Benefits of Functional Training



Functional training has gained increasing popularity in the fitness industry with focus on exercising and loading the body in functional movement patterns over the more traditional isolated exercises and machines. Functional movement patterns replicate normal day to day movements, loading the body in the way that it was designed to.

We all want the aesthetics right? Tight thighs and bum, six pack, lean muscle and a low body fat percentage. What if you could have that plus more? Functional training provides aesthetic benefits combined with efficiency of movement, decreased injury risk and improved athletic performance. There is a time and place for certain clients or athletes who require machines and isolated training. The fitness industry is moving away from standard gyms, machines and bodybuilding with growth in specialised training facilities, movement academies, calisthenics and gymnastic based movements.

Naturally, exercise involves movement although most people have lost the ability to move correctly. Sitting at desks in front of computers causes muscle imbalances, poor posture, and, subsequently, bad movement patterns during exercise..... They say sitting is the new smoking!! To then top it off people are going to most standard gyms after sitting at a desk all day to then only sit again on a piece of equipment and work on an isolated muscle group doing a movement that isn't a necessity in staying healthy in everyday life. As a result, you won't get as much out of your workouts and injury becomes a common factor. Instead of being stuck in straight forward motion, it's time to get moving the way the body was designed to, in a range of different angles and planes of movement. Functional training bases many exercises on the fundamentals such as run, jump, climb, crawl, twist, shift, push and pull.

There is strong evidence supporting the connection between movement and learning. Evidence from imaging sources, anatomical studies and clinical data shows that movement and exercise enhances cognitive processing. We need to better allocate recourses to harness the hidden power of movement, sport and exercise. This attitude has become more and more prevalent among scientists who study the brain. It's time for educators and fitness professionals to catch on!!

We all have very similar biological blue prints as humans. As a movement specialist, I view the body as a tensegrity; we are made up of bones, muscles, connective tissue, nervous system and joints. With true functional movement, the body must adapt to a wide range of different forces, loads and challenges to make it fluid in motion. This takes both muscular strength as well as cognitive processing in the brain, to co-ordinate and control this strength. Learning a new skill activates large areas of the brain that might be dormant in everyday life. Neuroscientists have shown that the enzymes released in the brain while learning a new skill, improves the function and processing power of the brain. Why not make sure you exercise your brain and your body at the same time!

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The reality of being time poor makes it important to get the most out of your exercise routines. On average we exercise only 1 hour in the day and on average 3 times per week, which isn't much considering there are 168 hours in a week. To get better bang for your buck you need to be doing full body workouts that challenge your brain and don't involve sitting on a piece of equipment and isolate one or small muscle groups per exercise.

Get into some form of functional exercise even for a couple of hours a week, put down your smart phone, step away from the computer and avoid the mundane machines and isolated exercises most people are still doing. One quick tip would be to master some bodyweight exercises and then add resistance to these movements including Dumbells, Kettlebells, Suspension Trainers (TRX) and more.

Movement based therapies are now widely accepted as the biggest healers. As with all forms of exercise, make sure with any training you avoid pain but use discomfort, load or stress, in controlled levels, as a gauge to know the body is working to its full potential, the way it's designed to.

It's time to get FITTER, FASTER, STRONGER in half the time and with less injuries or long term damage to joints and soft tissue.

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Guest Article by Ian McCoy of Urban Training Ground

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