

# FOUR STEPS TO FUNCTIONAL FITNESS



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Enjoy your new self! Relish being so functionally fit that you don't suffer cricks, sprains, catches and pains, and don't see your daily chores as a health hazard

## 1. What is Functional Fitness and what are its benefits?

Functional Fitness entails being able to go about your daily activities in a fit, healthy, capable fashion, without injuring yourself. In my opinion, it's not only of prime importance but it's absolutely your birthright! After all, what's the point of being fit if you're not healthy and not injury free?

## 2. How do I know if I'm Functionally Fit?

Do you have trouble sitting on the floor and even more while getting up? Are you unable to get out of a low sports car with ease? Do your legs really hurt while going up a flight of stairs? Did you injure your back during a golf or a tennis swing? Did you back out of your car driveway, looking over your shoulder as you reversed and ended up injuring your spine in the process? Did you lift a travel bag and injure your back in the process? Did your wrist give way during a racket game? Did you wake up with a neck ache, while blaming the way your neck was positioned, the type of pillow or the mattress? Are you unable to reach all parts of your back in order to give your back a good scrub during your bath?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then there's your answer: You are just not functionally fit. A very large part of general, overall fitness must necessarily include Functional Training.

## 3. What are Locomotor skills?

A person may injure themselves doing all of the above if they are not particular about how their body moves. Kinesiology is the study of the principles of mechanics and anatomy in relation to human movement. How one walks, manages their movements or locomotes has a great impact on the human body's link or chain system.

For instance, when lifting a travel bag – or anything heavy for that matter – one must always transfer the load onto the legs by bending them and not lift with straight legs, which invariably puts a lot of negative pressure on the back.

If you injured yourself just getting out of bed, it's more to do with the 'how' of it rather than not being functionally fit. The wrong way to do it is to sit straight up from lying flat on your back. The right way to do it is to bend your knees, turn onto your side and then sit up off the side of the bed while lowering your

legs onto the floor. The correct way of getting out of a sports car is not to first put a leg out onto the ground, but to swivel your hips in the car seat so you face the door, then get your legs out one after the other and finally stand up.

## 4. Which exercises constitute Functional Fitness and how are they performed?

Many regular and well known exercises constitute and promote functional fitness:

► The squat conditions the muscles of the lower body, particularly the quadriceps in the front of the thighs. These muscles are important in helping one sit down, stand up and walk up and down the stairs. Keep them well toned and you'll find that walking up stairs, sitting on the floor and getting up and getting in and out of low sports cars will be a breeze.

► Some spinal mobility exercises in Pilates using Pilates Studio equipment known as the Reformers are great to increase spinal flexibility and prevent injury. These exercises are particularly important for racket players and for any activities that require a spinal twist, e.g. looking over your shoulder while backing out of your car in the driveway.

► Back strengthening exercises such as bent over rows, hyperextensions and dead lifts will maintain a strong, fit back that can carry heavier loads without incidence of injury.

► Front and side neck press exercises

will keep the muscles of the neck strong, well conditioned and flexible so a crick in the neck when waking up is not a health hazard.

► Simple calf raise exercises along with its variations will keep the calves and the ankles strong, especially so if one does them using a step where the heels can dip down low before one rises up onto the toes again. If one is prone to spraining their ankles, these exercises will go a long way in keeping one functionally fit. However, these exercises are best done post recovery and not during an active stage of injury.

► Forearm and wrist curls and their variations will keep the forearms and wrists strong. For racket game players this is all the more important.

► Various variations of upper body stretches will increase the reach of the hands to all parts of the back.

