

FIRE FITNESS

Why do people still perform crunches and not stabilization exercises? Why do people still get on the leg press machine instead of body weight squats? Why do people still believe in long slow distance training to “burn fat” instead of high intensity intervals? Well, this is what we did 20 years ago. Things change and so must people. Just like fighting fire, fitness has transformed over the past 20 years. There are many concepts we thought we were doing exercises that would get us fit in the most efficient manner. But we no longer live in a bodybuilding world where we design body part splits for our workouts. You know the workouts: Chest/triceps, back/biceps, and legs/shoulders. If you are still doing this you are “old school”. Instead we train for functionality and job specific tasks. Firefighting does not happen in a singular plane, but rather multi-planar. Performing certain task requires firefighters to use their whole body in odd positions where balance and coordination is required along with strength and endurance. Program design has changed to train specific movements for proper function which is very important for the longevity for firefighters. The body is meant to function in a certain way so let’s train it the way it needs to be trained.

We need mobility in certain areas. If the hips do not move properly our low back will hurt (a common problem for firefighters). Does anyone out there want to blow a disc in their lower back? I am sure no one will answer yes but every time I walk into a "big box" gym people are always performing crunches, back extension and leg press exercises. Dr. Stuart McGill, a low back specialist, states that "any flexion or extension

will create a disc to blow." It might not happen the 1st, 2nd, or 50th time you perform these exercises, but eventually your low back will "hurt".

I will try and explain some old school concepts and methods that you should not be doing anymore. If you are, stop. Remember, you need an open mind when it comes to fitness. An athlete would change his training program if he knew it would help them improve and win. So why not firefighters? They are very similar to athletes in terms of physical exertion, but the major difference is that firefighters have a longer career. So they need to train to help prolong that career in the healthiest manner. If you want to continue to improve you must learn to change your program. Do not do the same thing you were doing 5-20 years ago. Step out of that bubble and step into the new age of fitness training and continue to learn.

Crunches are old school. Again, if you want a low back disc to blow then continue to perform crunches. The movement of crunching puts the spine into flexion. The spine does not want this load. The function of the spine is meant to be stable. When we move at the spine we cause low back pain. Read any of Stuart McGill's research. This guy is way smarter than I am and these are the concepts he talks about. Another exercise people need to eliminate from their program is back extensions. Start thinking stability exercises for the "core". Examples are plank variations, side plank variations, cable stabilization exercises, core rollouts, medicine ball training and cable chops and lifts. If you want a "6-pack", change your diet. If you want to lose weight, change your diet. Doing "abs" at the gym will not get you leaner. It is a mix of a properly designed workout program, consistent healthy nutritional habits and proper rest and recovery. We need to promote good postural habits and doing crunches puts our body in poor position for good posture. Stabilize the spine, stop doing crunches and you will see the difference in the way you move.

Bodybuilding splits are old school. In fact bodybuilding splits are probably close to 20 years old. This is what people did in the 80's and 90's. We went to the gym on Monday to work our chest for an hour. Then the next day was arms. Good ole biceps and triceps for the entire workout. We would leave the gym with a massive pump in our arms. Then the next day we worked back and shoulders. Then we would finish the week with a ridiculous leg routine. Some leg workouts left us unable to walk and we were sore for days after.

If you are still working out like this, STOP! This is not an efficient way to get fit. You must incorporate specific movements and interval conditioning into your workout routine. Horizontal and vertical pressing and pulling movements, bilateral and unilateral knee dominant and hip dominant movements and core stability exercises. Do not make it too complicated.

1. Choose large muscle groups first moving on to the next largest, etc.....switching from Push and Pull or Push and Pull exercises. For example: 3 sets of 10 reps Single Leg Squats followed by 5 vertical jumps in between each set. / 3 sets of as many as possible (AMAP) Pull Ups / Bench Press with clap push ups, etc.
2. Add balance to your routine. If you have two pressing exercises (bench press and push-up) you need two pulling exercises (chin-ups and DB row). If you have two knee dominant exercises (split squat and lunge) you need two hip dominant exercises (deadlifts and hip lifts). When you have imbalances it leads to injury. Who wants to get injured? Nobody! If you are trying to get fit, do not lift like a bodybuilder. Structure your workouts with these new concepts to build an ultimate fitness level.

3. Leg press, leg extension and leg curl machines are old school. In fact they will cause more problems for your knees because they add stress to the knee joint. The body wants to work efficient, and we can change how our body works with functional exercises. If you are using a machine, we are forced or constricted to move our body around the machine causing imbalances or reinforcing pre-existing injuries. Remember the old school Nautilus machines when they first came out. What year was that? 1976. Back then Nautilus was the "cutting edge" of fitness training. But we do not live in the past, we live in the future. Time to step into the new age of training. If your program is loaded with machine exercises and non-functional training then change your program. Implement deadlifts, squat variations, chin-ups, rows, push-ups, presses and core stability work. You will get results. In fact you will get the best results you have ever seen.

4. Long slow distance "cardio" for fat burning is old school. In my first few years as a coach I too did this for my athletes, but over time become more educated and started to develop my programs with modern training principles. There are many different interval protocols. For deconditioned individuals an interval might be a walk on a treadmill at a 5% incline for 30 seconds and then back down to 1% for 1 minute. For fit athletes I usually choose a higher intensity protocol where the work to rest ratio is 2 / 1 or a circuit. These are very intense and can be done as a medicine ball circuit or on a treadmill or bike.

5. The "5 minute walk on a treadmill" warm-up is old school. Do not walk on a treadmill for 5-10 minutes and think you are warmed up. You need to implement a dynamic warm-up to your workout routine. Not just once in awhile. Every time you workout you need to perform a dynamic warm-up. A proper warm-up will prepare you for your workout, increase flexibility, increase joint mobility, and elevate your heart rate. A walk on a treadmill only covers 1 of those traits. Your workout will be more intense and you will reduce injury. Try doing multi-planar moves such as lunges with a twist, elbow to instep, or a hand-walk.

6. Ok I saved the best for last. If you are still participating in step aerobics you are very old school. This was a fad in the 80's. All step class is going to do is give you knee pain. Yes, it is good that you are moving and staying active but there are better options than "step class". If you like group classes choose a strength training or circuit training class. At least now you can get some interval type training.

So the moral of the story is that things change. What we used to do does not work anymore. And what we know now may change. With the beauty of science and education fitness professional will continue to study the body and learn the most efficient ways to get fit. I personally will continue to learn the rest of my life.

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