and tailored to your specific needs and goals. They also provide crucial education on how to perform exercises correctly and how to prevent falls in your home environment. Professional guidance ensures you are working towards improvement in the most efficient and safest manner possible.

Personalized Exercise Programs

A physical therapist will evaluate your current level of function and identify any underlying weaknesses or deficits that contribute to poor balance. They will then create a program that addresses these specific issues, incorporating exercises that are appropriate for your current abilities.

and gradually increasing in difficulty as you improve.

Fall Prevention Strategies

Beyond exercises, physical therapists can offer comprehensive fall prevention strategies. This may include advice on home modifications, appropriate footwear, assistive devices if needed, and strategies for navigating everyday hazards. They empower seniors with the knowledge and tools to create a safer living environment.

Empowering Seniors Through Enhanced Balance

Improving balance is not just about physical well-being; it's about reclaiming a sense of control, confidence, and freedom. By engaging in targeted balance exercises, seniors can significantly reduce their risk of falls, maintain their independence, and continue to enjoy a full and active life. The resources and information available, including those often highlighted by institutions like the Mayo Clinic, provide a solid foundation for seniors to embark on this journey towards better stability and a higher quality of life.

Embracing balance exercises is an investment in one's future health and mobility. It's a proactive step that empowers individuals to age gracefully and independently, allowing them to continue participating in the activities and hobbies they cherish. The journey to better balance is achievable with consistent effort, proper guidance, and a commitment to well-being.

FAQ

Q: What are the most important balance exercises for seniors to do daily?

A: The most important balance exercises for seniors to do daily are those that are safe, progressive, and target the core, legs, and proprioception. Examples include single-leg stands, heel-to-toe walks, and calf raises. Consistency is key, so incorporating a few minutes of these exercises into a daily routine, even while waiting for things, can be very beneficial.

Q: Can balance exercises help prevent falls in seniors?

A: Yes, balance exercises are highly effective in preventing falls in seniors. By strengthening the muscles involved in stability, improving reaction times, and enhancing the body's ability to adjust to shifts in center of gravity, these exercises significantly reduce the risk of falling.

Q: How often should seniors perform balance exercises?

A: Seniors should aim to perform balance exercises at least three to five times per week. However, incorporating short balance challenges into daily activities, such as standing on one foot while brushing teeth, can provide continuous benefits. Listening to your body and ensuring rest days is also important.

Q: What if a senior is too weak to stand for balance exercises?

A: For seniors who are too weak to stand, chair-based balance exercises are an excellent alternative. These can include seated leg extensions, seated marches, and practicing sit-to-stands from a sturdy chair. A physical therapist can help design a safe and effective program even for those with significant mobility limitations.

Q: Are there any risks associated with balance exercises for seniors?

A: The primary risk associated with balance exercises is the potential for falls if not performed correctly or safely. It is crucial to start slowly, use support when needed, ensure a clear and safe environment, and consult with a healthcare provider or physical therapist before beginning a new program, especially if there are pre-existing health conditions.

Q: How long does it take to see improvements in balance for seniors?

A: Improvement in balance can vary from person to person, depending on factors like consistency of practice, baseline fitness level, and any underlying medical conditions. However, many seniors begin to notice positive changes within a few weeks of consistent practice. Significant improvements can often be observed within 2-3 months.

Q: Can Tai Chi or Yoga be considered balance exercises for seniors?

A: Yes, Tai Chi and Yoga are excellent forms of exercise that significantly improve balance in seniors. Tai Chi, with its slow, flowing movements, and Yoga, with its focus on poses and breath control, both enhance strength, flexibility, and proprioception, all of which are crucial for maintaining good balance. Many seniors find these practices enjoyable and beneficial.

Q: What role does proprioception play in balance exercises for seniors?

A: Proprioception is the body's ability to sense its position, movement, and action. Balance exercises directly improve proprioception by challenging the sensory receptors in the muscles, tendons, and joints to send accurate information to the brain. Better proprioception allows the brain to make quicker and more effective adjustments to maintain stability.

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balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic: *The 17 Day Plan to Stop Aging* Mike Moreno, 2012-09-18 From the author of the #1 bestselling *The 17 Day Diet*, the inspiring and easy-to-follow plan for staying young and healthy, based on the same 17 day model that made the diet the bestselling diet book of 2011. Every year, every month, every day, every hour, every minute that you are alive, you are getting older. No matter how old you are, your body is undergoing age-related changes that can lead to less energy, painful joints, droopy skin, unsightly wrinkles, and overall declining health. But what if someone told you that getting older and the physical process of aging don't have to be so closely entwined? And what if you had the ability to slow down the aging of your body so much that you could actually live to see, and more important, enjoy your 100th birthday or beyond? From feeling pain in your joints to realizing that your memory isn't what it used to be, our bodies all suffer from wear and tear as we get older. But Dr. Mike Moreno—author of the #1 bestselling sensation *The 17 Day Diet*—explains that it is totally within your power to prevent and even reverse these symptoms of aging. *The 17 Day Plan to Stop Aging* is a 4-cycle plan that uses nutrition, physical fitness, and mental exercise to get you ready for longevity. Each cycle focuses on a different set of body parts and offers prescriptive solutions for improving the way those parts function. The plan is set up so that you can target specific areas or work on improving whole-body health at once. From your heart to your lungs, your nervous system to your reproductive system, the book is packed with information about what you can do to start feeling more vital. *The 17 Day Plan to Stop Aging* puts the power in your hands so you will never have to fear the prospect of old age again. Dare to imagine not just living 100 years, but thriving for all of them. The time to get started is now! *** *The 17 Day Plan to Stop Aging* is a 4-cycle system designed to help you feel healthier and younger. Whether you want to focus on a specific part of your body or feel rejuvenated from top to bottom, this is your guide to a happier, more vital life! • Cycle 1—Restore: The plan begins with basic anti-aging approaches that will help restore all of your body's systems to a healthy baseline, stop potential medical problems before they start, and make way for a healthier, happier lifestyle—in 17 days flat. This cycle focuses on your heart, lungs, and brain, which Dr. Moreno considers to be

the primary systems worthy of your immediate attention. • Cycle 2—Rebuild: This cycle shows you how to protect your immune, digestive, and musculoskeletal systems. Through simple shifts in diet, unexpected ways to get your body moving, and a healthy dose of common sense, it's easy to strengthen these secondary systems so they can do their most efficient work for years to come. • Cycle 3—Refine: When your reproductive and urinary systems are performing properly, you are most likely to feel energetic and sexy. Whether you want to avoid unpleasant symptoms like urinary incontinence or your goal is to keep your sex life thriving for years to come, Cycle 3 offers tools that you can easily apply to your life. • Cycle 4—Renew: The strategies you'll master in the last 17 days of this plan will not only leave you feeling rejuvenated, but they will ensure that you are ready to make the most—in every way—of the long, happy, and healthy life that you're working toward. The vital elements in this final cycle help you achieve true harmony among your health, environment, and overall lifestyle.

balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic: *The Encyclopedia of Elder Care* Elizabeth Capezuti, Michael L. Malone, Ariba Khan, Steven L. Baumann, 2017-12-07 Praise for the Third Edition: "The third edition of this outstanding resource reflects the many advances in the care of older people that have occurred since the publication of the second edition...The vast bulk of the content is accessible and relevant to an international audience. The indexing and cross-referencing are excellent... Score: 5/5 stars. -- Margaret Arthur, Nursing Standard The information [in this book] is amazing. I reviewed topics in which I have expertise and was very satisfied. This is an excellent addition to my library and I will refer to it often, much like a medical dictionary... Score: 90, 4 Stars. --Doody's Medical Reviews "Provides 273 comprehensive, yet succinct, entries on a variety of topics related to elder care. In addition, many of the entries include see also references that help readers easily navigate the book. Recommended. --Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries This expanded, one-of-a-kind reference of more than 250 entries provides a comprehensive guide to all of the essential elements of elder care across a breadth of health and social service disciplines. Responding to the needs of providers, directcare workers, family, and other caregivers, the diverse array of entries included in this encyclopedia recognize and address the complex medical, social, and psychological problems associated with geriatric care. In addition to a brief, accessible summary of each topic, entries include several key references, including web links and mobile apps for additional sources of information. This updated edition contains more than 30 new entries written by renowned experts that address a variety of elder care topics. New to the Fourth Edition: New entries addressing Ethics Consultation, Eye Disorders, Pain - Acute and Chronic, and many others Key Features: Provides succinct descriptions of over 250 key topics for health and social service clinicians Offers crucial information for elder care providers across all settings and disciplines Distills current, evidence-based literature sources Written by nationally recognized expert researchers and clinicians Includes links to useful websites and mobile apps

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cancer. Coverage includes in-depth discussions of both the lifestyle exercise approach to exercising regularly and the structured exercise approach.

balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic: *100 Simple Things You Can Do to Prevent Alzheimer's and Age-Related Memory Loss* Jean Carper, 2010-09-20 The #1 New York Times–bestselling author “gives readers of all ages 100 doable strategies for keeping brains sharp and bodies healthy” (William Sears, MD, coauthor of *The Healthy Brain Book*). Most people think there is little or nothing you can do to avoid Alzheimer's. But scientists know this is no longer true. In fact, prominent researchers now say that our best and perhaps only hope of defeating Alzheimer's is to prevent it. After bestselling author Jean Carper discovered that she had the major susceptibility gene for Alzheimer's, she was determined to find all the latest scientific evidence on how to escape it. She discovered 100 surprisingly simple scientifically tested ways to radically cut the odds of Alzheimer's, memory decline, and other forms of dementia. Did you know that vitamin B 12 helps keep your brain from shrinking? Apple juice mimics a common Alzheimer's drug? Surfing the internet strengthens aging brain cells? Ordinary infections and a popular anesthesia may trigger dementia? Meditating spurs the growth of new neurons? Exercise is like Miracle-Gro for your brain? Even a few preventive actions could dramatically change your future by postponing Alzheimer's so long that you eventually outlive it. If you can delay the onset of Alzheimer's for five years, you cut your odds of having it by half. Postpone Alzheimer's for ten years, and you'll most likely never live to see it. *100 Simple Things You Can Do to Prevent Alzheimer's* will change the way you look at Alzheimer's and provide exciting new answers from the frontiers of brain research to help keep you and your family free of this heartbreaking disease.

balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic: *Balance!* Donald H. Blough, Charles Press, 2013-08-14 Balance is a learned trait. A baby's progression to walking is accomplished by gaining strength, improving coordination, receiving encouragement and by practicing. If we learned it once, we can also relearn it later. The electronic age has contributed to a sedentary life style. In addition, ranch homes, curb cuts, escalators, and elevators have eliminated stairs from our daily routines. Safety concerns also discourage many from walking for exercise. The predictable reality is a weaker, balance challenged population. The purpose of this publication is to provide the unstable reader with a practical guide to restore flexibility, strength, balance, coordination and function.

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balance exercises for seniors mayo clinic: *Exercise for Frail Elders* Elizabeth Best-Martini, Kim A. Jones-DiGenova, 2014-01-31 As the older adult population increases, so does the demand for fitness professionals who understand the capabilities and special needs of seniors with illnesses, disabilities, chronic disorders, and sedentary lifestyles. *Exercise for Frail Elders, Second Edition*, is the only exercise fitness guidebook that focuses on working with frail elders and adults with special conditions. It is an invaluable resource for improving functional fitness, maintaining aspects of independent living, and enhancing quality of life. With *Exercise for Frail Elders, Second Edition*, readers will gain a deeper understanding of 14 medical conditions common to older adults, how these conditions may affect participants' ability to perform activities of daily living, and what exercises can help them maintain and increase functional fitness. This book focuses on special needs stemming from conditions including arthritis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, orthopedic issues, osteoporosis, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease. The updated second edition provides a broader focus on balance, a critical component of any functional fitness program, to aid in designing classes that incorporate various stability exercises. Exercises that provide significant benefits to balance are indicated with a symbol to ensure effective program design.

Additional features of this edition include the following: · Learning objectives at the beginning and review questions at the conclusion of each chapter provide a framework for understanding. · Reproducible forms provide readers with easy-to-use appraisals, questionnaires, and exercise logs for evaluating clients. · Checklists and reference charts highlight key areas of concern and consider specific needs when planning functional fitness programs for clients. · Guidelines and safety precautions for special conditions and how they apply to range-of-motion exercises, resistance training, aerobic exercise, and stretching have been updated. · Specific exercise instructions, including variations and progression options, show professionals how to add interest and challenge for participants. · Suggested resources encourage exercise leaders to continue their education. To enhance learning and program development, the text is divided into two parts. Part I covers planning an exercise program for frail elders or adults with special needs, including knowing the needs of class participants, motivating students to exercise, and keeping them safe while participating. It also offers strategies for success, including basic class structure creating a sense of fun and community. Part II covers implementation of a successful program, including course design, warm-up and cool-down, and exercises for range of motion, resistance training, aerobic training, and stretching, with their variations. Over 150 photos illustrate safe and effective execution of the exercises. Exercise for Frail Elders, Second Edition, is an easy-to-follow resource for working with elderly individuals in assisted living and nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals, day centers, senior centers, recreation and community centers, and home health care environments. This unique guide has the hands-on information necessary for creating safe and effective exercise programs and understanding medical disorders, safety precautions for specific disorders, and implications for exercise. Readers will learn to design and teach a dynamic fitness program for older adults—and keep it fun, safe, and functional—with Exercise for Frail Elders.

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 2023 Winner BIBA Best Indie Book Awards Non-Fiction: Health. 2023 Honorable Mention 31st Annual Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards Non-Fiction: Reference 2023 Finalist Next Indie Book Awards Non-Fiction: Self-Help. Rehabit Your Life. A Doctor's Notebook on Navigating Health & Wellbeing by Portland resident PL Bandy, MD has been named by the Independent Book Publishing Professionals Group--the world's largest book awards program for independent publishers and self-published authors--as one of the best indie books of 2023. PL Bandy's book won the 2023 BIBA Best Indie Book Award non-fiction: health category; placed as a finalist in the 2023 Next Generation Indie Book Awards non-fiction: self-help category, and earned an honorable mention in 2023 31st Annual Writer's Digest Self-Published Book Awards in the non-fiction: reference category. Change can be hard when it comes to our habits, health, and well-being. But knowing what to change and where to begin may be even harder. Sorting fact from fiction in a world saturated with information and unverified advice is complex. Rehabit Your Lifemakes sense of it all. Throughout this collection of high-yield, well-researched, and scientifically supported advice, you will see what is possible and how you can get there. This book is about hope--hope that is grounded in affordable, effective, and doable actions--and finding what matters most to you. When life seems overwhelming, you are not powerless. Within these pages you will find how to embrace the small in order to produce the largest and most lasting change you never thought possible. Rehabit Your Lifeshares trusted advice from a seasoned physician and provides a proven roadmap in navigating better health and greater well-being, one step at a time.

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opportunity for faculty members to take the lead in innovating, researching, and implementing new strategies while demonstrating their effectiveness. Designed for instructors and instructional designers, *Motivating and Retaining Online Students* is filled with empirical research from the authors' study of motivation and retention strategies that can reduce online learner dropout. Focusing on the most important issues instructors face, such as course design; student engagement and motivation; and institutional, instructional, and informal student support strategies, the book provides effective online strategies that help minimize student dropout, increase student retention, and support student learning. While helping to improve the overall retention rates for educational institutions, the strategies outlined in the book also allow for student diversity and individual learner differences. Lehman and Conceição's proven model gives instructors an effective approach to help students persist in online courses and succeed as learners.

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