

BALANCE BASICS

Good balance is basic to all movement at the piano. As the lessons progress beyond Balance Basics, remind yourself first to check your student's balance. If your student is out of balance, changing other parts of the map will be far less effective.

To brace or not to brace

Can you remember the last time you saw someone fall, particularly someone who doesn't bounce right back up? It doesn't happen all that often, considering the amount of steps most people take in a day. Movement in the brain is organized around keeping us upright, no matter what our limitations may be. The brain works through our balance organs, located in our inner ears, and our kinesthetic sense *receptors*, located throughout muscles and *connective tissues*, to keep our faces out of the soup. The body responds with resilience to changes in the environment that might challenge our uprightness. This ability to respond to changes is an important aspect of the balance system.

Fundamentals: Moving freely is the result of moving from balance. A body that is chronically out of balance will have limitations, and the limitations show up as muscular tension. This kind of tension is called *bracing* because it prevents the body from falling.

EXPLORATION #1: What does bracing feel like?

Every time you move, your brain is busy figuring out how to do that safely.

1. Walk comfortably across the room. Notice how easy it is to do that without falling.
2. Stop walking in the middle of the room. Place both of your feet on the floor, and lean forward as far as you can before you feel like you might fall. What does that feel like?
3. Walk across the room again in your usual way. Stop walking, and place both of your feet on the floor. Lean backward as far as you can before you feel like you might fall. What does that feel like? Can you sense changes in certain parts of your body more than others? Do those changes feel like tension or extra work?
4. Repeat this lesson by leaning far to the left and then far to the right. Notice what changes happen.

Our muscles are designed to move us through space. If we are in danger of falling, some of those muscles will work hard to prevent us from falling. This work is called bracing. Notice if you brace when you play the piano.