

Functional Fitness: The Competitive Edge for Elite Athletes and Weekend Warriors

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Elite athlete? Total beginner?

Functional Fitness is the perfect start to the New Year!

Whether you are Michael Phelps with 28 Olympic medals (23 gold) or an active person in your 60s who loves to hike and travel, functional fitness is essential to keeping you at the pinnacle of your game.

Many levels of training gather under the Functional Fitness tent.

If you are competing at the most challenging level in your sport of choice, you must integrate the functional training you need for stability, strength, and injury prevention. This keeps your training consistent and at a high level with no injury holidays.

On the highest level of workout, we have elite athletes with intense training movements that focus on mobility, strength, and balance to prevent injuries, build strength, and lead the field for the specific sports they love.

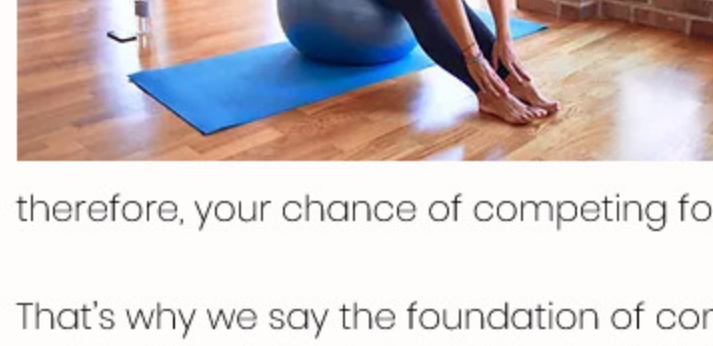
On a less intense level, we have people whose goals are strengthening muscles and improving stability and balance for everyday tasks and activities. Things like hiking, cycling trips, and pruning trees in the yard.

Between these two levels, we have everyone else doing a huge variety of functional exercises as they strive for a wide range of goals and priorities.

One of the best features of Functional Fitness for someone beginning to exercise is that it is a great place to start a consistent, lifelong fitness routine. It is simple and safe for almost everyone, as there is less chance of an injury.

Plus, this training does not require much – if any – equipment to get started, as you can begin to exercise using your body weight for strength building, stability, and balance.

Injury prevention is a prime motivation for Functional Training.



One thing elite athletes know well is that consistency in training is closely associated with being at the top of the sport(s) you choose. Consistency is everything! This is why injury prevention is so important.

In the case of the Olympics, one injury can set back your training and, therefore, your chance of competing for four years.

That's why we say the foundation of consistent training is *preventing injury* as much as possible while also making your training something that you look forward to and will do wholeheartedly, not something you dread.

Functional fitness – focusing on stability!

Functional training is what elite and dedicated athletes utilize to develop stability in their movement patterns and strengthen all the muscle groups needed for the movements they perform. Stability in our movements is an important way we prevent injuries.

Not everyone wants to break world records. Some of us just want to build strength, agility, and balance so we can play 18 holes of golf, stand up paddleboard, spread a load of gravel, or hike *El Camino de Santiago* across Spain.

Being stronger and more stable can benefit ALL of us, leading to fewer injuries while decreasing our back pain and improving our balance and mobility. Just to name a few benefits!

If you are someone who has lost their enthusiasm for exercise, this is the year to break out and try new things. You may love the challenges and creative variations of functional training. It is NOT boring!

How Functional Training differs from traditional strength training

Functional training for a dedicated athlete is usually doing different exercises outside of their main sport, like a runner improving upper body strength doing Pilates or a cyclist doing one-legged squats.

The goal in functional training is not just *building muscle* but improving ALL aspects of the movements required by one's favorite sport or activity. Functional training's goal is to strengthen all the supporting muscles for the sport – the prime movers, the synergists/helpers, and the antagonists/opposing muscles. This creates stability.

Using the Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps again as an example, his functional training workouts would include things outside the swimming pool, like:

- weight lifting for strength
- plyometrics for explosive power in his fast-twitch muscles (short, intense bursts of activity, like jumping up on a box)
- exercises like planks, Russian twists, and medicine ball exercises for core strength
- jogging and cycling for maximum endurance
- stretching and flexibility exercises like yoga and *dynamic stretching* for injury prevention and enhanced range of motion
- and, finally, training in the pool, doing a variety of swim drills to perfect his form, increase his speed, and improve his stamina in the water.

Functional Training for the Elite Athlete

By focusing on building overall functional and explosive strength, core stability, mobility, flexibility, agility, and balance, today's athletes like gymnast Simone Biles or sprinter Usain Bolt are able to do things once thought impossible.

Many athletes build their exercise program around the *types of movements* their favorite sport requires. The focus is not on strong biceps or pecs but rather on how fast and agile they are at downhill slalom skiing or how explosive they are in the 100-meter sprint.

Single-leg training helps to balance the legs' strength and add stability.

Since most sports do not engage both legs simultaneously, single-leg exercises are crucial for working on stability and overcoming any asymmetry between a dominant and non-dominant leg.

For this, a more advanced athlete would do single-leg movements like single-leg squats, deadlifts, bridges, and calf raises to name a few, building up balance and stability before adding any weight.

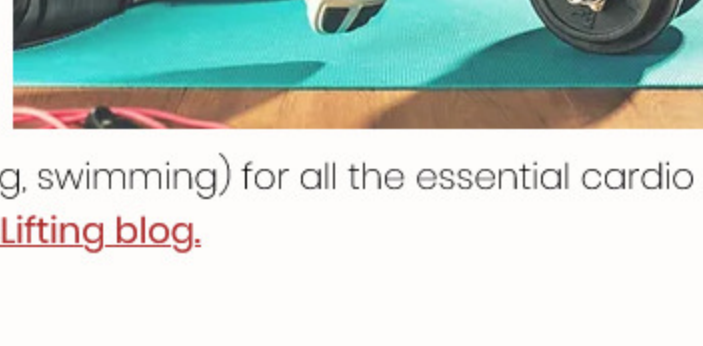
For a sport-specific example, someone who enjoys ski mountaineering (hiking up and skiing down) would focus on improving the movement of climbing and would, therefore, do supportive exercises like deadlifts, squats, lunges, and step-ups.

For athletes who like Spartan races or Obstacle Course Racing, you will need exercises to build your strength for the movement of *pulling* – climbing up ropes, moving through monkey bars, and climbing up walls. So you would want to do pull-ups, planks, burpees, and even Toes-to-Bar exercises, to name a few.

Functional Fitness for a beginner's goal of a healthy, active lifestyle

If you are a beginner and want a *sustainable and consistent* exercise program, then you will want to start slow with something exactly like functional training.

Generally, you will find this to be more of a strength training program. So you will still need to do five to six days a week of cardio (brisk walking, running, cycling, swimming) for all the essential cardio health benefits you will see in our [Cardio vs Lifting blog](#).



When we look at Functional training for beginners, we almost always see that the program involves:

- Focus on injury prevention
- Mostly bodyweight exercises to start – safe and productive for anyone
- Unilateral/one-sided/one-leg movements, like one-legged squats or deadlifts
- Compound movements using more than one body part at a time
- Exercises that go through your full range of motion
- Building strength for your daily life in ALL its aspects, no matter what your age

The motivation for a beginner can be the simple goal of a healthy, active life – keeping our metabolic health, bone health, brain health, strength, and agility deep into our 80s, 90s, and beyond!

The workouts for a beginner usually focus on improving mobility AND stability by training *all* our muscles, especially the less *showy* ones that are overlooked or underused in many traditional weight-lifting routines.

Once you feel stronger, more stable, and have more range of motion, then you might want to move on to slightly more challenging types of functional training, like Pilates or even CrossFit, which is a form of functional training, just a more intense, high-intensity blend of cardio and strength training.

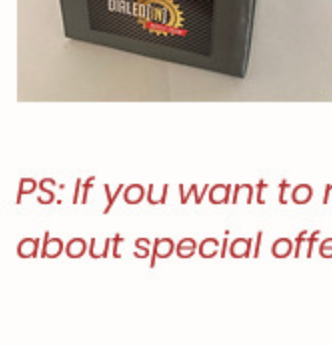
DIALED [IN] Muscle Cream, a competitive advantage in any sport

[DIALED \[IN\]](#) is used by people of all fitness and performance levels – from grandparents training to lift their grandbabies off the floor to elite athletes training for a marathon.

In the same way that functional training gives elite athletes a competitive edge by allowing their training to be more consistent without getting injured, DIALED [IN] Muscle Cream gives a similar advantage towards facilitating consistency in workouts.

When using the cream before and after workouts, athletes notice they can train harder and still recover better in less time. *Day after* muscle soreness and cramping are substantially reduced.

This means that you, the competitive athlete, having trained harder and recovered more thoroughly, show up on race day noticeably stronger, faster, and more recovered than everyone else!



During the race, [DIALED \[IN\]](#) has also been shown to improve performance speed and finish times due to the way it can neutralize acidity. Your muscles can function at optimum performance for a longer period.

With [DIALED \[IN\] Muscle Cream](#) AND functional training, we will see you at your next event, way ahead of the pack, as you cross the finish line.

PS: If you want to receive Kirk and Jenny's free coaching/exercise tips, plus find out about special offers, sign up for the DIALED [IN] monthly newsletter:

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[Peter Douglas Black, LMT, Freelance Writer](#)