

THE SECRETS TO BODY
OPTIMISATION

MOVEMENT
& EXERCISE

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ALL YOU NEED IS 10 MINUTES AND VIRTUALLY NO EQUIPMENT



THE REAL (AND SURPRISING) REASONS HEALTHY MOVEMENT MATTERS.

It's not about busting your ass to get a gym body. It's about being capable, confident, and free.

To most people, healthy movement = exercise. As in cardio, crunches, and fitness models. But moving your body is about so much more, like improved thinking, stronger relationships, and expressing your purpose in life.

When most people hear healthy movement, they think exercise or fitness or looking better or weight loss.

Sometimes, vanity.

Often, fitting into social norms.

“The man” telling you what to do (or how to be).

Moral righteousness packaged as 6am Hot Detox Spin Pump class or an entire weekend of Instagram-worthy self-punishment.

But healthy movement is actually more interesting, liberating, and, frankly, crucial than all that.

In my years as a health and fitness coach, here’s the most important thing I’ve discovered: Developing a body that moves well is the ticket to a place where you feel — finally — capable, confident, and free.

We are all, literally, born to move.

It’s no secret: Human life has become structured in a way that makes it very easy to avoid movement.

We sit in cars on the way to work. At work we sit at our desks for much of the day. Then we come home and sit down to relax.

That’s not what our bodies are built for, so creaky knees, stiff backs, and “I can’t keep up with my toddler!” have become the norm.

Sure, if you can’t move well, it may be a sign that you aren’t as healthy as you could be. But the quality and quantity of your daily movement — your strength and agility — are actually markers for something much more important.

In my line of work, you watch a lot of people lose a lot of weight. The results would shock you — and I'm not talking about how they look on the beach in their bathing suits (although there is always a big celebration for that).

Most often, the thing people are most excited about after they go from heavy and stiff to lean and agile is this feeling that they're now living better. They notice they're:

- more energetic and young-feeling,
- able to do things they've been putting off for years,
- empowered,
- proud of their lifestyle, and
- free from many of the anxieties and limitations that held them back for so long.

They're happier, but not just because they wanted to look better, and now they do. They're happier because their bodies now work like they're supposed to. They can now do things they know they ought to be able to do.

As humans, we move our bodies to express our wants, needs, emotions, thoughts, and ideas. Ultimately, how well we move — and how much we move — determines how well we engage with the world and establish our larger purpose in life.

If you move well, you also think, feel, and live well.

It's proven that healthy movement helps us:

- Feel well, physically and emotionally
- Function productively
- Think, learn, and remember
- Interact with the world

- Communicate and express ourselves
- Connect and build relationships with others

We don't need “workouts” to move.

Shocking secret: There's nothing magic about a resistance circuit, the bootcamp class at your gym, or the latest branded training method.

Our ancestors didn't need to “work out” when they were walking, climbing, running, crawling, swimming, clambering, hauling, digging, squatting, throwing, and carrying things to survive. Nor did they need an “exercise class” when they ran to get places, danced to share stories or celebrate rituals, or simply... played.

“Working out” is just an artificial way to get us to do what our bodies have, for most of human history, known and loved — regular movements we lost and forgot as we matured as a species.

We may not hunt for dinner anymore, and we may opt for the elevator more often than not.

We may move less. But movement is still programmed into the human brain as a critical aspect of how we engage with the world.

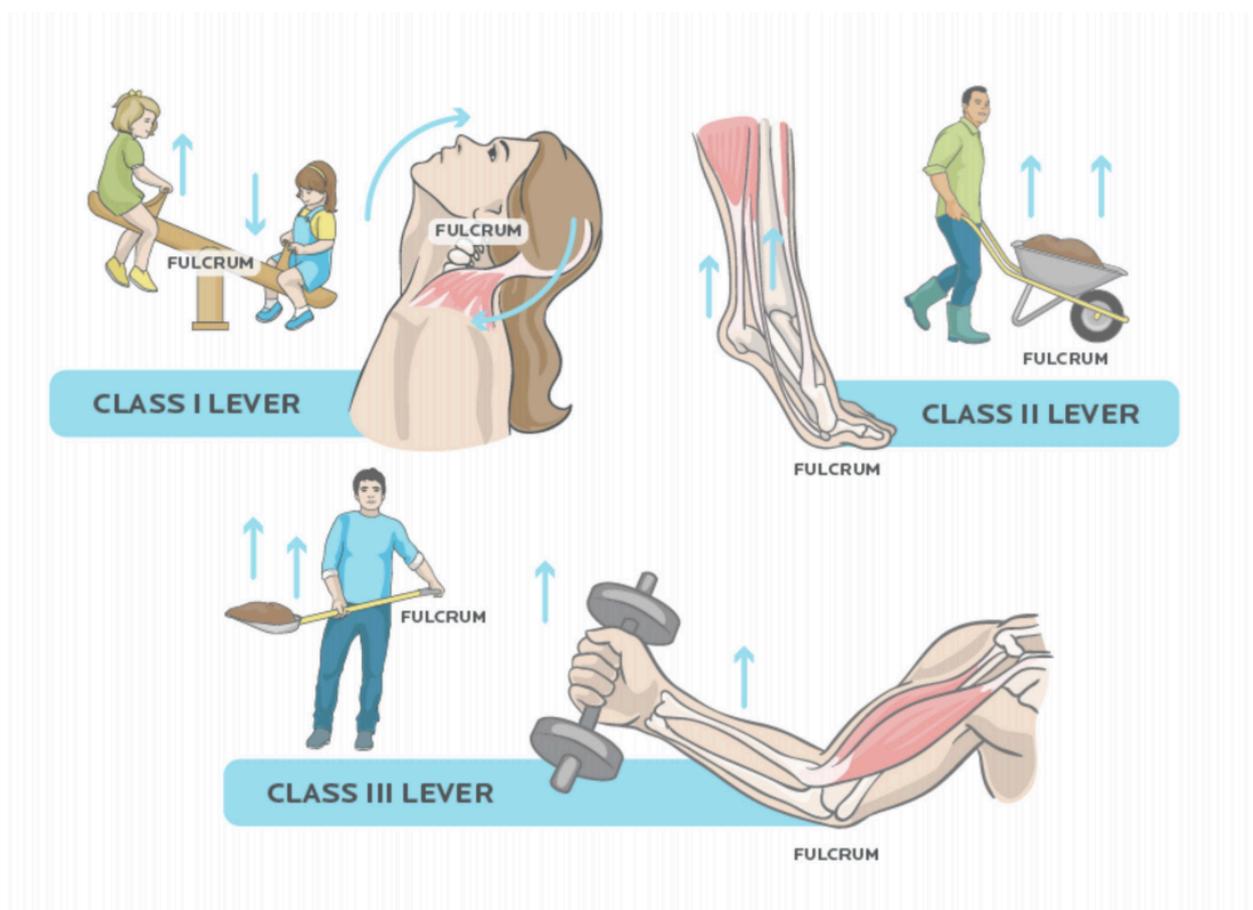
Therefore, to *not* move is a loss much, much greater than your pant size.

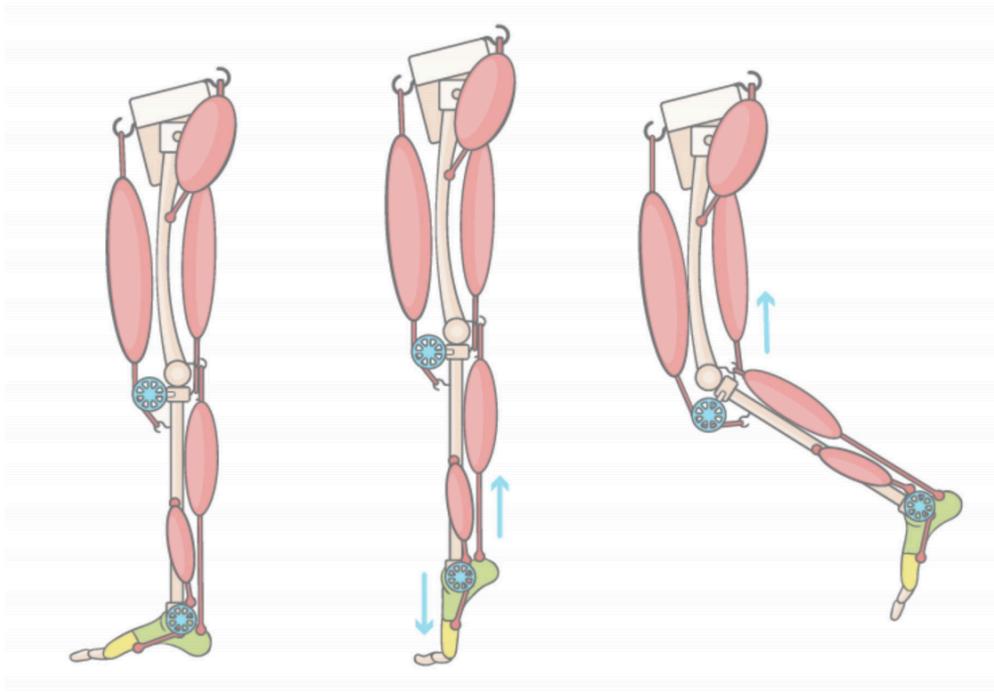
What are the factors that determine how your body moves?

While there are universal human movement patterns, our specific movement habits are unique to us, and to our individual bioengineering.

Basically, the human body amounts to a sophisticated pile of interconnected levers:

- Muscles are attached to bones with tendons.
- These tendons connect to two (or more) bones across a joint.
- When a muscle contracts, or shortens, the tendons pull on the bone.
- That contraction and pull causes the joint to flex (bend) or extend (straighten).





How you move is determined by the size, shape and position of all of those parts, along with anything that adds weight, like body fat.

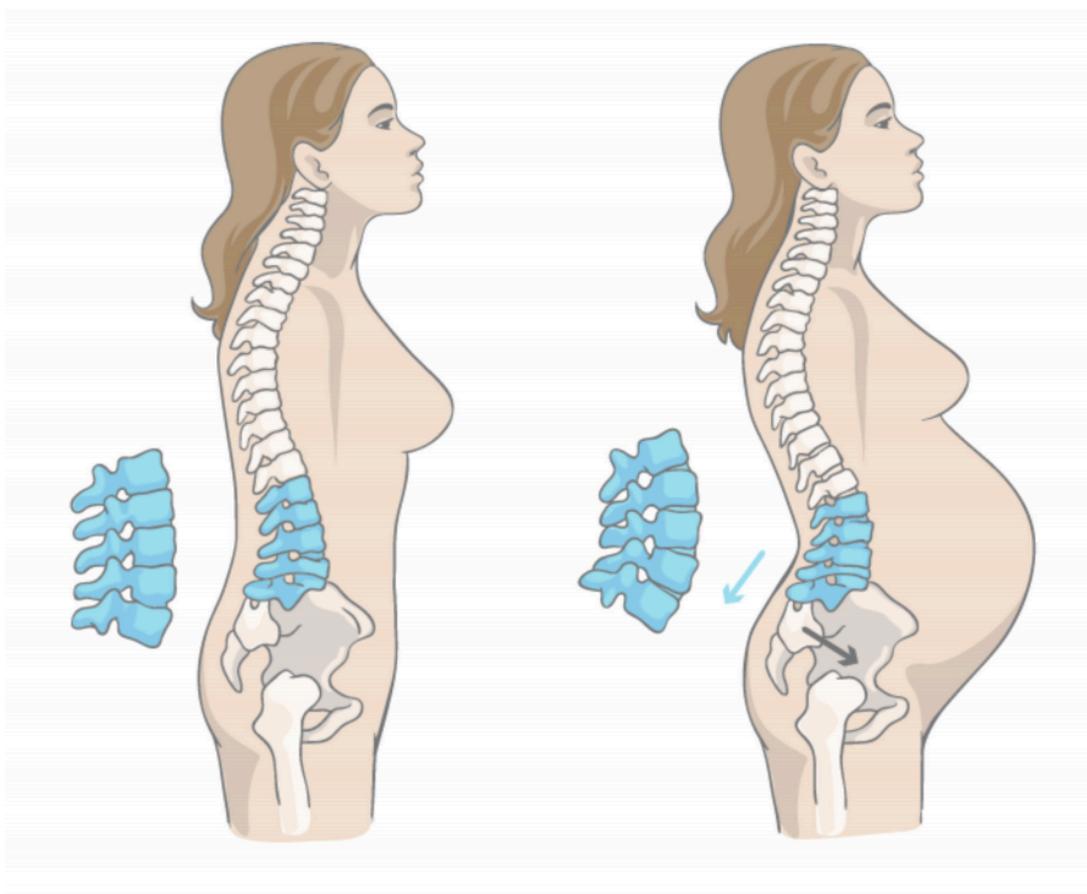
If you're a **tall person with long bones** it may be harder for you to bench press, squat, or deadlift the amount of weight your shorter buddy can, because your range of motion is much bigger than your friend's, so you have to move that weight a longer distance with much longer levers.

(This is why there aren't many super-tall weightlifters or powerlifters, and why great bench pressers usually have a big ribcage and stubby T-Rex arms.)

But you can probably spank your short friend at swimming, climbing, and running.

If you're **bottom-heavy and/or shorter**, you may not be able to run as fast as your taller friend. But you may have exceptional balance.

If you've **gained weight in your middle (or if you're pregnant)**, you may have back pain. That's because the extra belly weight pulls downward on the lumbar spine (lower back).



When the lumbar spine is pulled down and forward (“lordosis”):

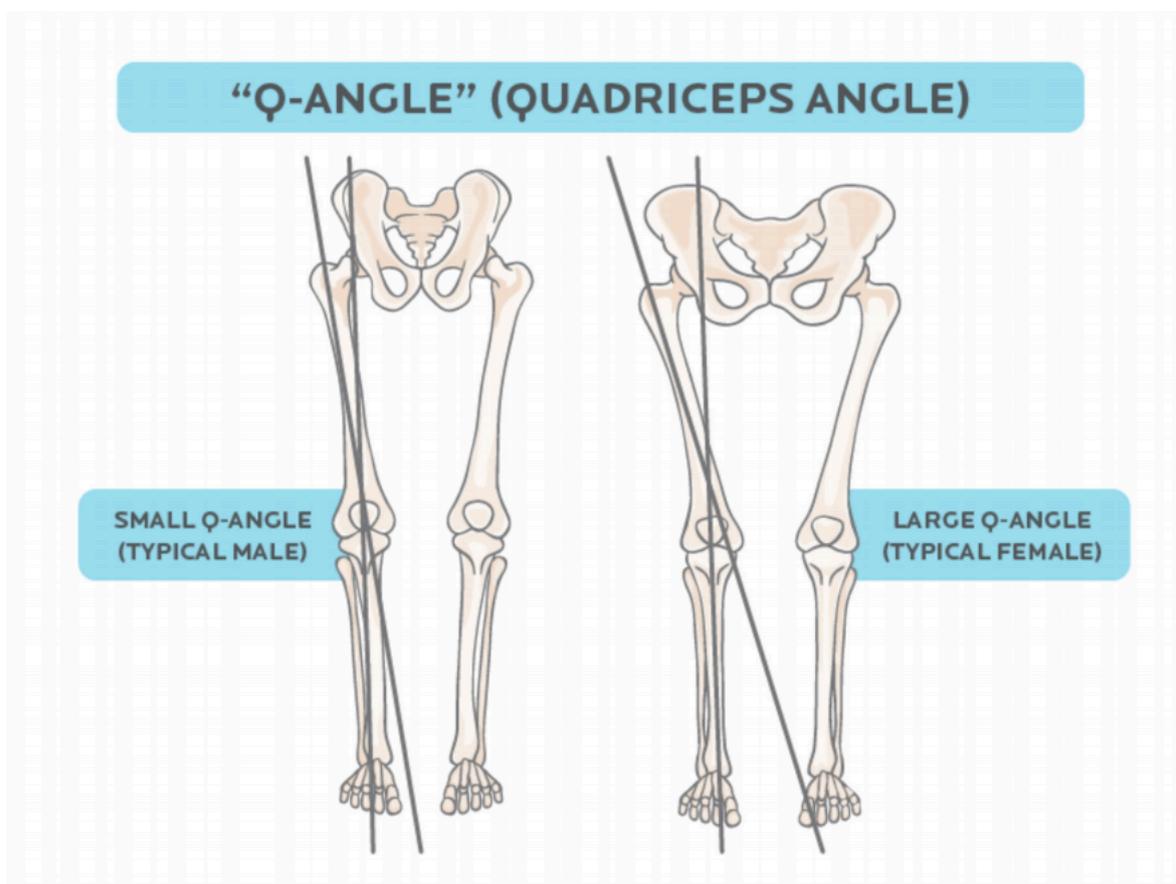
- The pelvis also tips forward (“anterior pelvic tilt”), which pokes the tailbone back and the belly forward — aka Donald Duck Butt.
- The upper/mid back may round to compensate (“kyphosis”).

The downward pull can also affect all the joints below (the pelvis, hip, knee, and ankle).

Conversely, it also works in the opposite direction, where, say, ankle stiffness can affect movement in the lower back.

If you have **wider shoulders** (“biacromial width”), then you have a longer lever arm, which means you can potentially throw, pull, swim or hit better.

If you have **longer legs**, then you have longer stride, which means you can potentially run faster. This is especially true if you also have **narrower hips**, which create a more vertical femur angle (“Q-angle”), allowing you to waste less energy controlling pelvic rotation.



Some variations in movement, we are given by nature and evolution. Other variations, we learn and practice.

If you’re a woman who’s **top-heavy**, you may have developed a hunch in your thoracic spine (upper and mid-back), whether from the physical weight of your breasts or from the social awkwardness of being The Girl With Boobs in middle school.

Or, if you got **really tall at an early age**, you may have developed a habitual hunch to hide your size or communicate with fellow hobbits.

Yet the structural engineering remains important. Especially if we understand how our structures and physical makeup affect our movements.

For instance:

Body fat and weight change how we move.

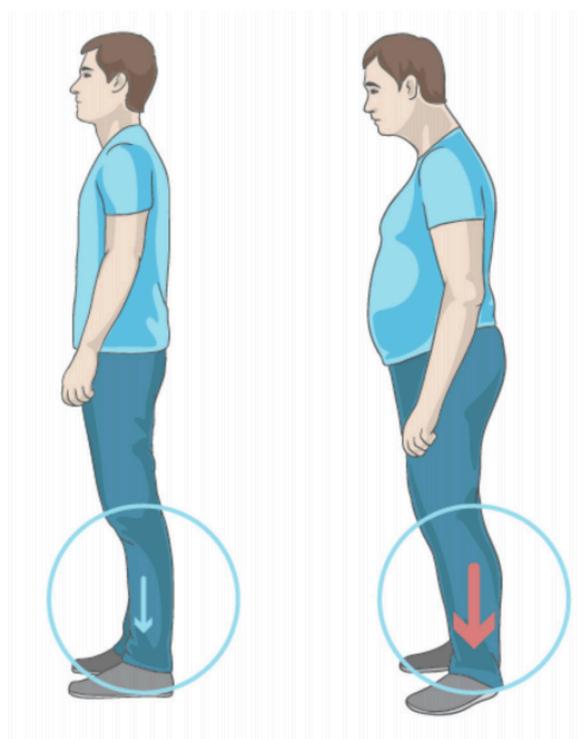
This is especially true if you don't have enough muscle to drive the engine.

At a healthy weight, your center of mass is just in front of your ankle joints when you stand upright.

However, the more mass you have, especially if you have extra weight in front, the harder your lower legs and feet have to work to keep you from tipping forward.

This puts additional torque (rotational force) on ankle joints.

Once you start walking — which is, essentially, a controlled forward fall — you have to work even harder to compensate.



Any unstable or changing surface (stairs, ice, fluffy carpet, a wet floor), requires your lower joints to adjust powerfully and almost instantaneously — literally millisecond to millisecond.

As a result, obese children and adults fall more often.

Human bodies are amazingly adaptable and clever, but nevertheless, physics can be an unforgiving master.

The good news is that this is generally reversible.

No matter where you're starting, the more you move, the better your body will function.

When we move:

- our muscles contract;
- we load our connective tissues and bones;
- we increase our respiration and circulation; and
- we release particular hormones and cell signals.

All of these (and a variety of other physiological processes) tell our bodies to use its raw materials and the food we eat in certain ways.

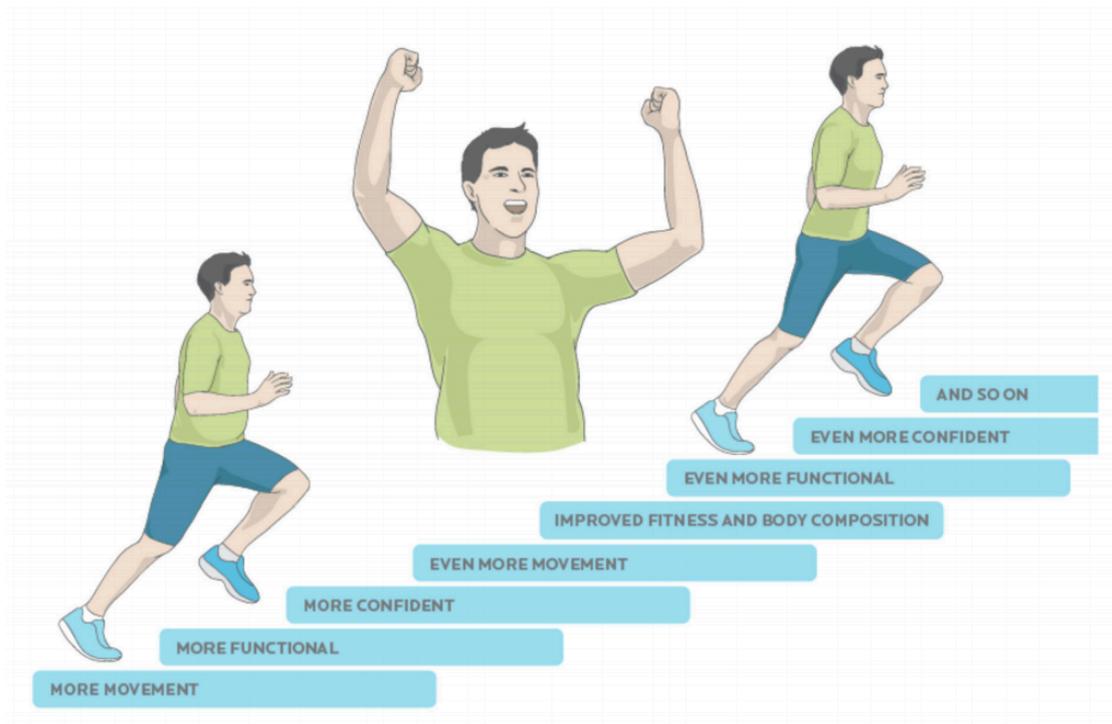
For instance, movement tells our bodies:

- to retrieve stored energy (e.g. fat or glucose) and use it;
- to store any extra energy in muscles, or use it for repair, rather than storing it as fat;
- to strengthen tissues such as muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones; and
- to clear out accumulated waste products.

And improved body functions ensure you'll be able to move well and:

- climb stairs or hills
- step over obstacles
- carry groceries
- stand up from sitting down, or get up from the floor
- grasp and hold objects like a hammer
- pull or drag things like a heavy door or garbage can
- walk an excitable dog

The more we can do confidently and capably, the fitter we'll be. Even better, that means we'll do more. That leads to more fitness. And this virtuous cycle continues.



Movement does more than just “get us into great shape”.

Despite eyeglasses and iPhones, humans are still animals. We're meant to move with the grace and agility of a tiger (or a monkey). And movement offers us a tremendous number of (sometimes surprising) benefits.

Movement is how humans (and other animals) interact with the world.

As babies, we immediately start grabbing things, putting things in our mouths, reaching for things, and clinging to our (now less furry) primate parents.

We are tactile, kinesthetic beings who must directly interact with physical stimuli: touching, tasting, manipulating, moving ourselves around objects in three-dimensional space.

Movement helps us connect and build relationships with others.

Movement is a sensor for the world around us. In one study, when people's facial muscles were paralysed with Botox, they couldn't read others' emotions or describe their own. We need to mimic and mirror the body language and facial cues of one another to connect emotionally and mentally.

From the puffed-chest posturing of drunken young men outside a bar, to Beyonce's fierce dance moves, to the mating rituals like close leaning and eye contact, to the laser stare your mom gives you when she knows you're up to no good:

Movement gives us a rich, nuanced expressive language that goes far beyond words, helping us build more fulfilling and lasting relationships, with fewer misunderstandings, disconnections, or communication bloopers.

Movement helps us think, learn, and remember.

You might imagine that “thinking” lives only in your head.

But in reality, research shows we do what’s called “embodied cognition” — in which the body’s movements influence brain functions like processing information and decision making, and vice versa.

So **“thinking” lives in our entire bodies.**

But even if thinking were limited to our brains, there is evidence that movement and thought are intertwined.

It turns out that the cerebellum — a structure at the base of the brain previously thought to only be used for balance, posture, coordination, and motor skills — also plays a role in thinking and emotion.

Also, movement supports brain health and function in many ways, by helping new neurons grow and thrive (i.e. neurogenesis).

Every day, our brains produce thousands of new neurons, especially in our hippocampal region, an area involved in learning and memory.

Movement — whether learning new physical skills or simply doing exercise that improves circulation — gives the new cells a purpose so that they stick around rather than dying.

Thus, movement:

- **helps maintain existing brain structures,**
- **helps slow age-related mental decline,**
- **helps us recover if our brain is injured or inflamed,**
- **lowers oxidative stress,** and
- **increases the levels of a substance known as brain-derived neurotrophic factor,** or BDNF, which is involved in learning and memory.

Move well, move often, get smarter.

Movement affects how we feel physically and emotionally.

People of all shapes and sizes say they have a better quality of life, with fewer physical limitations, when they are physically active.

If you exercise regularly, you probably know that kickass workouts can leave you feeling like a million bucks. (Personally I think of mine as anti-anger meds.)

Research that compared exercise alone to diet alone found:

People who change their bodies with exercise (rather than dieting) feel better — about their bodies, about their capabilities, about their health, and about their overall quality of life — even if their weight ultimately doesn't change.

(Now... just imagine if you combined the magic of exercise with brain-boosting and body-building nutrition!)

Find out what “healthy movement” looks like for you.

Not everyone has to be (or can be) a Professional Footballer or Olympic gymnast. As a 5-foot something, 30 year old who can't jump nor catch a ball, I'm fairly sure the NBA won't be calling me.

But I'm also not saying that, “Well, guess I shouldn't climb the stairs because of my Q-angle” is the way to go.

I'm saying: Today, pay special attention to how you move.

Be curious.

As you go through the mundane activities of your day, notice how your unique body shapes your movements.

How do you move... and how could you potentially move?

In our coaching programs, we work with a lot of clients who have physical limitations, such as:

- chronic pain or movement restrictions — say, from an injury or inflammation.
- too much body fat and/or not enough lean mass.
- too many or too few calories/nutrients to feel energetic.
- age-related loss of mobility.
- a physical disability.
- neurological problems.

You may have some body configuration that makes it easier or harder for you to do certain things.

We all have structural or physical limitations. We all have advantages. It all depends on context.

Regardless of what your unique physical makeup might be, there are activities that can work for you, and help you make movement a big part of your daily life.

Ask yourself:

**How can I move better — whatever that means for MY unique body?
And what might my life be like if I did?**

And finding someone who can help you if you think that's what you need.

What to do next

1. Pay attention to how it feels to move.

“Sense in” to your body:

- When you walk or run: How long is your stride? Do your legs swing freely? Do your hips feel tight or loose? What are your arms doing? Where are you looking?
- When you stand: How does your weight shift gently as you stand? What does that feel like in your feet or lower legs?
- When you sit: Where is your head? Can you feel the pressure of the seat on your back or bottom?
- When you work out: Can you feel the muscles working? What happens if you try to do a fast movement (like a jump or kick) slowly, and vice versa?

2. Consider whether you're moving as well as you could.

Do you feel confident and capable? Ninja-ready for anything?

Do you have some physical limitations?

Do you have ways to adapt or route around them?

When was the last time you tried learning new movement skills?

What movements would you like to try... in a perfect world?

3. Think about other ways to move.

If you're working out a certain way because you think you "should", but it's not fitting your body well, consider other options.

Or, if your current workout is going great but you're curious about other possibilities, consider expanding your movement repertoire anyway.

Everything from archery to pilates is out there, waiting for you to come and try it out.

Remember: You don't have to "work out" or "exercise" to move. And you don't need to revamp your physical activity overnight, either.

Take your time. Do what you like. Pick one small new way you can move today — and do it.

4. Help your body do its job with good nutrition.

Quality movement requires quality nutrition.

And just like your movements, your nutritional needs are unique to you.

Here's how to start figuring out what "optimal nutrition" means for you:

- Balance your intake to eliminate possible nutrient deficiencies.
- Calibrate your calorie intake with easy, effective portion control and appetite awareness.
- Tailor your diet for special circumstances, like pregnancy or injury.
- Find ways to reduce stress.



HOW INTENSE WORKOUTS (AND OVERTRAINING) CAN RUIN YOUR RESULTS. .

Here's how to know what's **TOO MUCH** when it comes to exercise.

When it comes to health and fitness, everyone's obsessed with "more". More cardio. More calorie restriction. More squats. More gym time. But if you're not careful, "more" can lead to overtraining, injury, and illness. Here's how to know what's **TOO MUCH** when it comes to exercise.

I've been coaching clients for nearly 13 years and I've seen many of them treat their bodies like teenagers learning to drive a car.

Vroom.

Full speed ahead on killer workouts! Max effort each time! Add another hour of cardio!

Errrt!

Get hurt. Get sick. Feel discouraged.

Vroom.

Cut calories! Weigh and measure everything!

Errrt!

Lose control. Feel even more discouraged.

We see this cycle of alternatively slamming the gas, then brake, then gas, then brake with our Coaching clients. When they decide to get moving, they go hard.

They throw everything — energy, time, resources — at their weight loss, strength gain, or health goals. They feel invigorated and energised, high on their new workout drug.

Have you tried Workout X? they ask their coworkers.

Feel my quads, it's amazing!

This full throttle approach seems to work for a little while.

Until... it doesn't.

One day it's hard to get out of bed. Shoulders and knees ache a bit. They get a bit of a cough or feel run down.

A week later they miss an easy lift. They reach for the ice pack. No big deal.

The week after, they're dialing their chiro or physio's office. Or lying on the couch with a back spasm that feels like giving bellybutton birth to a sea urchin.

What happened? Where did it all go wrong?

The problem isn't the exercise, or even the intensity.

The problem is not balancing stress with recovery.

Training vs. straining

Exercise is a stressor. Usually a good one. But a stressor nonetheless.

If you exercise intensely and/or often, you add stress to a body that may already be stressed from other life stuff like work, relationships, travel, late nights, etc.

This isn't a bad thing. Exercise can indeed help relieve stress.

But in terms of a physical demand, **we still need to help our bodies recover from all the stress we experience.**

How well you'll recover (and how much extra recovery you might need) depends on your allostatic load — i.e. how much total stress you're under at any given moment.

In other words, on those days when you were late for work and your boss yelled at you and you spilled ketchup on your favourite shirt and you were up all night caring for a sick child — and then you went to the gym and tried to nail a PR?

You better plan for some serious recovery time.

On the other hand, if you slept well, woke up to sunshine, had a terrific breakfast, and strutted into the gym feeling like a rock star, your body will likely recover faster and better from your workout.

The right amount of exercise, at the right intensity, and the right time:

We train. We learn. We get healthier and stronger.

Too much exercise, with too high an intensity, too often:

We strain. We stress. We shut down. And break down.

Mission Control: Our bodies.

Overtraining isn't a failure of willpower or the fate of weak-minded wimps. Our bodies have complex feedback loops and elegant shutdown systems that actively prevent us from over-reaching or pushing ourselves too hard.

Two systems are at play:

- Our **central nervous system (CNS)** acts like a car engine regulator. If the engine on a car revs too high for too long, it shuts down. Similarly, if we exercise too much, our brain tries to protect our muscles by reducing the rate of nerve impulses so we can't (or don't want to) move as much. And we certainly can't work as hard.
- **Local fatigue**, the result of energy system depletion and/or metabolic byproduct accumulation, makes your muscles feel really tired, lethargic, and weak. Using our car analogy, this is sort of like running out of gas.

Training too frequently and intensely — again, without prioritising recovery — means that stress never subsides.

We never get a chance to put gas in the tank or change the oil. We just drive and drive and drive, mashing the pedals harder and harder.

If we “lift the hood” we might see:

- Poor lubrication: Our connective tissues are creaky and frayed.
- Radiator overheating: More inflammation.
- Battery drained: Feel-good brain chemicals and anabolic (building-up) hormones have gone down.
- Rust: Catabolic (breaking-down) hormones such as cortisol have gone up.

As a result, you might experience:

- Blood sugar ups and downs.
- Depression, anxiety, and/or racing thoughts.
- Trouble sleeping or early wake-ups.
- Food cravings, maybe even trouble controlling your eating.
- Lower metabolism due to decreased thyroid hormone output.
- Disrupted sex hormones (which means less mojo overall, and in women, irregular or missing menstrual cycles).

Here’s the thing.

You don’t get to decide if you need recovery or not.

Your body will decide for you.

If you don’t build recovery into your plan, your body will eventually force it.

The more extreme your overtraining, the more you’ll “pay” via illness, injury, or exhaustion. The more severe the payback, the more “time off” you’ll need from exercise.

That's a bummer. Now your car has stalled, or worse — gone backwards.

Argh.

What drives people to overtrain?

Some folks in our Coaching program worry that the prescribed workouts and daily habits won't be enough. So they add more exercise and subtract food.

What's driving them?

1. Some people depend on intense exercise to feel good about themselves.

They might tell themselves it's "for their health" or "to get the perfect body".

But, the truth is, many people depend on their extreme exercise regimen to feel good about themselves.

Take this example of one of our coaching clients:

Early on in the program, a client's weight went up a few kilo on a particular measurement day. I went on high alert.

I called him and could hear the treadmill rolling in the background. "Uh, what are you doing... right now?"

Turns out he was into his 40th minute of a 60 minute "post-measurement day guilt workout".

I yelled, "Get off the *&%! treadmill... Now!"

Right then and there we made each other a promise: No more extra work. Training program only.

He was terrified of eating more and doing less. But, after his first week of “eating more and doing less”, he lost 1.5 kilo.

(Before, he had been doing “everything right” and not losing a pound.)

A few months later, he’d lost 5 kilo and 6% body fat. He looked healthy, fit and amazing. People would ask for his secret.

Those intense, laborious workouts can feel good. Almost... too good.

Strenuous exercise releases chemicals that kill pain and make us happy... temporarily.

By the way, these chemicals are also released when your body thinks you’re in big trouble and about to die. Their evolutionary job is to help us float away in a happy painless haze as the saber-toothed tiger is eating our arm off. So in a sense, they’re stress-related chemicals.

For some people, these chemicals become a “hit”.

Pushing their bodies to the limit and working hard becomes their drug.

2. Intense exercise gives you a sense of control over your body and life.

It’s drilled into people’s heads via popular media: If you want control over how your body looks, hit the gym (and then hit it again).

Here’s another client’s story, in their own words:

I ran 7 marathons over the course of about 10 years, each time hoping that this training round would be the one that got me thinner.

But the harder I worked, the more frustrated I got. Which I used to propel myself harder, over more miles.

The more I trained, the hungrier I was. It was a massive battle against appetite, all day long.

I never got thinner. Sometimes I gained.

I got stressed out, cold after cold after random infection, and increasingly unhappy with myself.

For me, what I needed to finally drop those last 3-5 kilo wasn't exercise for 1-2 hours a day, it was to go harder for shorter periods of time, and give myself enough downtime to recover.

It became so much easier to achieve a slight energy deficit when my body felt more at-ease, less pushed to the limits all the time.

Muscles stayed and got stronger. Fat shrunk away.

People who overtrain often want to try hard and do their best to reach their goals. They think they're "doing what it takes".

If some exercise is good, more must be better, right?

3. Most people don't know that overtraining can work against them.

Our coaching clients who are overtraining are often shocked to learn they're doing too much. Nobody's ever told them that there's a "sweet spot" for exercise that balances work and recovery.

Usually, people learn about the risks of overtraining the hard way — like this client from our coaching program:

Last week I injured my ribs and back. Not enough to put me out of commission, and it's not serious, but it was a real pain in the ass.

Certain positions and actions (like sneezing) felt like a knife in my side.

I had to cut certain exercises out (e.g. push-ups), and I couldn't jump rope or sprint, either.

I still did the workouts every day, but I had to cut back on the weight (I used about 80% of what I typically use), and for the intervals, scale back the intensity.

Now here's the interesting part: When I was done with the workouts, I felt really good, as opposed to the fall-on-the-floor wiped out feeling I usually have. And I wasn't sore the next day either.

In fact, I've been really looking forward to these workouts.

I thought: Hey, this is fun!

But then I had this other nagging thought: Am I just a wimp?

Anyway, all this got me thinking: What the hell am I working out so hard every day for? Should I be killing myself?

I'm not a competitor. Nobody knows or cares how fast I run or how much I squat.

I'm starting to think I should be ending a workout feeling like "I could do that again right now if I had to." I call that "training".

The opposite would be pushing myself to the limit frequently, feeling completely pooped after a workout. I call that "straining".

It seems pretty obvious I won't make a lot of fast progress by "training", but on the other hand, I gotta wonder: How long can I keep going if I am "straining"?

Here's what our client didn't know before going through the coaching program:

Sometimes, less is more.

Putting in a consistent good effort over the long haul is much more sustainable than cycles of “crash and burn”.

This client’s slow and steady efforts paid off — he lost 10 kilo and 10 percent of his body fat in 6 months.

More importantly, he recovered, stayed uninjured, and kept having fun.

Do what truly works.

Look, if “pump till you puke” and hours of treadmill torture worked, we’d make our clients do it.

But it doesn’t work.

So we don’t do it.

Exercise should make us feel, look, perform and live better... not crush us.

Movement should help us function freely... not incapacitate us.

What if you could leave the gym feeling energised, not exhausted?
What if, instead of doing more, you could do better?

Recovery: Overtraining antidote.

Here’s your first tip: “Overtraining” isn’t exactly the problem. The problem is more like “under-recovering”.

Your body can actually handle a tremendous amount of work... if you recover properly and fully from that work.

Your stress-recovery pattern should look like rolling hills: For every up (training or life stress) there’s a down (recovery).

For every intense workout, there's an equally intense focus on activities that help your body repair and rebuild.

This doesn't mean you need to retreat to your dark and quiet blanket fort and get massages every day... although that does sound awesome.

Check out our recovery tips below.

Free your mind, and your body will follow.

When you factor in recovery as a crucial part of your training regimen, a funny thing happens.

You start to think of training completely differently.

What if you could “exercise” on a continuum — where every movement “counts”?

What if you could balance high with low, heavy with light, work with play in a natural, organic rhythm?

Here are some ways to find balance.

An effective physical activity routine incorporates:

1. Resistance Training
2. Intervals
3. Active Recovery
4. Fun

You can do that no matter how much time you have to devote to physical activity.

Here's what the balance looks like in our Coaching:



Our Coaching clients who have the most success aren't usually the ones who do the biggest, most challenging workouts.

Instead, they're the ones who find small ways of getting movement whenever and wherever they can.

That includes real-life functional movement, such as:

- Biking or walking to work (or running to catch that damn bus)
- Walking to the grocery store and carrying your groceries home
- Washing the car
- Giving the walls a fresh coat of paint

- Teaching your kids how to fly a kite
- Shovelling dirt, raking leaves, planting a garden, or mowing the lawn

When you think of movement this way, it stops becoming “a workout” (i.e. a chore, or a gauntlet you have to psych yourself up for) and starts becoming “your daily life” (i.e. something that is easy, seamless, and always with you).

What to do next

If you’re feeling some of the symptoms described in this article, here are a few steps you can take to start feeling better.

1. Do a little self-assessment.

For some of us, skipping a workout is no biggie.

For others, taking a day off requires effort. Doing less can make you feel uneasy.

If spending more time away from your self-imposed bootcamp freaks you out, ask yourself:

- What am I doing this for? What are my goals, and why do I have them?
- How do I feel? Am I constantly in pain, tired but wired, hungry, etc.?
- How is what I’m doing working for me? What kind of results am I seeing?

If you’re beating yourself up and not getting anywhere, maybe it’s time to take a different approach.

2. Trust your body — and listen to it.

What's really going on under the hood?

Do a mind-body scan: Lie quietly for a few minutes and bring your focus slowly from your feet to your head. What do you feel?

Practice becoming more aware of your body cues.

What does your body feel like when it's well-rested? How do you know when it needs a break?

If you're feeling:

- achy and creaky
- run-down and blah
- un-motivated
- anxious or depressed
- fatigued or annoyingly sleepless...

...consider changing up your workout routine.

3. Make time for recovery.

Recovery won't happen by accident. Plan it, prepare for it and *hunt it down*.

Schedule that massage. Tell your friends to save the date for the citywide scavenger hunt. And block off Sunday afternoon for guilt-free goof-off time.

Whatever you do, remember that **your recovery — what you do between workouts — is just as important as training.**

Some ideas:

- **Go for a walk**, preferably in a natural, outdoor setting. Put away your phone. Observe what's around you.
- **Meditate**. It's easier than you might think.
- **Do yoga**. Remember: it doesn't have to be 'hot yoga' or 'power yoga' to count.
- **Go for a swim**. Finish it off with a relaxing sauna.
- **Chill out in the park**. Lie back on the grass and stare at the clouds.
- **Get a massage**. Give the body a little help de-stressing.

4. Achieve the balance.

There's time for tough workouts and time for taking it easy. There's time for long runs, and there's time for throwing a frisbee around.

Doing the same thing over and over again isn't doing your body any good. Mix up your exercises, and the intensity.

If you're not sure how much of each you're getting, try keeping a workout journal for a week or two.

What could you use a little more of?

Where could you ease back?

Find some new ways to get active without being in the gym.

Incorporate some silly, goofy play time into your routine. See how it feels.

5. Have fun.

And there's a reason why kids naturally run, jump, roll, and wiggle their bodies around: Fun is a huge part of how we learn to move and

interact in the world. Continuing this process keeps us healthy and young.

Laughing activates the recovery system, as does even just smiling. Lighten up and loosen your white-knuckle grip on life, Sergeant Hardcore.

Here are some ideas for good old-fashioned fun:

- **Play a sport you love.** Or discover a new one.
- **Actively play with your kids.** Run around with them on the playground, swing from the monkey bars, climb trees, chase a frisbee, etc.
- **Dance.** Yes men, i'm talking to you. Have a night out with friends, or just goof off with the music cranked up in your living room.
- **Pay your pet some extra attention.** Give your dog an extra run for his money at the dog park. Try some doggy yoga. (This is a thing. I'm not even kidding.)
- **Go for a hike or take a walk in the city.** Explore a new neighborhood.

6. Get driving lessons.

The only message you've likely ever gotten about staying fit is: put the pedal to the metal. Now it turns out you're actually in overdrive?

If you're feeling frustrated or confused (or exhausted or stressed) — team up with someone.

Call up an active friend, find a local trainer/coach/sensei, or brainstorm with your family. Together, experiment with a fun, balanced approach to your physical activity.

Your "car" will thank you.



WHY ADVANCED EXERCISE AND NUTRITION STRATEGIES USUALLY BACKFIRE.

Make faster progress with deliberate practice and SIT.

Most people who work out and try to eat well hope to graduate quickly to advanced exercise and nutrition strategies. But these usually backfire. Here's why it happens. Plus two strategies (deliberate practice and stress inoculation training) for faster progress.

For ten years I thought I knew how to kick.

Ok, so I wasn't Jonny Wilkinson (a famous English Rugby Union goal kicker), but I knew how to kick a ball through the posts.

The only problem was, **I never really knew what I was doing.**

I mean, I had a great success rate when it came to comparing myself to others, but that was most likely from the decade of endless practice, often 3 hours a day.

My improvement over the years wasn't great. Often I would kick the hard ones from out wide & then shank ones in close. I never really got to that world class level.

Until I worked with a world class coach.

In the space of one week, my kicking percentage had increased by 15%. Now this may not sound like much, but I hadn't increased it by that much in 10 years!

After 10 years of perfecting a bad technique, I was finally learning how to *actually* kick a ball...

But that's not all. I also learned some powerful lessons that can apply to almost anything—especially health and fitness.

My two greatest lessons:

1. "Just do it" isn't enough
2. In order to get better at something, you need a system. More specifically, you need something called *deliberate practice*.

These lessons can help anyone who is trying to improve their fitness, health or nutrition habits.

And they can help anyone who is trying to get better at being a coach.

Let's dive in.

How to “learn” exercise and nutrition.

Trying to get into better shape, or eat healthier, is much like learning to kick a ball.

There are waves of conflicting information hitting you from all sides. Other people seem to have “the secret” that you don't. You fail a lot.

You're never sure what you should be focusing on or if you're doing it wrong.

And most importantly: **without expert guidance and a good system, you're going to waste a lot of time and build bad habits.**

A beginner kicking a ball doesn't necessarily know why he can't kick it straight. Or what to do differently next time.

An exerciser whose back hurts after several months of his workouts, or who hasn't gotten any more fit from his last program, doesn't necessarily know why that is either, nor what to do about it.

Someone trying to lose weight or “eat healthy” without a clear plan, feedback, or guidance may feel like they “fall down”, over and over and over, face first.

In all of these scenarios, just practicing “more” can actually do more harm than good.

But deliberate practice, whether in the gym, in the kitchen, or life in general, can dramatically improve your progress, faster.

What is deliberate practice? I'll explain in a moment. But first, let's understand the context around when and where you might need it.

The three stages of skill development.

Learning to do anything—whether it's eat better, ride a motorcycle or do backflips—is really just a matter of developing the right skills.

And learning a skill happens along a continuum, loosely defined by three stages.

Stage 1: Slow and conscious

Think back to when you learned to type.

At first, you were in hunt-and-peck mode, going letter by letter. Learning was slow, conscious and took up almost all of your attention. You made big mistakes, often. You could only focus on one thing at a time, like finding the damn semicolon.

Stage 2: Getting a feel for it

After a while, you could start to tap out entire words and sentences at once, instead of thinking letter by letter. You got faster and more accurate. Your mistakes were fewer and smaller.

You didn't have to think so much. Instead, you started to get a "feel" for things. When you hit the wrong letter, you could often sense it before you saw it on the screen.

Stage 3: Intuitive instinct

If you kept working on your typing, eventually you didn't have to work at it, or even think about it. You could just *do it*.

Letters flowed from your fingers smoothly and you didn't even have to look where they were. You could type while listening to music, or maybe even having a conversation.

You're now at the place of "good enough".

When "good enough"... isn't.

Now let's imagine you don't need to be a typing master. You just need to be good enough.

You're happy there, at "reasonably decent". Things are relatively easy.

Here's the important thing to know: **Getting better from that stage forward will take active work.**

You won't become an awesome typist by accident.

You'll just be... OK.

The research term for "good enough" is theory of par or tolerance. It's the level of performance that most people are content to meet, but not exceed.

And it's almost always less than they're actually capable of.

Now, there's nothing bad about "good enough".

Unless you do, in fact, want to get better.

This is where deliberate practice comes in.

Deliberate practice

If you do an activity over and over, you'll get good at it, up to a point.

Past that point, simply adding more practice won't help. (Consider how many people are lousy drivers, even if they've been driving for decades.)

To get better, your practice has to be deliberate. It has to have a goal and ongoing feedback.

The kicking, that's the difference between "just knocking over the odd goal", and kicking while trying to refine a specific skill, like a curving banana kick.

In the gym, it's the difference between knocking out the reps and moving on, and paying attention to something like how your spine is positioned during a squat.

As a coach, it's the difference between telling someone to "suck less" or "just do it," and giving them a specific, strategic action to focus on next.

Getting better means getting worse... briefly

There's a catch to deliberate practice, though:

You have to allow yourself to suck for a while.

Because to learn past "good enough", you have to regress back down to levels where things become more conscious again. In other words, the level where you're not good enough anymore.

A lot of our clients struggle with this. If they've got some knowledge about working out or "eating healthy", it's hard for them to regress.

“I’m already good enough,” they protest. “Give me something advanced.”

Nobody wants to feel like they’ve been knocked down to Remedial Vegetable Eating or Bench Press 101. But—apparently paradoxically—that’s where they have to go in order to graduate to truly advanced exercise and nutrition strategies.

Developing “instinct”

The “deliberate” part of deliberate practice is essential.

If we’re not paying attention to what we’re doing, don’t really know why we’re doing it, or don’t know how well we did it, we don’t improve. Stuff is just random noise.

Conversely, **when we purposely try something**, observe how well it worked, adjust with awareness, and try again, we learn. **We learn faster, and better.** With this conscious, goal-driven feedback loop, we get a deeper, more intuitive “feel for things” rather than thinking about them.

We’re able to see differently, like a carpenter who notices a doorframe is crooked without having to measure it. We make smarter decisions with less information, and ignore distractions.

In turn, this process of consciously developing a “feel for things” helps our brains get even better at learning new things.

Thus, experts’ instinct and ability to respond with seemingly superhuman speed and accuracy isn’t magical.

It’s simply the result of deliberate practice.

The Lego blocks of skill development

So how do we put deliberate practice into, well, practice?

Think about it as stacking a series of “Lego blocks.”

Learning is sequential. We build understanding and insight block by block, stacking one “Lego block” of learning on top of another, clicking them together to make connections.

In terms of movements, we build more complex movements out of “Lego blocks” of simpler movements, all stuck together.

When you learn a sport, you might drill each individual “Lego block”. Dribbling in basketball. Hip movement in grappling. Shuffling your feet in boxing. Serving in tennis.

In kicking, you’ll have to learn how to place the ball on the tee. How to line it up with the posts. Then, if you’re lucky, how to actually kick the thing.

At first, it’s clumsy. The kicker’s mind is juggling foot, hip, hand, head and eye position, and learning what each of those pieces feel like.

With practice, those things become instinctive and happen more automatically.

This frees up the kicker’s mind so that they can add more pieces to the pattern, and start making the ball actually do stuff.

How to vaccinate yourself from stress

Here’s another reason you need deliberate practice: **stress**.

Ever tried to do a familiar task when you were rushing and freaked out? You probably did it terribly.

Learning a skill can be challenging enough. Being able to recall it under stressful, real-world conditions (say, when getting knocked off a surfboard, or when your comfortable daily routine of exercise and nutrition habits gets disrupted) adds a whole new level of difficulty.

In general, stress tends to make us worse at things... unless we make stressful situations part of our deliberate practice.

We can do this with what's called **Stress Inoculation Training**, or SIT.

You can think of SIT like a “stress vaccination”: a little bit of stress, released gradually and only in levels you can handle, eventually lets you deal with increasingly tough situations.

Let's take surfing for instance, you might learn your first skills in a zero-stress environment, like sitting on the beach with your surfboard. You might practice holding the board, lying on it in the right spot, and even paddling on the sand.

Then, you add a little bit of stress: You go into the water. It might be a calm, waist-deep ocean. Or it might be a pool. Just a tiny bit of stress, to start with. Then, you add a little more stress. Maybe you go out in chest-deep water. You get into bigger, faster waves.

Over and over, you add a little more stress, and a little more.

Eventually, of course, you're ripping gnarly tubes during a solid swell. Or you're staying true to your workout and nutrition habits even when your life is truly insane.

To make SIT work, you practice your skills deliberately, at a level that is just slightly challenging—you're focused on the task at hand, but you're almost always able to execute.

You want your mind and body to learn that a little stress is okay. All you do is change the definition of what “a little stress” is.

This is key: A vaccination is no good if it actually makes you violently ill.

SIT is only effective when the student first masters their skills in a non-stressed environment. Every practice session should end in relative success.

Translation: **don't give yourself way more than you can handle at once.** Assess your current positioning realistically. Decide what the next level of appropriate challenge (stress) would be, then go from there.

Resist the temptation to “level up”.

So, say we get “good enough” at the basics. This frees up our brain to try new stuff.

But that can actually be a problem.

If you're “good enough” to just stand up on a surfboard, you'll want to jump right away to trying other fancy things.

Remember, though, that standing up is the Lego block that controls all the other Lego blocks. If you never deliberately practice that basic skill of simply standing up—if you don't get really, really good at it—you'll never get really, really good at anything else.

Likewise, people who resist learning the basics because “basics are boring” often find that they “fall off the wagon” when their routine changes, or the normal stresses of life hit.

Their crucial “Lego block” of nutrition, exercise, and self-organisation skills gets knocked out easily with even small challenges.

Ask yourself: **how solid are your basics?**

Can your “good enough” ability at the fundamentals be a lot better?

Say, continuing with your established nutrition habits but working on your consistency.

Or learning to incorporate rest and stress management practices into the mix, rather than loading up on more workouts.

Your efforts might not seem as impressive to a layperson for example. (It feels more badass to bang out 20 so-so pull-ups than five good ones.)

But you know better.

You know that becoming an expert means not worrying about looking good, but instead, looking and feeling like a beginner.

By embracing being a beginner, you're on your way to becoming a master.

What to do next

Clarify your purpose.

The best way to change a system is to alter its purpose. Are you exercising to punish yourself for yesterday's ice cream? Or, are you exercising to improve something like physical performance or body composition? Workouts geared towards punishment become good at punishing. Workouts focused on improvement help make something better.

Identify the big skill you're after.

Now that you know why you're doing this thing, what is it? This could be a sport like surfing, or strength training, or eating healthy meals.

Break that skill down into its building blocks.

What are all the tiny components that make up this big skill? Look as deeply as you can here. Movement during exercise may start with the way you stand, walk and breathe (and those things are made up of other pieces). Healthy eating may start with your relationship with food, or something like eating slowly and mindfully.

Develop a system.

You can't learn all these components at once, or even in a random order. You need a structure, a progression, and a source of feedback.

Practice, deliberately, in your zone of optimal challenge.

To develop a skill, you have to focus your attention on it and practice it deliberately, at a level of challenge that's at the edge of your ability, but allows you to be generally successful while making and learning from small errors.

First, mastery. Then, stress.

Remember stress inoculation. Master the skill first in a non-stressed, low complexity environment, and then practice it with the heat turned up. Only add as much stress and complexity as you can while building on success.

Consider a coach.

Breaking a skill down into components, putting them into a system, assessing performance on each piece within that system and providing ongoing feedback and guidance is a big undertaking. It's especially hard to do by yourself. This is why even great coaches hire other people to coach them.



HOW TO STAY IN SHAPE WHEN YOU'RE BUSY. [INFOGRAPHIC]

All you need is 10 minutes and virtually no equipment.

You exercise regularly for months... then get derailed by a vacation, business trip, or just the general insanity of life. Sound familiar? Here's how to stay in shape when you're busy — it's faster and easier than you think.

It's one of the most common patterns I see as a fitness and nutrition coach: People trying to get (and stay) in shape workout diligently for months — then get derailed by the holidays or a big deadline at work.

Many then “fall off the wagon” for the rest of the year.

It's a seesaw that plays out physiologically too. Exercise regularly and you get a training effect — adaptations in the brain, circulatory system, respiratory system, metabolism, muscles, and bones that optimise health and function.

Stop exercising and your body starts adapting to that — doing nothing — so you start to lose all these benefits you worked so hard for.

That's why we came up with this simple, do-anywhere workout. It takes only a few minutes a day, it requires minimal or no equipment, and it focuses on compound exercise (big muscles, big movements) so it's certain to be effective.

It's also adaptable: You can shuffle exercises around or skip a few of them, come up with different ways to add resistance, or modify the total number of reps and rounds according to how much time you have and your preferences.

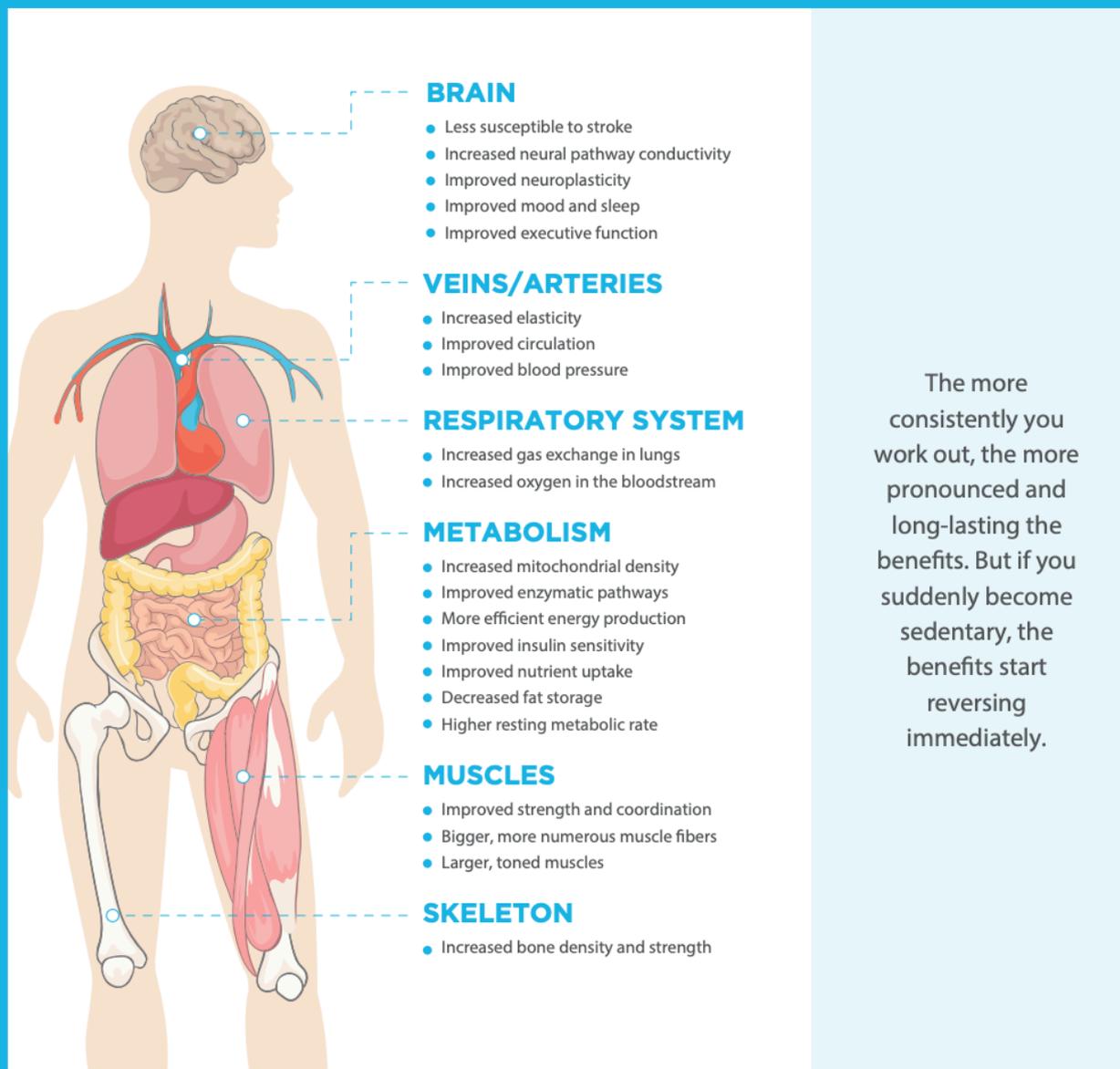
The important thing is to get some full-body movement each day.

Use this plan when you just can't make your regular workout happen. It'll help you maintain muscle, keep your metabolism humming, stave off fat gain, and more.

HOW TO STAY IN SHAPE WHEN YOU'RE BUSY

Work trips? Holidays? In hectic times, exercise routines crash. But with 10 minutes a day and virtually no equipment, you can maintain your fitness until you're back in the game.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OFFERS A LONG LIST OF AMAZING BENEFITS



STRESS CAN MAKE YOU LOSE CONDITIONING FASTER

MENTAL/EMOTIONAL STRESS

INCREASED BREATHING RATE

INCREASED OXYGEN UPTAKE
AND CO₂ CLEARANCE

DECREASED CO₂ IN THE BODY

REDUCED OXYGEN TRANSFER
TO MUSCLE CELLS

ALTERED ENERGY PRODUCTION
IN MUSCLES

REDUCED ATP (ENERGY)
AVAILABILITY IN MUSCLES

IMPAIRED ABILITY TO RELAX AND
LENGTHEN MUSCLES

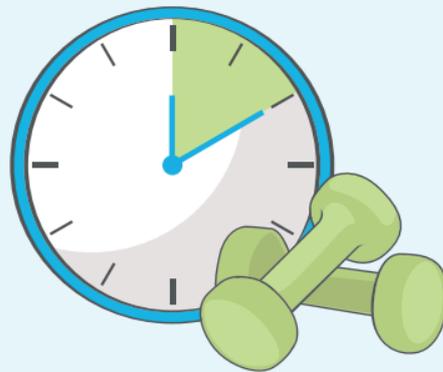
TIGHTNESS AND STIFFNESS (ESPECIALLY IN
AREAS AFFECTED BY STRESS, LIKE THE NECK
AND LOWER BACK) AND FATIGUE



SIMPLE, DO-ANYWHERE WORKOUT

For those times when you just can't manage your normal exercise routine, use this minimalist 10-minute workout to stay in shape.

1. Move through each exercise in sequence.
2. Do 5 reps of each exercise.
3. Don't rest between exercises.
4. Rest 1-2 minutes at the end of the circuit.
5. Repeat for a total of 2-4 circuits.



BEAR CRAWL

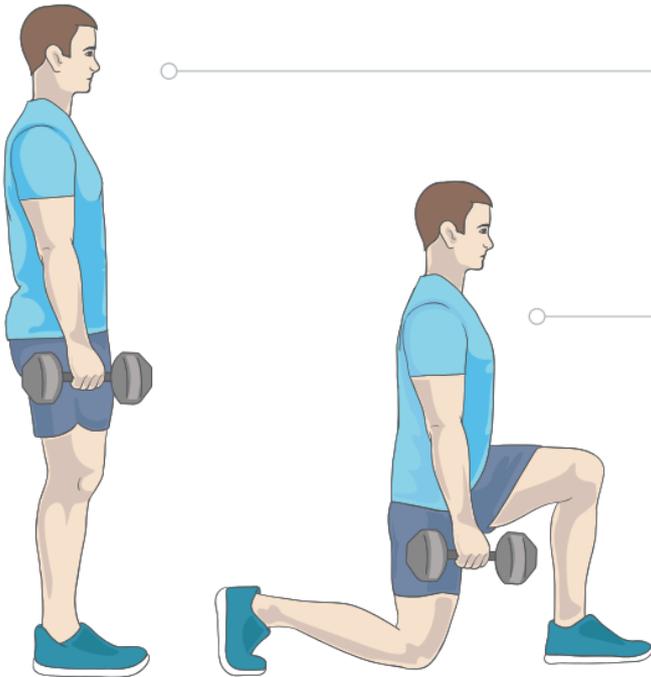
Starting on all fours, push down with toes to bring knees off floor.



Keeping pelvis centered, "crawl" with right arm and left leg moving forward together, and vice versa. 10 seconds = 1 rep.



REVERSE LUNGE



Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, a dumbbell in each hand.

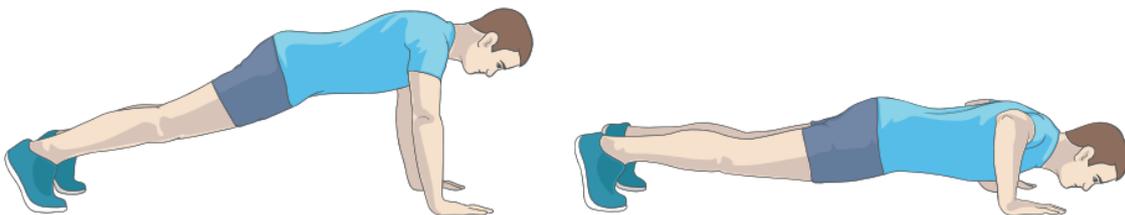
With chest high, abs engaged, and lower back neutral, step right foot back. Keep weight on forward heel and hips squared as you lower right knee until it's just off the floor and slightly behind your hip.

Drive weight into forward heel to return to start. Complete set for right leg, then repeat on the left.

PUSH-UP

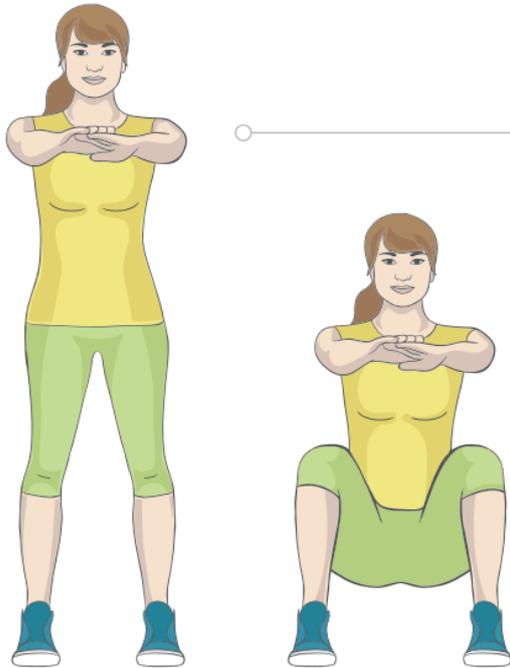
Start in "plank" position, hands directly under shoulders and fingers forward.

Maintaining a straight line from head to heel, keep elbows in as you bend them to lower your body as far as you can without shoulders popping forward.



Squeeze shoulder blades together and down toward glutes as you lower, then allow them to spread fully apart at the top. Keep abs tight, tailbone tucked under and shoulders down away from ears.

SQUAT



Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, arms extended in front of you.

With abs engaged, ribs pulled down, and tailbone tucked under, push hips back and lower as far as you can, keeping feet straight and knees aligned with little toe.

Drive weight into heels and midfoot to return to start.

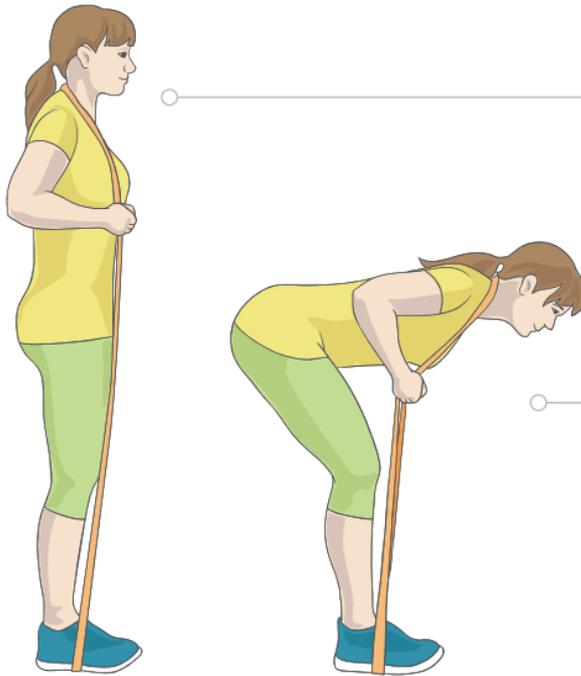
SINGLE-ARM DUMBBELL ROW

Keeping ribs down, abs tight, tailbone tucked, and weight through forward heel, pull dumbbell toward lower ribs while locking your shoulder blade inward and down.

Keeping ribs down, abs tight, tailbone tucked, and weight through forward heel, pull dumbbell toward lower ribs while locking your shoulder blade inward and down.



BANDED HIP EXTENSION

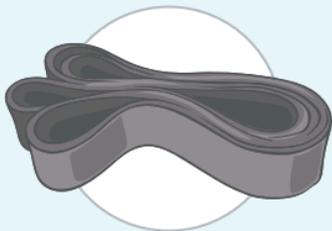


Stand with feet shoulder-width apart with resistance band looped behind neck and ends secured under feet.

Keeping abs engaged, ribs pulled down, back straight, and weight rooted through heels, push your hips back and bend at waist until you feel a slight stretch in hamstrings.

Return to start, keeping abs tight, ribs down, and tailbone tucked.

YOUR MINIMALIST GYM



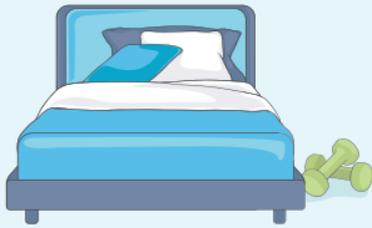
Resistance band
(length: 41",
width: 0.5-1.5")



Choose a weight that's
moderately challenging
(women: 15-30 lb, men 30-50 lb.)

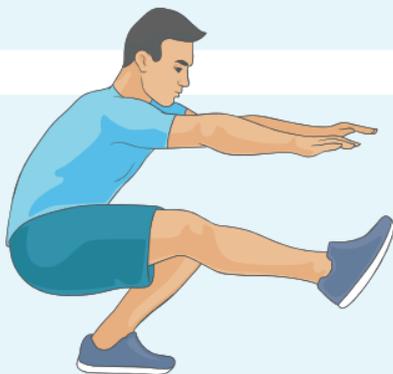
MAKE IT EASY

When you're busy and stressed, working memory and willpower are low. Here's how to make a minimal workout happen.



Keep your resistance bands or workout clothes somewhere visible, where you'll practically trip over them. Behavioral triggers make exercise more automatic, less thought-driven.

Don't think of the workout as a chore or punishment. Positivity keeps your stress hormone response in check and reduces hedonic compensation ("I did push-ups, so I earned this brownie").



Can't do one or more of the exercises in the circuit? Skip them. If possible, focus on the legs, which require greater muscle recruitment and energy burn.

No dumbbell?
Use whatever you can find to add weight to the moves.



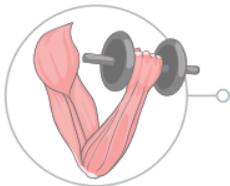
WHY THIS PLAN WORKS



Requires minimal time and equipment, so you can do it anytime, anywhere



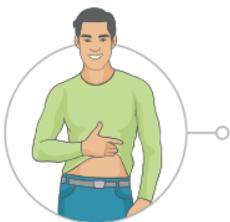
Uses "compound exercise" -- big muscles, big range of motion -- so you get more out of each rep



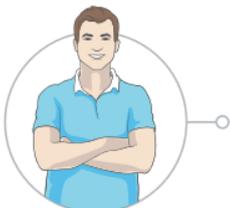
Maintains joint and tissue health



Helps you avoid the all-or-nothing downward spiral of feeling "off-track" with exercise



Gives dietary sugar a purpose, mitigating chances of increased fat storage and weight gain



Keeps stress in check

Resource & graphic credit: Precision Nutrition, John Berardi