

Expanded Guide: How to Perform the Berg Balance Scale

The Berg Balance Scale (BBS) is a 14-item test designed to evaluate a person's ability to maintain balance during a series of predetermined tasks that reflect real-life functional movements. Each item is scored on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from 0 (unable) to 4 (independent and safe). The maximum total score is 56, and lower scores indicate greater fall risk.

Before You Begin: Setup and Equipment

- A standard-height armless chair
- A stopwatch or timer
- A ruler or measuring tape
- A step or stool (approx. 20 cm or 8 inches)
- An object to pick up (e.g., slipper or pen)
- A flat, quiet, and safe testing environment

Instructions for the Patient:

- Encourage the patient to wear comfortable shoes and use their regular mobility aids.
- Explain each task clearly before asking them to begin.
- Always prioritize safety — stay close to prevent falls but avoid assisting unless needed.

Tasks 1–14: Each task includes instructions, scoring tips, and safety notes. See full blog for detailed breakdown.

Scoring:

- Each task is scored from 0 (cannot perform) to 4 (normal performance)
- Total Maximum Score: 56
- Document observations immediately using the score sheet

Interpretation:

41–56: Independent (Low fall risk)

21–40: Walking with assistance (Moderate fall risk)

0–20: Wheelchair bound or severe imbalance (High fall risk)

Clinical Tips:

- Be consistent with test conditions
- Prioritize safety
- Use a second person to spot high-risk patients
- Document clearly
- Consider factors like fatigue, time of day, or medication