



50+Living our best lives now and in the future!

Balance and Focus for Life

As a physical therapist and a mother of three active boys (two teenage twins and a pre-teen), Marki James, DPT, has focused on balance in her professional and personal life. Though not yet fifty, James has developed expertise, insights, and habits that are timeless; they are ones that can benefit most people at any age.



The Best Path

In her twenties, James was an accomplished professional musician who played bass (upright and electric) in salsa and jazz groups and performed with the Darrell Grant Trio at the Mt. Hood Festival of Jazz. With an academic background in science, she later became a chemist but felt “the job wasn’t a good fit” for her.

After a bike injury, she was sent to physical therapy. “I was looking for a new career path, and the physical therapist treating me answered my questions and let me do some job shadowing with him.” She had found the right path for her and graduated from Pacific University in 2006 with a doctorate in physical therapy.

Specializing in Balance Issues

James initially worked with general outpatient “orthopedic diagnoses,” but she soon started specializing in balance and vestibular issues (related to an inner ear sensory system that regulates balance).

“Many people start experiencing difficulty with their balance as they age. The majority of balance-specific patients I see are older adults who have either had a fall or two or feel unstable or likely to fall. Vestibular patients typically can span a larger age range.”

Paying Attention to Our Physical Balance is Vital



“Most people don’t realize that your balance can be strengthened and improved with practice. A fall can be catastrophic. Around

20% of people who fall and sustain a hip fracture won’t make it home. We want to avoid falls at all costs, especially for those with decreased bone density (osteoporosis/osteopenia). I recommend that anyone starting to notice difficulty with their balance see a physical therapist so they can be evaluated and given safe and appropriate exercises.

For balance to improve, exercises need to be challenging, but they must also be done safely.”

Staying Mentally and Physically Active is Vital

James believes that “Staying mentally and physically active, along with eating a healthy diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, and low sugar and processed foods, will give you the best chance at staying healthy long term.” She is “a big walker” and plans “to continue walking as a form of exercise and recreation long-term. I also stretch regularly and do core-strengthening exercises.”

Focus and Balance at Home

“My boys are my world right now. I work part-time so I can be there when they get home from school, and I do my best to volunteer in their classrooms and be present in their lives for those things that are important to them. I have absolutely no regrets about this. My most important job is raising good and kind human beings and helping them find their passion in life and reach their full potential...My greatest challenge is giving each boy enough individual attention and, logistically, getting them to their activities. My greatest joy is in watching them work hard, achieve their goals, and generally, seeing and enjoying watching their personalities develop.”



The James family when the boys were much younger.

Family Focus on Travel

“I didn’t fully understand how big and diverse the world truly was until I could experience different places, people, and cultures.” Among other places, Marki and her husband, [Ben James](#), have traveled to Costa Rica, London, Paris, Venice, and Sweden (where they saw the Northern Lights). “I would revisit any of these places! Costa Rica is an amazing



place because of the biodiversity seen in the rainforest and the cloud forest.”

“My kids have only left the U.S. once for a trip to Costa

Rica this past summer. Seeing them enjoy the different environments, animals, people, foods, and the culture of a different country was fun. It was also great to see them practice the Spanish they study at school. We would like to take them to other places, perhaps Europe or Asia next.”

For Relaxation

Because “things are typically pretty hectic, especially during the school year with sports and other activities,” James values time to relax and recharge—an essential part of maintaining a healthy life balance and focus. “I do long-distance walking and have completed many half-marathons with my walking buddies. I love reading, gardening, hiking, and kayaking.” She and her family enjoy “spending downtime visiting Fish Hawk Lake together or watching movies or reruns of our favorite shows (*The Office* and *Gilmore Girls*).” She and Ben also enjoy wine tasting. “Our favorite place is [Willakenzie](#), but Oregon has so many great wineries.”

Advice for Living Our Best Lives

“Stay active, both physically and mentally. Travel. Be active with family, especially grandkids, and with other close connections. Keep up with your health and fitness. Deferred maintenance to your health makes it more difficult down the road.” For additional reading about balance and its role in longevity, James suggests the 2022 CNN article, [“Wobbly on one leg? Ability to balance is linked to a longer life, study finds.”](#) She also recommends an [article](#) about physical and sedentary behavior for those over fifty.

Older Adults and [CDC](#) Facts about Falls



- More than one out of four older adults 65+ falls each year. “Falling once doubles your chances of falling again.”
- Approximately 20% of falls will result in serious injuries such as broken bones or head injuries.
- “Over 800,000 patients a year are hospitalized because of a fall injury...and at least 300,000 older people are hospitalized yearly for hip fractures,” and are often “caused by falling sideways.”
- The most common cause of traumatic brain injuries is a fall.
- “In 2015, the total medical costs for falls totaled more than \$50 billion. Medicare and Medicaid shouldered 75% of these costs.”

Don't think you need to be concerned about falls?

A Wake-Up Call

As I shared in my 2022 book, [Refusing to Be Invisible](#), my daughter-in-law, Marki James, explained that one of the most essential preventative actions women could take as they age is to work on their balance. I appreciated her expert advice and told some of my friends how important it was for

women, as we age, to work on our balance. “It didn’t occur to me that I needed to start working on *my* balance.”

Then, when I was almost sixty, I had my first fall while jogging on what I assumed was an uneven sidewalk. About a month later, I had another fall. Fortunately, I didn’t seriously injure myself. Instead, I realized that I had some work to do and started practicing my balance regularly and have continued to do so for over ten years. I don’t want to become a statistic if I can avoid it. Thank you, Marki!

Paula Marie

Walking for Life

Too much time sitting is associated with numerous [health risks](#), and unfortunately, many “older adults are relatively inactive,” especially after retirement. To counter inactivity, “the CDC recommends walking due to its ease and accessibility.”

Health Benefits

According to the [Arthritis Foundation](#), some of the

benefits of walking include lowering blood pressure and the risk of stroke. In addition, an appropriate amount of walking may

stop the loss of “bone mass for those with osteoporosis.” Spending time walking outdoors also has [mood-enhancing](#) benefits.



Steps Matter

As reported in [Medical News Today](#), one recent study suggests that “walking between 6,000 and 9,000 steps each day is “linked to a dramatically lower risk of cardiovascular disease for older adults.” Citing recent studies in *JAMA Neurology* and *JAMA Internal Medicine*, a CNBC [article](#) reported that studies indicated a connection

“between daily step count, intensity of steps, and increased health benefit. Findings also indicated “greater benefits by walking a total of 30 minutes each day.”

Appropriate Intensity Makes a Difference

Citing a University of Pittsburgh study, a [Healthy Life After Fifty](#) article reported that adults 65+ “ who walked 0.8 meters per second had average life expectancies, while those who walked at least 1 meter per second lived longer than the slower walkers.

If you want to test your speed, the distance between regulation baseball bases is about 90 feet. A meter is 3.28 feet. If you are walking a meter per second, you should be able to walk between two baseball bases and an additional 8 ½ feet within 30 seconds.

The Borg Perceived Exertion Scale, as explained in a [Well and Good](#) article, might be an easier way to measure appropriate exertion to get the most benefits from walking. Using a “self-determined rating between six and 20 to measure physical activity intensity based on sensations such as increased heart rate, breathing, and muscle fatigue... a perceived exertion rate of 12-14 typically indicates you’re performing... right where you want to be for a brisk walk.”

Addressing Weather and Other Potential Barriers

[AARP research](#) suggests that 37% of older adults felt that weather conditions were a barrier to getting outside and walking. Another “15% were concerned about safety issues such as a lack of sidewalks or access to safe walking areas.”

Appropriate apparel (e.g., waterproof clothing, etc.) can make walking more comfortable in rainy weather. Finding a walking partner can help keep us motivated and moving even when conditions aren’t ideal. Having a walking partner can also help address some safety concerns.

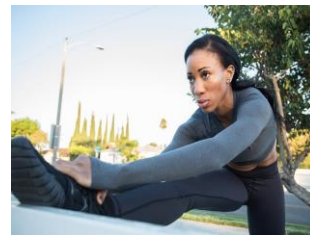
If you live in a neighborhood with limited sidewalks or access to safe walking spaces, you may want to consider conducting a [Walk Audit](#) in your community, as aging expert [James Hill](#) suggested. Another option is carpooling with other walkers to areas with desirable walking conditions.

If You Have Health Concerns

Before starting a new exercise routine, you should talk with your doctor if you have any health concerns. [Better Health](#) suggests asking your doctor or healthcare professional if there are some exercises you should avoid. Also, if you experience “dizziness, chest pain, or shortness of breath,” contact your doctor without delay.

Why Stretch Before Exercising?

As explained in a Harvard Health [article](#), daily stretching is essential. “Stretching keeps the muscles flexible, strong, and healthy, and we need that flexibility to maintain a range of motion in the joints. Without it, the muscles shorten and become tight. Then, when you call on your muscles for activity, they are weak and unable to extend all the way. That puts you at risk for joint pain, strains, and muscle damage.”



Boomer Best U does not provide medical, dietary, legal, or financial advice. As appropriate, consult your doctor, a legal professional, or a financial expert when considering health-related, legal, or financial changes.

Subscribe/Unsubscribe: Paula@boomerbestU.com