

Week Ten

Functional exercise has long history of success

Joe Ferry

Last week, we explored the role functional nutrition has played in my quest to lose fat, build muscle and get into shape. In case you missed it, in a nutshell, functional nutrition involves looking at the body's nutritional requirements from a historical and anthropological viewpoint, how it processes food, and the impact modern lifestyles have on it.

This week, we're taking a look at the role functional exercise plays in a fitness program. Just like functional nutrition, functional exercise has its roots going back thousands of years to a time when the human body was adapting to its surroundings.

Now 10 weeks into my "Farewell to Fat" program, I'm feeling great. I'm down six pounds from my starting weight of 246 pounds, although Fernando Paredes, my personal trainer, believes I've probably lost a lot more than that and gained additional muscle. I know one thing: I feel great, my clothes are falling off me, and I have more energy than ever. Maybe it's my imagination, but I also feel like I'm thinking more clearly and handle stress better.

I suppose it's possible. Fernando, who is guiding me through this regimen, likes to remind me that the ancient Greeks believed physical fitness was a key to mental performance. The whole "sound mind, sound body" philosophy.

By the way, we've decided to extend this series by two weeks. I had a "breakthrough" of sorts at Week Six, so Fernando decided we should call that the halfway point. Works for me.

After a recent workout, I sat down with Fernando, the owner of Fusion Fitness Studio in Doylestown, to tap into his vast knowledge of the matter of functional exercise.

Q. A constant theme in our conversations has been the benefits of



functional exercise. Can you explain what that is and why it is such an integral part of a fitness program?

A. The short answer is that functional exercise is training the body according to how it functions. Total-body movement-based exercise working the upper body simultaneously with the lower body, with the core as the go-between.

To understand why that is important, you need to understand how and why the body functions the way it does. This will tell us what type of exercise it will respond to best.

First, we need to look at the origins and history of exercise. As an agrarian society for thousands of year, life was physically demanding. Life was exercise! We worked the land and chased animals for food. Sometimes, the animals chased us! Life was dangerous...that's why the average lifespan was only 35 or 40 years.

The point is, our bodies were always in motion. We were walking, running, hitting, farming, dragging, carrying, lifting, pushing, pulling, swimming and throwing. What they all have in common is that they are total body movements. Life was hard back then. That's why the average lifespan was only 35 of 40 years.

That being said, because of this volatile, physically-demanding way of life that existed for thousands of

years, our physiology adapted to the "fight or flight" response. When the body sensed danger, it had to respond in one of two ways: either stay and fight or run away very fast. Regardless of which option we chose, the body would release a cascade of hormones that gave us extraordinary strength or speed, and the ability to block out pain.

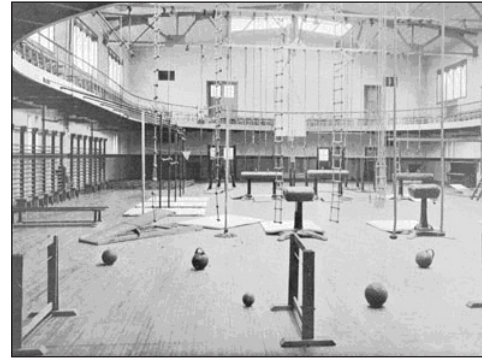
Q. So when did we start engaging in what today we call "exercise?"

A. There are historical records dating to 700 BCE that indicate athletes of day took part in special training, both physically and nutritionally, to prepare for competition. There is a story of one Olympic athlete who routinely ate 20 pounds of meat and a few pieces of bread every day for months leading up to his events. Maybe that was the original high-protein, low-carb diet.

Their workouts almost exclusively involved total body movements: pushups, pullups, dragging, lifting, pulling and squatting. This type of total-body movement-based exercise that taxed strength, balance and core stability was the norm and the only method used until about 1900 CE.

Q. So what does that have to do with the way we exercise today?

A. Everything, Joe! Believe it or not, our bodies still respond to exercise the same way we did thousands of years ago. We are no different genetically from humans who lived 5,000 years ago. If that is the type of exercise our bodies grew accustomed to, that is what our bodies understand. If the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, those in ancient China and India, even the old-time body builders of the 19th and early 20th centuries, were able to achieve remarkable muscular strength and development with full-body workouts and functional exercise methods, it will still work for us today better than anything out there.



The college of the City of New York gym, circa 1927. "If all gyms used to look like this...why did they change? I'll tell you why" says Paredes.

Functional exercise is in our genes!

Q. When did the approach to exercise change? Why did we get away from total body workout and move toward training specific body parts, such as last legs or arms or chest?

A. The "modern" concept of exercise started in the 1940s among a small group of body builders who looked at exercise in a different way. After building their bodies using functional methods, now they were looking to put the finishing touches and refine each individual muscle group. To do this, they developed specific machines to work those specific body parts. Machines that required you to sit down and exercise specific areas of the body.

Here's the problem: since this new method of exercise was developed by advanced body builders for advanced body builders looking to refine and put the finishing touches on their physiques, it was never meant to be a stand-alone system!

Q. So why is it that many trainers and fitness centers don't teach func-

tional exercise?

A. That's the million-dollar question. During the 1970s through the 1990s, which I call "The Rise of the Machines," exercise machines took over the fitness world. It was at about this time that the average Joe and Jane started to make their way to the fitness centers.

The average person blindly followed those modern concepts because they think that's the way it is done. But average Joe and Jane looking to get fit or lose fat doesn't have the proper foundation for that advanced form of

exercise. Neither would they want to, unless they dream of becoming a competitive body builder.

Trainers taught the machine approach because it was easy...just put them in the machine, tell them to push or pull, and walk away. "No function, no instruction," I like to say.

Q. Ok, so we don't get as much physical activity as our ancestors and a lot of people don't exercise the right way. What's the bottom line?

A. The bottom line is that we are seeing the ever-growing problems that sedentary lifestyles, poor nutrition and ignoring the original functional method of exercise is causing. More and more overweight and obese people and orthopedic problems abound. Even in performing everyday activities, people are experiencing severe back, knee, shoulder and hip problems.

The evidence shows that our ancestors were extremely strong, lean, agile and robust. A far cry from humans living today, wouldn't you agree?

(Next week: Functional Exercise, Part II)

Bob Staranowicz: Veterans' Corner

Take time to say "thank you" on Memorial Day

As Memorial Day approaches, many of our thoughts go to the men and women who have served and died for our country.

Unfortunately in the past month, Doylestown and America have lost two of its finest. 1st Lieutenant Travis Manion and 1st Lieutenant Colby Umbrell were killed in Iraq.

Travis Manion was hit by a sniper's bullet in Anbar Province on April 29. Colby Umbrell was killed by a roadside bomb near Musayyib on May 3. Both men were a young

26 and they both grew up in Doylestown Township.

Although they did not know each other, they had so much in common. They were athletes; Colby a football player and Travis a wrestler and lacrosse player. They were both good students and natural leaders. They died doing what they believed in – a commitment to bringing stability to Iraq.

Both men were honored in a candlelight vigil in Doylestown on May 4 with a crowd of about 500. On May 16, there was a special ceremony at Central Bucks East High

School – Colby's Alma Mater – in his honor.

It is a noble idea that we remember the fallen, and I want to recognize Ginny Kownurko and Principal Joseph Jennelle for organizing the Colby tribute.

Like Colby and Travis, many men and women have given their lives for their country. Many have returned from war, scarred both mentally and physically. Many still share their brotherhood by joining veterans organizations.

Being a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post

175 and Vietnam Veterans of America Post 210, I have experienced this brotherhood firsthand. Although it took me a long time to decide to join such an organization, I am proud and honored to be a member of one of the oldest VFWs in the United States.

I will write more about Post 175 next month and give a brief history and examples of some of the good this organization does for veterans and their families.

In the meantime, as you enjoy your barbeque with friends and family, or if you are

just enjoying the holiday, take some time this Memorial Day by remembering what impact veterans have had on this country. Your veterans have provided the privileges, liberties and freedoms that you enjoy today.

If you are in the area, come out to the Doylestown Memorial Day Parade, or any other function in your area that honors veterans, and wave, applaud or just smile as a veteran group passes by.

Veterans ask for little, but they have given so much. Take time to say "thank you."

Susan Charkes: Nature's Way

To see the world in a grain of pollen

As often as I can in spring-time, I try to go out of my way to arrange an intimate encounter with a tree.

Trees are the largest life forms that most of us will ever meet up close. They tower over us and reach invisibly underneath, usurping the sky above and ground below. Their scale can be intimidating. And en masse, they invite awe. Atop the canopies of forest interiors, tree branches soar like cathedral trusses, inviting introspection and contemplation.

But where trees need not grow only straight and tall to reach the light, they meet us at our own height. Lining mountain streams and reaching out from the woods' edge, standing solitary watch in old fields, guarding parking lots and shading the middle school softball

team's grandparents, trees extend their branches like welcoming arms.

Here the catkins reach down low enough to touch – to run your hand through, or bury your face in. The flowers skip across your skin like tiny dancers, tingling and tickling. Strands of red silk, strings of tawny pearls, spikes of jade-yellow fuzz: maple, oak and willow flowers feel as different as they look, shimmering, fluttering, dipping in the sun-heated breeze.

As the wind blows, the air fills with millions upon millions of investments – almost all of which end up lost. Each catkin is a flower studded with florets, and each floret holds a cache of pollen that it casts into the air. Breathe in. Whether you seek out a spring fling with a tree or, like my son, prefer to trim a

clothes tree in season, if you are alive to inhale, you can't help but have your own close encounter with a tree.

Of all these innumerable pollen grains, most miss their mark, and a great many of those lodge in eyes, throats and lungs, where their journey ends with a sneeze. If you're unfortunate enough to be hypersensitive to pollen, their presence will trigger an immune response, escalating the mild, irritated sneeze to a histamine-fueled battle that does neither trees nor humans any good. This is intimacy of a different order, but a necessary implication of the system that trees have devised to spread their kind as far as possible. Allergies are collateral damage in a tree's empire-building campaign.

For these great beings

depend, as equally as do the smallest of us, on minute packages of genetic material for their reproduction. Throwing caution to the wind, a grain of tree pollen grain launches from the male catkin with only the remotest hope of accomplishing its mission.

Somewhere out there is a sticky female flower. On maples, it dresses in brazen red; on oaks it hides shyly in the crook of the leaf bud; on willows, it hides in plain sight on catkins nearly identical to the male flowers. In the unlikely event that one of the billions of pollen grains lands on a stigma, and that the female accepts the pollination offer (usually, a tree rejects not only its own pollen, but also the pollen of other species), fertilization will follow.

Of course that doesn't end the story; the seeds or nuts produced by fertilization still have to be dispersed, germinate and grow to maturity – a process that the tree has no control over. It depends instead on wind, water, and even autonomous agents such as seed-eating or nut-caching animals.

The odds against any single pollen grain developing into a tree that reproduces itself are astronomical. Is this a system that any rational being would have devised?

An encounter with a tree flower is a glimpse into the madness that binds the unmerciful randomness of the universe together into what we call hope. This is the grand unifying force. No wonder its touch tingles, like electricity.

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