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**Movement That Matters: Exercise With a Greater Purpose**

**By Gillian Hood-Gabrielson**

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You've seen the commercials I've fallen and I can't get up! While this has been a topic of many jokes and late-night comedy skits, the reality is falling is a very real danger for many people. Too often falls can lead to broken bones, hospitalization, and sometimes life-threatening illnesses due to being confined to a bed while recovering.

A less extreme, but still real situation is when a person lacks the leg strength to get out of a chair. Or someone who throws out their back just picking up a child or the groceries from the trunk of the car.

Did you know that this is not inevitable? With consistent and effective exercise, you will maintain your daily activities without injury well into your sixties, seventies, eighties, and beyond.

You may have heard the buzzwords functional training and core training mentioned in the latest fitness magazines. While these terms sound complicated, they are really terms for the most effective and exciting system of strength training being used today.

Functional training strengthens your body for the everyday movements it has to perform. This could be any type of movement, whether for a sport, your job, or just picking up your kids. Most injuries occur in the course of our everyday lives. Strengthen your body for these activities and you will sustain less injury. Functional training also improves balance. This is essential for preventing falls. A combination of strength and balance will give you the confidence to move through your day with ease!

Core training works on strengthening your core, your abdominal and low back muscles. Just as a house needs a foundation to build upon, so does your body. Work on the core first and every other exercise you add will be more effective and make you stronger. Many functional training exercises incorporate core training. There are also exercises that isolate the core for maximum benefit. Core training is the idea behind Pilates and is also used in yoga.

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You can incorporate both types of training into your regular workout with equipment such as stability balls, medicine balls, elastic tubing, slides, and dumbbells. Some exercises require no equipment at all! Several videos and guides on the market can teach you many of these exercises. You can also hire a personal trainer for a few sessions so you can learn the proper techniques. These methods are more effective than traditional gym strength training machines because more muscles are used and the body becomes more coordinated and strong as a result. Machines do play an important role, however. As a new exerciser, you may not have the strength or coordination necessary for functional training. I recommend a combination of basic core strengthening and the use of machines to develop basic strength before starting the more complex functional and core movements.

One of the best and simplest functional exercises is the squat. We use this motion all day long getting up from a chair, or picking an object up from the ground, as examples. Learn to squat properly and do it consistently and you will remain strong, independent, and less prone to injury. A great core exercise for beginners is one you can do anytime, anywhere. While sitting or standing, pull your navel towards

your spine. Concentrate on performing this movement without flattening your back it is important to maintain proper posture. This strengthens very deep abdominal muscles that are responsible for protecting your back. Try this exercise while driving when you stop at a red light, perform 10 repetitions. Your abdominals will thank you for it!

Think about it, do you walk around during the day doing leg extensions? What about abdominals crunches on the floor? While these exercises work targeted muscles and are good accessory exercises, functional exercises create a stronger, healthier body that will be protected from injury and provide a higher quality of life.

Gillian Hood–Gabrielson, MS, ACSM is the president of Flexible Fitness, a nationwide coaching practice offering health and fitness solutions for your busy lifestyle including Fitness Coaching by Phone, Intuitive Eating, and monthly motivational seminars. She can be reached at 866–618–8814 or by email at

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### **One Simple Movement Can Double the Effectiveness of Pulldowns**

**By Nick Nilsson**

The Pulldown is an excellent exercise for working the Latissimus Dorsi muscles of the back (also known as the lats). It is a little known fact but there is a way you can dramatically improve the effectiveness of this exercise by performing one simple movement before each rep.

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Many people have a hard time feeling their lats working when they do pulldowns. The biceps may have a tendency to take over the movement. Some people just don't feel anything in their back at all.

This little movement trick can change all of that.

The movement is simply a shoulder drop and even though it may seem like a SMALL thing, it can have a HUGE impact on your back workout.

To demonstrate this movement, start by sitting in a pulldown machine with a moderate weight on the stack. Take a close grip on the bar with your palms facing you (known as a reverse grip). Do a few reps using your normal technique so you have a gauge to measure against.

Now we will add the shoulder drop. Let your arms go straight and let your shoulder girdle rise up as though shrugging. Your shoulders should be up by your ears. Now drop your shoulder girdle down in the opposite movement to the shrug, pulling the weight down as you do so. The range of motion is small, being only a matter of a few inches. Repeat this drop and raise several times to get the feel for the movement. You should feel your entire shoulder girdle moving up and down.

We will now do a rep with the shoulder drop movement. Start in the stretched position with your shoulders up by your ears. Drop your shoulders down, lean slightly back then do a pulldown. Be sure to keep your lower back arched and your chest puffed out to meet the bar on the way down. You should feel your lats working harder than usual.

Squeeze hard as though trying to touch your shoulder blades together as you come to the bottom then let the weight back up slowly. You can repeat the shoulder drop movement at the start of every rep or you can simply keep your shoulders down and locked in that position throughout the set.

Dropping your shoulders down like this serves to lock the lats into the movement and helps to minimize the biceps involvement in the pulldown. You should find that you get a much more effective lat workout using this technique.

Nick Nilsson is Vice President of BetterU, Inc., an online exercise, fitness, and personal training company. Check out his latest eBook "The Best Exercises You've Never Heard Of" at

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