

The Graceful Move to Reduce Elder Falls

Kaiser Permanente and the Sacramento Ballet are partnering on a class designed to decrease seniors' risk of falling.

"At first, I thought, 'ballet? How am I going to get on my tip toes?'" said Kathy Frodahl, a 67-year-old ballet student. "But now I'm hooked and astonished about all the physical and mental health benefits I've experienced since joining the class 2 years ago."

Since early 2019, the Sacramento Ballet, in partnership with Kaiser Permanente, has been putting together weekly ballet classes taught by former San Francisco principal ballerina Cynthia Drayer-Reues and Sacramento Ballet instructor Grant Spencer. The Fall Prevention Through Movement class has been helping dozens of seniors incorporate ballet into their fitness routines, getting seniors up and moving, and decreasing their chances of falling.

"I've always been an active senior, but since starting ballet my posture has improved. I'm more flexible and more confident," said Frodahl. "Now, when I walk, I have the voice of our instructor in my head, 'Heals to toes, heals to toes.'"

The 60-minute class has tripled in size since the first session as more seniors learn about this free program that could keep them out of emergency rooms. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 3 adults over 65 fall each year.

"Falls are the second leading cause of traumatic injury coming into the Kaiser Permanente South Sacramento Trauma Center every year," said Christine McGahey, a registered nurse who holds a bachelor of science in nursing and who is Trauma Program director at Kaiser Permanente South Sacramento. "We decided to establish a program that would armor our seniors and make them more stable to decrease or even prevent falls."

A Senior Who Is Going Places

Janice Willing from Sacramento learned about the ballet class from her neighbor and decided to give it a try. Willing had serious back surgery a few years ago and was told by her doctor that one wrong fall could leave her paralyzed.

"Up until starting these classes, I was falling and tripping on a flat carpet in my house," said Willing. "I have not fallen once since I started these classes, and I can go places where I couldn't go before."

Students have found that with this class they have better posture, improved memory, and improved balance.

“Ballet can also help to stretch muscles, straighten bones, and fight dementia. And there is less chance for injury to older joints because it’s not high impact,” said Cynthia Dryer, the Sacramento Ballet School director.

In addition to all the physical benefits, students are finding a supportive and welcoming environment that’s providing emotional support and helping them socialize and helping them live life to the fullest.

For more information about Fall Prevention Through Movement classes in the Sacramento region, visit www.sacballet.org.