

## EXERCISE FOR BALANCE

**The benefits of exercise are well-known** and proven by thousands and thousands of studies. It encourages circulation, detoxification and cellular reproduction; it can help reduce blood pressure, LDL cholesterol, depression, heart disease, osteoporosis, insomnia... and the list goes on.

**But have you ever wondered, “What is exercise?”?**

**Exercise, by definition, is force applied to a motor pattern.**

Whether the force is your body weight against gravity and inertia (such as running, aerobics, biking, etc.) or against dumbbells, machines and cables in the gym, the most popular part of this equation is the force. Questions like “what was your average watts on this ride?” and “how much can you press?” are much more common than “were your hip external rotators firing in the proper sequence during the down phase of your stroke” or “are you emphasizing the costal or sternal fibers of your pec in the press?” The motor pattern, or the sequence of muscular participation, in an exercise is just as important as the direction or amount of force.

**Next time you go to the gym or for a run, leave your ipod behind and direct your awareness to your body.** First just observe, don't make any changes. Do the movements in every joint feel smooth? How about the ones that aren't moving? Are they stable and balanced? Does your right feel the same as your left?

**Remember, where the force enters your body isn't necessarily the area that is being affected.**

When you are doing bicep curls, it's not your hands (and especially not the iron) that is being load. It's your biceps. So direct your attention from your hands and the weights to the muscles you are working. When you are doing squats, it's not your shoulders holding the bar that you are trying to exercise, but your feet, quads, glutes and the rest of your lower body. Direct your attention there.

**If you are not certain as to where to direct your awareness, consult a trainer or a coach,** and unless you have previous education in exercise, this next step may also require a trainer or coach as well.

**You may have found during your observations that one muscle is more active than the same muscle on the other side of your body, or that you are recruiting wrong muscles or not recruiting the right ones.** For an example, if your neck fatigues before your abs do in a crunch, then you are probably doing it wrong. Place your hands on your stomach, direct your awareness to your abs, and slowly feel the ab muscles contracting and shortening. Only crunch as far as your abs can shorten. Do not exaggerate the motion by flexing your neck forwards or rounding your shoulders.

**Use this awareness and your ability to manipulate muscular involvement in every exercise.** This alone will greatly improve your results by encouraging muscular balance and efficiency.

**With some practice you will be able to improve joint balance and muscular efficiency.** Each step in your run will feel fluid, your swim stroke will feel effortless, and your vulnerability to injury will greatly decrease. In short, help your body and your body will help you!

Yours in Health,  
Pam