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How To Make Your Workouts Functional and Dynamic



Put the “fun” in functional with workouts to build strength and prevent injury in everyday life.

In today’s fitness landscape, many individuals are shifting away from traditional gym routines in favor of functional and dynamic workouts. These approaches emphasize movements that improve real-world strength, mobility, and coordination while keeping sessions engaging and effective.

Fitness is evolving beyond just lifting heavy or chasing aesthetics. The focus is shifting toward building a body and mind that are adaptable, resilient, and ready for life. Over the years, I’ve been a collegiate athlete, and participant in extreme sports. Along the way, injuries taught me to ask deeper questions about strength, speed, and durability—and how to achieve them sustainably.

Training should feel like recess for adults—a chance to move, play, and grow stronger for everyday life. This starts with the mind: “The brain leads, and the body follows.” By controlling your movements and recruiting the appropriate muscles, you build the foundation for functional strength and injury prevention.

Functional workouts improve your ability to perform everyday activities efficiently and safely. They develop real-world strength, mobility, and coordination. Here’s how to make your workouts functional and dynamic:

Engage Multiple Muscle Groups With Real-Life Movements

Functional exercises mimic the motions you perform daily—like bending, twisting, reaching, and lifting—while engaging multiple muscle groups and joints simultaneously. This combination improves strength, coordination, and efficiency, making these exercises both practical and effective.

For example:

- Picking Up Objects: Deadlifts and squats replicate lifting heavy items while working your legs, core, and back.
- Rotational Movements: Medicine ball throws or cable chops mimic turning motions, engaging your obliques.

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- Carrying and Balancing: Farmer's carries train grip strength, core stability, and shoulder endurance, preparing you for tasks like carrying groceries.

By practicing these exercises, you not only build strength but also train your body to handle real-life demands with fluidity and power.

Move in Every Direction: Multiplanar Movement

Most gym exercises occur in a single plane of motion, like forward and backward (sagittal plane). However, daily activities require movement in multiple planes. Multiplanar exercises incorporate training in all three planes:

- Sagittal Plane: Forward and backward movements like squats and deadlifts.
- Frontal Plane: Side-to-side movements like lateral lunges or lateral band walks.
- Transverse Plane: Rotational movements like medicine ball throws, cable chops, or multi-directional planks.

Training in multiple planes prepares your body for real-life actions like twisting, stepping sideways, or reaching in different directions, improving balance and reducing injury risk.

Incorporate Unilateral Exercises to Balance Asymmetry

Unilateral exercises—those that work one side of the body at a time—are crucial for improving balance, coordination, and addressing muscle imbalances. Exercises like single-leg Romanian deadlifts, Bulgarian split squats, and single-arm kettlebell presses challenge your stability while preventing over-reliance on your dominant side.

Addressing asymmetries helps build strength with better symmetry, allowing you to create force more evenly and efficiently.

Prioritize Core Stability

Your core is the foundation of functional training, supporting balance and stability in all movements. Instead of isolating your abs, focus on exercises like plank variations and kettlebell windmills that engage your entire core while improving posture. Core stability enhances your ability to perform compound exercises and supports everyday tasks like lifting and twisting with control.

Add Dynamic Elements

Dynamic exercises improve power, agility, and cardiovascular health while keeping your workouts exciting. Include plyometric moves like box jumps or skater hops to build explosive strength, and add sled pushes or battle rope drills to test your endurance.

Mobility: A Long-Term Investment in Movement

Mobility exercises improve your range of motion and joint health, ensuring you can move freely without pain. Drills like hip circles, CARs (Controlled Articular Rotations), and dynamic stretches like walking lunges or arm swings help reduce rigidity.

Incorporating mobility drills enhances your range of motion, improving muscle contractions during lengthening and shortening phases around each joint. This results in added strength and better injury prevention.

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Have Fun and Stay Consistent

Training should add to your life, not stress you out. Choose movements you enjoy and remember that consistency matters more than perfection. Celebrate your effort, and be proud of the work you're doing to become stronger, inside and out.

By focusing on real-life movements, multiplanar training, core stability, compound exercises, and mobility, you're setting yourself up for success—not just in the gym but in life. Fitness isn't just about lifting heavier—it's about creating a body that moves, feels, and performs at its best, now and for the long run.

Coach Shane's Top 3 Functional Exercises

As a trainer and coach, I focus on movements that translate directly to real life. Functional exercises aren't just about building strength in the gym—they're about creating a body that's prepared for the challenges of everyday life. Here are my top three functional exercises:

- Deadlifts
 - Why it's functional: The deadlift is one of the most foundational movements for real-world strength. It mimics the action of picking up heavy objects and strengthens your hamstrings, glutes, lower back, and core. It's not just about building muscle—it's about teaching your body to move safely and efficiently.
 - How it helps in life: Whether you're lifting a heavy box, a child, or groceries, deadlifts prepare your body to handle those tasks without risking injury to your back.
- Farmer's Carries
 - Why it's functional: Carrying weights in each hand might seem simple, but it's incredibly effective. Farmer's carries work your grip strength, shoulders, core, and legs while challenging your balance and stability.
 - How it helps in life: Think about how often you're carrying something heavy—groceries, suitcases, or even furniture. This exercise strengthens your ability to stabilize under load and makes carrying those items feel effortless.
- Lunges (All Directions)
 - Why it's functional: Lunges are incredibly versatile because they can be performed in all planes of motion. They strengthen your legs, glutes, and core while improving balance, mobility, and coordination.
 - How it helps in life: Whether you're stepping forward, sideways, or twisting to reach for something, lunges prepare your body for those movements. They also help you recover from slips or stabilize yourself when navigating uneven terrain.

These exercises are my go-to for building strength that's practical and transferable to everyday life. They've helped me and my clients move better, feel stronger, and avoid injury—not just in the gym, but in the real world.