

# TUMMY TIME: RESTORING HARMONY IN THE COMPLEX OLDER ADULT

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## INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, I fell in love with the geriatric patient. For 27 years, I worked in long-term care (LTC) with my attention and focus on fall prevention. Early on, I realized that a single fall could and would take away the life a patient once knew and catapult them into an unfamiliar, often lonely environment...the medical system.

My favorite part of working with older adults is listening to their adventures, their movement in this snapshot of time we call "life." Every conversation seems to have a common theme. Frequently, there are two areas of discussion; first their family and the second what they did for a living and/or throughout their life. I have met world-renowned inventors, artists, farmers, teachers, veterans (of almost any war in the last 100 years), athletes, entertainers, pastors, and government officials. Each conversation was a journey through their memories reliving their favorite times in their mind. Even though the physical body cannot carry out their dreams anymore, there is no limit when it comes to the heart and soul. The thoughts of the heart can at any moment navigate through time and space to rediscover each and every "movement" we have ever experienced.

When I started on this journey, I recall observing lap buddies, vest restraints, straps on beds, and other devices to reduce the risk of falls. Today, those "old" ideas of fall prevention seem barbaric. Twenty-five years ago, this manner of restraint for fall prevention was normal. At that time, few had stood up to say these particular devices were potentially diminishing a patient's quality of life and rights. It made sense that we put the lap buddy on the wheelchair, tied the vest, etc. This was the protocol for patients who were at a high risk of falling. This was done each time we completed our treatment with patients to prevent in-

juries from falls. The devices were not tight or uncomfortable for the patients. Rather, the devices served as a "pause" in a patient's movement as a reminder not to get up on their own. Even so, it was at this same time that I began to see it was the absence of movement, not the movement itself that led patients to fall. As time went on, I knew in my heart that it was my job to help patients who came to therapy to get "out of their box" and move.

When life begins, we are "restrained" in the womb with little space to stretch and feel our bodies react to the environment around us. In no time at all we are plunged into the world and begin our journey. In the beginning, we spend most of our time nestled in our parent's bosom or the safety of our cribs. In just a few short months, we are stretching outside of our safe fetal positions and experiencing and exploring the amazing phenomena, a new realm called "movement." Energy that had once been "restrained" is now being unleashed to experience the world around us. We begin to reach and extend farther into the world. Each and every gesture of movement that is performed we learn and respond in this new stage of life. Uninhibited motion teaching our mind and body to work together to catapult us into movement, energy, and most importantly balance to harmonize with the world in which we live.

From the womb, to the crib, crawling across a floor, walking down the hallways of our house, to running in the parks and playgrounds, our world expands dramatically introducing us to what seems like an infinite amount of movement that we experience with no boundaries in sight. We continue to grow into the world around us throughout our adult lives. All that we see and all we attempt to learn and do challenges our movement. Our bodies are in a constant state of change always striving for

harmony. Our bodies continue to grow and adapt to the world. As we grow, it is movement that allows us to have more strength, more energy, and more balance to continue this fairytale journey where almost anything is possible.

For most of us, anything is possible with this amazing network we call a body. The movement of the human body has fascinated me. As we grow, our patterns of movement develop in similar ways. Even so, we have the tendency to develop and follow our own pattern or our own "journey" of movement. Whether it is dance, music, sports, etc, there is a particular pattern that we tune into throughout our lives that carries our movement in a certain direction. Even so, our movement must have a foundation. This foundation is what allows harmony. It is a place within ourselves that allows us to remain "centered." This center is what we search for to carry out all the functions required of this amazing detailed and miraculous network we call the physical body.

## INTERVENTION

Rather than getting overly scientific in this article, I have chosen to reflect on common sense. The information in this article is evidence-based. Unfortunately, there is limited research on treatment programs for the complex older adult (COA). Most of the COAs we treat have multiple comorbidities and years of compensation and/or substitution tendencies. Because of this they have "misplaced" their original movement and ability to balance. Our responsibility is to help each patient rediscover this original movement pattern to bring light to the path of balance and overall physical harmony once again.

Years of observation and trial and error have led me to recognize the specific needs of the COA. The COA with the altered movement pattern (AMP) requires an individualized exercise program with focus on the weakest ar-