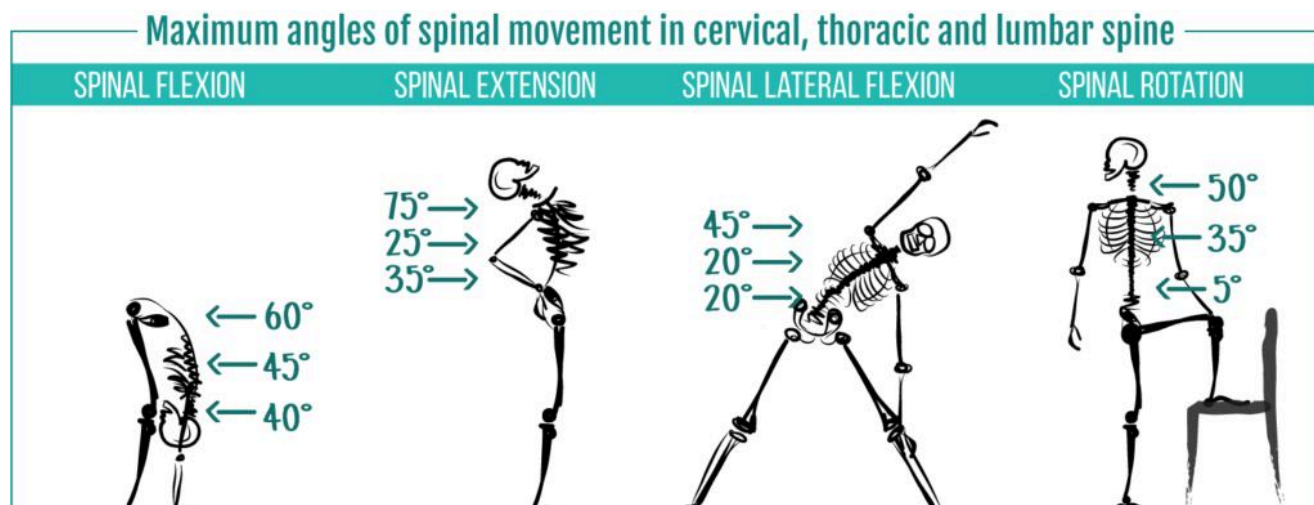


Spinal Mobility – Routines to ensure you target all aspects of the core

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When we aim to address spinal mobility – there are 4 major movements that we should include in any exercise routine we create:

1. Torso flexion
2. Torso Extension
3. Torso lateral Flexion
4. Torso Rotation

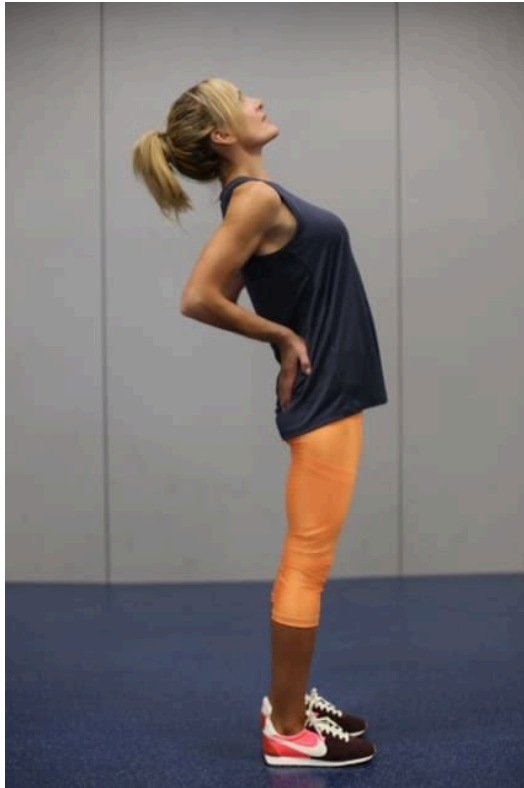
If we ensure that our routine includes exercises that target all of these movements, we can then be confident that we are training the torso/spine in all planes that it needs to be able to function properly.

I have two goals with the above routines:

1. To improve the strength through range that the torso can work through.
2. To improve the actual range of motion that the torso (spine) can move through.

It is not just a lack of strength at range as we get older, it is a lack of mobility through these ranges that I see being the larger problem.

Through increased time standing with poor posture & sitting in poor ergonomic seats, the older client will often be unable to bend their spine much at all in certain movements (eg extension, lateral flexion and rotation).



Older clients are often just unable to generate any decent back extension without it causing them pain.

This decreased mobility then leads to other regions having to take the brunt of the load when performing some physical activity leading to overuse & potential for injury.

There is also the difference between “passive” Range of Motion (ROM) and active ROM. I am a firm believer in active ROM exercises because we want the torso to move itself (under its own steam so to speak) rather than using our arms to twist, pull, bend and rotate our torso (spine).

A poorly conditioned spine can be easily injured if you passively move the spine through large ranges of motion without the supporting musculature, so early on I focus on improving the client's core strength to allow for strong movements in all planes.



Trying to force yourself into a Cobra pose can lead to joint irritation particularly in your lumbar spine.

EXAMPLE ROUTINES:

1. Torso flexion

I like my clients to perform both traditional crunches (curling up from the cervical spine) as well as from lower down the spine (a reach for the sky movement).



Subject is curling from the neck. Subject is curling from the thoracic spine

2. Torso Extension

This is a key movement that most of my older clients are not at all good at!! It is something that we do so rarely in today's sedentary lifestyle but is very important for spine functionality.



Torso Raise only. Supers (both torso and legs)

3. Torso lateral Flexion

Lateral flexion is simply bending to one side (not forward and side which is what most clients end up doing when asked to do this movement).

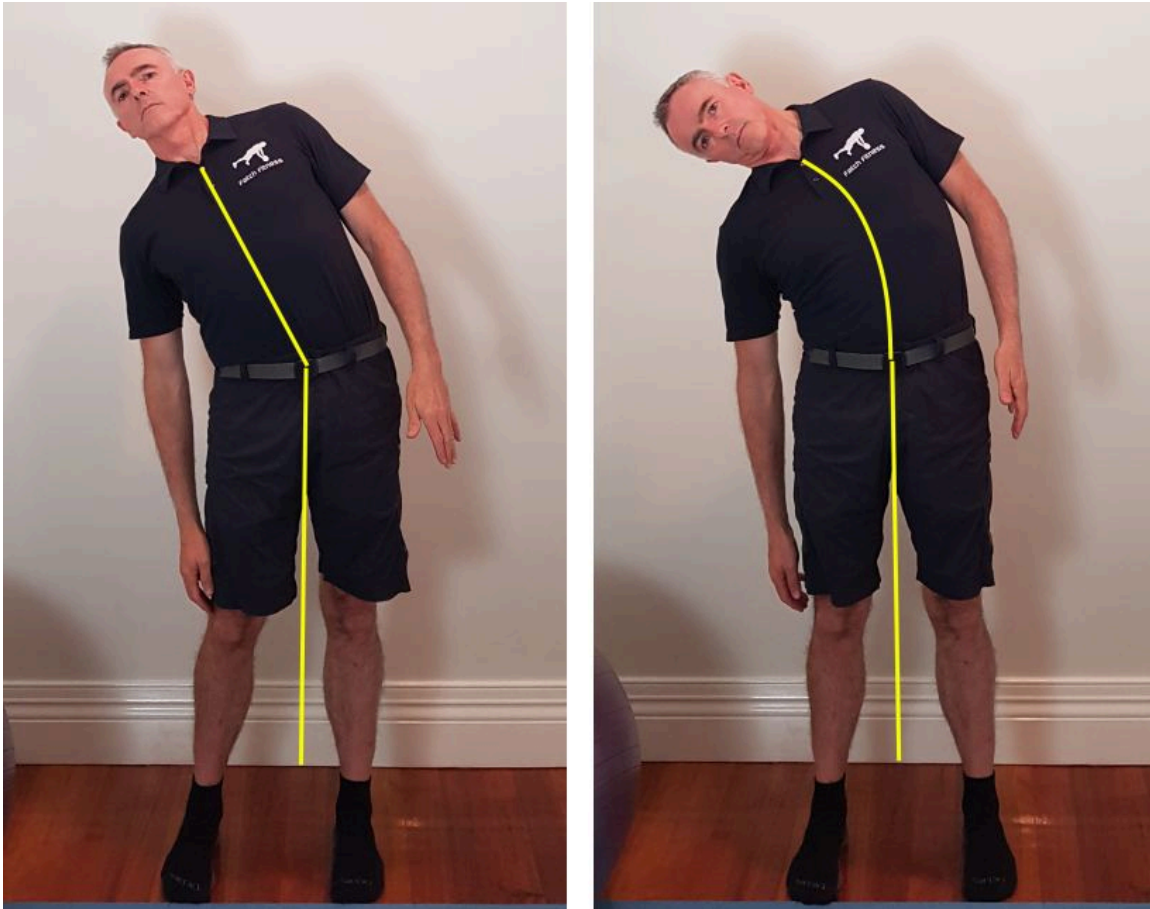


Image 1 - bending at hips only. Image 2 - Spine bending from lumbar to cervical vertebra.

4. Torso Rotation

The final movement that we should train is the torso's ability to rotate. I typically see clients unable to rotate evenly in both directions – which can lead to further imbalances particularly if a rotational movement is important in day to day activities (eg twisting to see behind you when reversing your car!).



A great way of working on both rotation and extension is to perform a super with a twist. (Hands can be out front, under your chin or by the side of your head as shown here).

ROUTINE (2 rounds):

1. Reach for the Sky situps x 10-20

1. Slow contraction up and down, full recovery at the bottom of each rep.

2. Supers x 10

1. Lifting feet is optional. Slow 1-2 second up and down.

3. Standing lateral flexion (for maximum range) x 5/side

1. Focus on contracting the side abs (obliques) when you pause at your deepest range as you come out of this position.

4. Super with twist x 3/side

1. Keep elbows off the ground at all times – try to look to the ceiling.

Please see accompanying video highlighting many of these exercises ([40+ Spinal Mobility 1](#)).

I will continue to discuss the importance of spinal mobility in future posts and highlight additional exercises you can include to improve the health of your spine.

