



5 GYM TRAINING TIPS

By Craig Osborne, Chiropractor © 2010

The aim of this check list is to help you pick the best type of exercises to work the muscles of your body. If you stick closely to this list I believe that you'll train the muscles more closely to how they are meant to function, this reduces the injury risk, plus the muscle will look more natural in shape. There are always exceptions but this will give you a great starting point.

IS IT FUNCTIONAL?

Think about the movement of the exercise and try and come up with an everyday activity that would use the movement. If you can come up with one it's probably a functional exercise and it should be fine to do the exercise. Some examples of dysfunctional exercises are sit-ups / crunches, 45 degree leg press, many shoulder and arm exercises, leg extensions and curls, and pulling exercises behind the neck.

Isolation exercises (where only one joint moves) such as pec flyes, lateral shoulder raises, leg extensions are also less functional.

Compound exercises (2 joints or more) are more functional and therefore safer and more effective e.g. bench press, chin ups, squats.

What equipment are you using? Aim to use dumbbells, barbells, Swiss balls and cable weight machines before using fixed pivot equipment, you'll generally be better off. Most fixed pivot machines will be dysfunctional, and may force you through movement patterns that don't match your anatomy.

Please note that this advice is not meant to replace the personal exercise advice you can get from a qualified trainer.

SPINE IN NEUTRAL

Always try to keep your spine in neutral irrespective of the position of the exercise you are doing Neutral means that if you were to move to an upright, standing position and didn't have to straighten up at all, then you're probably in neutral. Your core muscles are much stronger in a neutral position and therefore protect your back while exercising.

CHIN TUCK

Way too often I see people exercising and adding stress to their shoulders and neck by either jutting the chin forward, tilting it down to the chest, or jerking it around because they're exercising above their safe capacity. Always aim to keep your chin drawn in—something that when done standing will lift your head, straighten your spine and keep pressure off your neck. This should apply for all exercises, no matter what you're doing.

ACTIVATE YOUR CORE—BRACE

From the moment you move to start an exercise, or pick up a weight, activate your core to support your spine with the 'Brace' technique. If you're used to doing what is called 'Abdominal Hollowing' and aren't sure how the Brace differs, please ask. Research has shown that while the hollowing does provide some stiffness to the spine, a 'Brace' is far more effective, and I think you will find also a lot easier to do. Many instructors continue to teach the hollowing as they've not caught up with the research yet.

STRETCH MORE

Too many of us don't stretch enough. It seems that stretching before exercise while you are cold is not recommended (current thought) and that it may even increase injury risk. I think it's useful to use every rest period to stretch the muscles you just worked. That way by the time you finish you will have already done most of your stretching, and probably far more than if you'd left it all to the end. Remember to hold the stretch for at least 20 seconds to be effective. It's generally far more effective to do a proper warm up (say 5-10 minutes on a cross trainer) than focus on pre-exercise stretching. Most of the benefits of stretching occur after your workout.