

50+ Impact Training

Originally published 18 February 2020 · fatchfitness.com



Today's topic is related to a well know training phenomena, that of "Use it or lose it".

What this phenomena states is that with all physical attributes, if you don't continue to stress them, they will reduce over time.

Whilst this seems pretty obvious to most, it is amazing how quickly without even realising it, clients can fall back into a low impact, low intensity exercise routine and what this does is slowly degrade those important real world attributes that allow you to continue to run, jump and do dynamic activities into your old age.

HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

Few people consciously move down this path, it typically starts with some sort of impact injury (eg muscle strain, tendon issue from some dynamic activity) resulting in the person beginning a rehabilitation routine that typically will have you move totally away from any high impact type activities for a time (running, jumping, throwing, swinging a racquet, bat, etc).

Unfortunately, if you do not rehabilitate the injury appropriately (this includes easing back into the higher intensity activities), you are then less resilient in these types of activities leading to a further aggravation/injury to the same area or worse, it spreads to the opposite limb/side of the body, etc.

Add to the above injury factor the onset of joint pain and cartilage deterioration as you age and it becomes harder to complete these activities over time. Also as you move into your 70's, it becomes very difficult to maintain your younger strength levels which further impacts your capacity to complete dynamic activities in and outside of a gym environment.

BONE DENSITY:



In a previous article ([Females and Bone Density](#)) I spoke about the importance of not only resistance training but also to impact training (bone density better responds to impacts than to just tension created by muscle contractions).

This aspect of training is not just for females, this should become an integral part of training for all ageing trainers (I would call anyone above 40yrs of age to be in that category).

One fallacy with the gym is that this is the fountain of youth – it can be but that fountain has to prepare yourself for the real rigours of outdoor life and activity. We often take our lead from athletes whom swear by the use of gym type programming to maximise their performance out on the track, field, court, etc.

These athletes are using the gym environment to augment their sporting performance, they are therefore applying any strength or power developed in the gym directly to their sport – this is when gym training comes into its own.

If you spend all your days in the gym doing gym work – guess what, you become really good at lifting in the gym and not much else!!

Physiologically, it is rapid force generation and high impacts that lead to the most likely occurrence of injury – with rapidly swinging or throwing an object and repeated ground contacts (jumps, sprints) being the main culprits.

So, what's a motivated trainer to do???

There are two clear solutions to the above problem:

1. Add an outdoor (or non gym) type activity to your weekly training regime. This activity should include movements that are fast & dynamic in nature, including jumping and change of direction movements and if possible swinging or throwing an object (bat, racquet, ball, etc). We can achieve this by partaking in some form of competitive or non-competitive sporting activity.

A note of care – if you have spent a lot of time in the gym and have gotten very strong, it is possible that you have developed strength/power levels that will in time benefit you in this sporting activity, BUT, it might lead to you potentially injuring yourself as you are able to generate high forces but won't have developed the muscle/tendon tolerance to deal with these forces when you try to jump, sprint, throw, or swing an object with effort.

An example: An ex-power lifter I know is interested in learning how to sprint well, but he continues to injure himself at the track because he is able to generate great power through his thighs but his lower limbs are not conditioned enough to tolerate these high forces resulting in ongoing shin and achilles issues.

Start by spending some time training in this activity before starting any competitive performance (I suggest this approach even social sport). Start slowly with everything you do, keep the volume very low and try to repeat this type of training at least twice a week (it could be a warm up to a gym session for example).

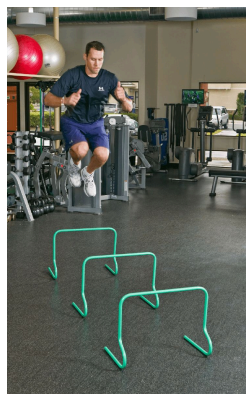
2. Add dynamic activities to your gym routine.

If you don't want to or don't have the time to add 1-2 more sessions to your week (through attending a sporting training session), then adding appropriate exercises to your gym routine will go a long way in addressing this gap in your physical training.

Some of the activities you might consider adding to your routine can be broken into different categories:

1. Jumping

There are two types of jumps that I would suggest you look at incorporating into your weekly routines:



a. Short ground contact jumps – these include activities such as skipping, jumping over low hurdles or repeated ground and box jumps. These jumps are to be done quickly with short time on the ground.



b. Long ground contact jumps – these types of jumps include jumping up onto a high box (and stepping down to repeat) as well as double leg long jumping.

The short contact jumps will place a high load on your lower limb (shins, ankles, achilles, feet) whilst the long contact jumps will place more stress on your knees, hips and back.

2. Fast Feet activities

These activities will be less stressful on your joints, but will challenge your nervous system and coordination which will be very beneficial for any dynamic outdoor activity.

These activities can include:



a. Fast feet through ladders (or any line markings on the ground).

The goal here is to complete a range of very quick feet movements which will improve your movement over the ground.



b. Patters – I really like this exercise, you can do it to time, follow a path, add a jump and other activities to it – again it really stresses your nervous system and starts to address the loss of speed that we all experience as we age.

The technique is that you try to take really fast stationary steps as many as possible. You don't need to bring your feet as high as this image – even just a couple of centimetres is great – you can then really aim for high leg speed until your nervous system gives way!

3. Dynamic medicine Ball Throws

Now these exercises will be somewhat dependent upon the facility you have access to, but let's assume you have a solid wall – then these exercises are excellent in developing some of this real work muscle conditioning that will increase your robustness for outside the gym activities.

a. Repeat wall/floor/partner throws



These sorts of exercises are excellent in that you have a weight (medicine ball) that to throw with force, you have to use your legs, arms & core in combination to get the maximum force.

You can do single throws with a short rest for power or you can complete repeated throws which will increase your muscular and aerobic endurance as well.

There are 100's of variations of these that you can undertake (with a partner is an excellent addition to your dynamic training) and they are a great way of expressing your strength from your gym training into a more dynamic movement that will benefit you outside with any dynamic activity.

SUMMARY:

- Gym training by itself only really makes you good at gym training.
- You have to convert this 'slow' strength to 'fast' strength through the use of dynamic exercises.
- These exercises could be participation in a sporting activity or through the addition of dynamic exercises in your gym setting.
- You must keep volume low to begin with. Dynamic exercises have the capacity to injure you (muscles, tendons, joints) so give your body time to adapt by slowly increasing the intensity and volume over time.

For further information on how you can add appropriate impact training to your program - check out my blog, in particular the section on [JUMP TRAINING & BONE MASS DENSITY \(BMD\)](#).

This scientific paper reinforces the impact requirements of exercise to maximise bone stimulation ([Effects of Resistance Training on Bone Health](#)).

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