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How Mindfulness Meditation Could Improve Balance and Coordination

Maybe you've been here before: Late for a meeting, rushing up a flight of stairs, cup of coffee in one hand and a folder in the other . . . and your foot catches something. You sprawl on the stairs, and you've got to spend the rest of the day with coffee-soaked clothes and sore shins. Sometimes our clumsy moments lead to more than embarrassment, too – even injury. So wouldn't it be something if mindfulness meditation could improve our balance and coordination?

Ying Kee, PhD and his colleagues at Nanyang Technological University's National Institute of Education figured it might, so they conducted some research to find out. They gathered 32 men and randomly assigned them to two groups. First, researchers had the treatment and the control group balance on one leg on top of a force plate. Next, both groups placed their hands in a basin of water. People in the treatment group were told to consider how their hands felt as they moved them slowly across the basin. This was meant to quickly induce a mindful state. Members of the control group were told merely to move their hands at their own pace. After the water task, researchers instructed both groups to stand on one foot again. All participants then completed some short surveys about mindfulness and balance. Mindful awareness might actually improve your ability to balance and control your motions. Here's what they found – and it's good news, especially if you're already a mindfulness practitioner.

For participants who already showed higher attention and awareness levels (according to the surveys), the treatment significantly improved their balance. Meanwhile, members of the control group with the same traits saw no changes. In other words, paying mindful attention to your body doesn't just change how you experience feelings flowing through it. Mindful awareness might actually improve your ability to balance and control your motions. This study starts small – just standing on one foot. But imagine the implications of mindful awareness to improve balance and coordination for athletes, soldiers, or the elderly. And wouldn't it be nice to never trip on the stairs again? If you want to read the full study, it was published in the October 2012 Journal of Exercise and Sport Psychology.

Source: OCTOBER 24, 2012 BY RUTH BUCZYNSKI, PHD