

BY DENISE JOHNSON

FUNCTIONAL FITNESS?

GET MORE OUT OF YOUR BODY IN JUST ONE MONTH!

Interested in improving your endurance, strength, agility and coordination all at the same time?

A recent study suggests you can, by taking part in a Functional Fitness program. The American Council on Exercise released a study in 2007 that demonstrated that considerable gains could be made in as little as one month. The study confirmed that this type of training promotes greater physical improvement.

So what is Functional Fitness, anyway? It's a series of movements designed to aid in everyday living and enhance sport-specific abilities and techniques. The muscles and joints work in unison to generate movement, resulting in more powerful and efficient motions. This training differs from a traditional strength-training program, where one muscle group is isolated at a time. Consider it balanced muscle fitness because it focuses on exercises designed to work several muscles, joints and ligaments simultaneously—just like you do with everyday life tasks.

Bret Funk, A.C.E., C.S.C.S., owner of Funktional Training and a trainer at the DC Ranch Village Health Club says, "The body moves in concert," so he recommends, "several movements in several planes because that's the way the body is built."

It's best to start by envisioning the muscles used as you mimic a movement. It also helps to divide the body into three quadrants: upper, core and lower. Since the core links the upper and lower body, improving core strength can be beneficial to many everyday activities. Why? Because the activation of core muscles during training teaches you to activate them at other times, too. As a result, you learn to contract your abdominal muscles and garner enough breath to draw more power out of your body when you need it.

Some example functional training exercises include:

Weighted bicep curl and shoulder press while standing on the dome side of a Bosu ball. These two exercises engage the upper body and core through instability.

Pushing and pulling exercises such as the push-up, bench press and seated row work multiple upper body muscles.

To improve your lower body, consider the *Olympic lift*, a strength-training exercise done while standing. Funk also recommends *multi-directional lunges* and *agility drills*.

While many of these exercises can be done using your body weight alone without the need for any props, there are a multitude of training tools that can be incorporated, such as stability balls, resistance bands and medicine balls.

The benefits of a Functional Fitness program are readily apparent—training that's adaptable to fit specific needs and limitations, and an endless variety of exercises to stave off boredom.