

Music, movement exercise can reduce falls risk: study

By Mary Gustafson

Seniors at an increased risk for falling who take part in classes involving music and rhythmic exercise may improve their balance and walking skills. As a added benefit, classes could help reduce the number of falls in this group, according to new research out of Switzerland.

More than 130 seniors were tested in walking and balance skills after taking part in a music-education program called Dalcroze eurhythmics. Participaants, all of whom had a history of problems with falls, fell fewer times over the test period. Greater improvements occurred in the test group that took the class once a week for six months. (A control group performed its normal activities for six month and did the exercises six months later.)

In a typical class, residents warm up by walking in place. Then they are encouraged to adapt body movements to keep up with the rhythm of improvised piano music.

Participants who took the classes in the first half of the study continued to show improvement in balance and walking ability six months after the study ended.

The findings suggest that social dancing or other activities that challenge balance and require continuous adjustments to the environment could have a positive effect on older adults, according to the lead researcher Dr. Andrea Trombetti. Results were reported in Nov. 22 edition of the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.