



# Sitting Balance Scale

The Sitting Balance Scale is an 11-item ordinal assessment used to evaluate seated balance and postural control in individuals with limited mobility. It is particularly useful for adults with limited mobility, including individuals who are frail or primarily nonambulatory, and for those whose balance limitations may not be captured by standing or gait-based measures.

Performance on seated balance tasks provides insight into fall risk during reaching, transfers, and transitional movements.

## Instructions

The following equipment is required to administer the Sitting Balance Scale:

- Stopwatch
- 2-lb cuff weight
- Pen
- 12-inch ruler
- Lightweight object (e.g., slipper)
- Stable object approximately 3 to 3.5 inches in height
- Clipboard
- Foam pad (approximately 15" x 15" x 15")

## Procedure

Each activity is performed with the patient seated unsupported on a firm, stable surface unless otherwise specified. Feet should be positioned in a supported, weight-bearing position when applicable.

- One attempt is allowed per activity
- Provide clear instructions before each task
- Observe and document performance for each item
- Score performance according to the criteria listed for each activity
- If the full requirements for a score level are not met, assign the next lower score
- Guard the patient closely throughout testing and discontinue if safety concerns arise

## Scoring

Each item is scored on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from 0 to 4:

- **0** – Unable to perform safely
- **4** – Performs independently with good postural control

**Total possible score: 44**

Higher scores indicate better seated balance and postural control. Lower scores may reflect impaired postural control and increased fall risk. Results should be interpreted in conjunction with clinical judgment and the individual's overall functional presentation.

## Sitting Balance Scale Assessment

### Patient information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact information: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Sitting Balance Scale

## 1. Sitting unsupported (eyes open)

**Instructions:** Please sit upright with your arms folded across your chest and your feet flat on the floor. Maintain this position for 60 seconds without using your hands for support or leaning your back against a support surface.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Maintains upright sitting independently for 60 seconds with good postural control
- ☐ 3 – Maintains sitting for 60 seconds with supervision
- ☐ 2 – Maintains sitting independently for at least 30 seconds
- ☐ 1 – Maintains sitting independently for at least 10 seconds
- ☐ 0 – Unable to sit unsupported for 10 seconds

## 2. Sitting unsupported (eyes closed)

**Instructions:** Please sit upright with your eyes closed and your feet flat on the floor. Maintain this position for 30 seconds without using your hands for support.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Maintains sitting independently for 30 seconds with good postural control
- ☐ 3 – Maintains sitting for 30 seconds with supervision
- ☐ 2 – Maintains sitting independently for at least 10 seconds
- ☐ 1 – Maintains sitting independently for at least 3 seconds
- ☐ 0 – Unable to sit unsupported for 3 seconds

## 3. Sitting unsupported with arms as levers

**Instructions:** Begin with your hands resting in your lap. Cross your arms across your chest. If able, raise one arm forward to shoulder height while keeping the elbow straight. If able, repeat while holding a 2-lb weight. Use the unaffected arm if one side is impaired.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Maintains sitting while lifting a 2-lb weight to shoulder height
- ☐ 3 – Maintains sitting while lifting one arm to shoulder height without weight
- ☐ 2 – Maintains sitting with arms folded across the chest
- ☐ 1 – Maintains sitting with hands resting in the lap
- ☐ 0 – Requires hands placed on the support surface for balance

## 4. Reaching forward while sitting

**Instructions:** Make a fist and reach forward with your arm flexed to shoulder height and the elbow straight. Attempt to reach toward the target placed in front of you without losing balance.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Reaches forward more than 10 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 3 – Reaches forward more than 5 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 2 – Reaches forward more than 2 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 1 – Reaches forward with supervision
- ☐ 0 – Loses balance or requires external support



# Sitting Balance Scale

## 5. Picking up an object from the floor while sitting unsupported

**Instructions:** Reach down to pick up the object placed approximately 3 inches in front of your toes while remaining seated and unsupported.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Picks up the object independently without loss of balance
- ☐ 3 – Picks up the object with supervision
- ☐ 2 – Reaches within 1–2 inches of the object and maintains balance
- ☐ 1 – Attempts the task but requires supervision
- ☐ 0 – Unable to attempt or requires assistance to prevent loss of balance

## 6. Alternating foot placement while sitting unsupported

**Instructions:** Alternately place each foot on the elevated object positioned in front of you, completing a total of four repetitions per foot while maintaining seated balance.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Completes all repetitions independently within 20 seconds
- ☐ 3 – Completes all repetitions independently but requires more than 20 seconds
- ☐ 2 – Completes four total repetitions with supervision
- ☐ 1 – Completes more than two repetitions with minimal assistance
- ☐ 0 – Unable to attempt or requires assistance to prevent falling

## 7. Reaching laterally while sitting unsupported

**Instructions:** Make a fist and reach out to the side with your arm extended to shoulder height. Attempt to reach toward the target without losing balance.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Reaches laterally more than 10 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 3 – Reaches laterally more than 5 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 2 – Reaches laterally more than 2 inches without loss of balance
- ☐ 1 – Reaches laterally with supervision
- ☐ 0 – Loses balance when attempting the task or requires external support

## 8. Turning to look behind over each shoulder while sitting

**Instructions:** Turn your head and trunk to look directly behind you over one shoulder, then repeat on the opposite side while maintaining seated balance.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Turns fully to both sides with appropriate weight shift
- ☐ 3 – Turns fully to one side with reduced weight shift to the other
- ☐ 2 – Turns partially while maintaining balance
- ☐ 1 – Requires supervision while turning
- ☐ 0 – Requires assistance to prevent loss of balance



# Sitting Balance Scale

## 9. Lateral trunk flexion in sitting

**Instructions:** Bend sideways to bring your elbow toward the surface beside you, then return to an upright seated position. Repeat on both sides.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Completes the movement smoothly on both sides
- ☐ 3 – Completes approximately two-thirds of the movement or has difficulty returning upright
- ☐ 2 – Completes approximately one-third of the movement or only on one side
- ☐ 1 – Initiates the movement but requires assistance
- ☐ 0 – Unable to complete the movement

## 10. Sit-to-stand transfer

**Instructions:** Stand up from the seated position, attempting to avoid using your hands for support if possible.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Transfers safely with minimal use of hands
- ☐ 3 – Transfers safely with verbal cues or supervision
- ☐ 2 – Transfers with assistance from one person
- ☐ 1 – Transfers with assistance from two people
- ☐ 0 – Unable to transfer or requires a mechanical lift

## 11. Picking up an object from the floor while sitting on foam

**Instructions:** While seated on the foam pad with your feet flat on the floor, reach down to pick up the object placed in front of your toes.

**Scoring:**

- ☐ 4 – Picks up the object independently without loss of balance
- ☐ 3 – Picks up the object with supervision
- ☐ 2 – Reaches within 1–2 inches of the object and maintains balance
- ☐ 1 – Attempts the task but requires supervision
- ☐ 0 – Unable to attempt or requires assistance to prevent falling

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ /44

**Disclaimer:** This assessment is intended for use by licensed healthcare professionals as part of a comprehensive clinical evaluation. It should not be used in isolation to diagnose balance disorders or predict falls.

**Reference:** Medley A, Thompson M. Development, reliability, and validity of the Sitting Balance Scale. *Physiother Theory Pract.* 2011 Oct;27(7):471-81. doi: 10.3109/09593985.2010.531077. Epub 2011 May 15. PMID: 21574772.

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