

## The Evolution of the Functional Fitness Movement

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Fitness trends come and go each year introducing new concepts of diet and exercise to the public. One trend that has been growing in popularity the past few years is “Functional Fitness”. While it is poorly defined and often poorly understood, functional fitness was originally defined as one’s ability to perform the functions of their daily life with successful performance and no pain. The thought was that if someone was having a difficult time performing daily activities such as going down stairs, they could perform “functional exercises” that mimic the task of walking down stairs to improve upon this activity. For example, if an individual has a difficult time walking down stairs you could have them perform half-lunges a few times a day to strengthen the muscles that allow safe stair descent. This form of training made sense because the exercises are more specific to the individuals needs than performing exercise on a machine or on the floor.

As the functional exercise movement increased in popularity, so did the number of complex exercises. Rehabilitation and fitness professionals were moving farther away from the original functional movement by adding tools such as exercise balls, rollers, balance boards, and kettle bells. They thought to challenge their clients in a variety of positions so that they would become masters of the movement. Soon, the “functional exercises” were more complex than the functional tasks they were supposed to mimic in the first place! While training in this manner has its benefits, the original purpose of the functional exercise movement was forgotten and a new definition of functional fitness was emerging. Functional fitness was no longer being defined by the activities one NEEDED to do, but by what one had THE POTENTIAL TO DO.

With the new definition of functional fitness came various screening tests developed to measure attributes of functional fitness such as balance, range of motion, stability and motor control. It is believed that if a standard level of baseline function can be defined, rehabilitation and fitness professionals will be able to better evaluate their client’s abilities and prescribe exercises to address their functional needs. This view of functional fitness benefits both sedentary and active clients and is thought to make clients more athletic, more resilient to injury and improve their performance in their daily tasks. Outside of rehabilitation clinics, groups such as the US military, NFL, NASCAR, MLB and even industrial organizations are utilizing functional movement screening in some way to evaluate their employees perceived injury risk, functional fitness level, and to help direct their fitness programs.

For more information on functional fitness or to have your functional fitness screened, contact your physical therapist or a qualified health and fitness professional today!

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