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**Proprioceptive Training: A key to sports success**

**By John D Moore**

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Let's talk a little bit about proprioception for a minute. That's a \$3 SAT word that means your body's ability to react properly to external forces. For example: if you ride bulls for fun, you must have the ability to react to gravity and the changing forces of the bull to keep from being thrown off. That's proprioception. But proprioception is also your ability to walk across a room without falling down.

One of the main components of proprioception is your kinesthetic sense. That is your ability to sense where your body is in space. But that's only one component unless your sport happens to involve standing or lying in space.

You must also be able to sense and control your body's movements. Think of a gymnast showing perfect control as she throws herself about the parallel bars. The key here is the appropriate control of tension by your central nervous system.

Balance is also a key element to proprioception. You will not perform your sport very well if you fall down all the time. Balance is also a key to generating power - as any martial artist will tell you. Balance in movement as occurs in walking or running, is a process of constantly and consciously losing your balance and regaining it quickly. The quicker you can regain your balance, the safer your movement.

Deliberate Proprioceptive training has normally been reserved for people who are in rehabilitation from injuries. Sports injuries in particular can leave decreased performance in the mechanoreceptors in the body. Exercises for balance and greater kinesthetic sense are usually prescribed.

The benefits of proprioceptive training to the healthy athlete are many. With increased balance athletes are less prone to injury. Athletes may also become quicker - in athletic terms this mean they can change direction faster. Proprioceptive training helps them make more precise movements with less effort. Think about the martial artist throwing that jumping spinning wazzu - butterfly kick - now that's

proprioception.

So, the benefits break down to safer, more efficient, quicker, and more precise movement. What athlete wouldn't want that?

To be fair, any type of training you do is already working your proprioception - unless you are training for the sleep Olympics. Playing your sport itself is a functional integration of your proprioceptive skills. However, you may want to spend some time focusing on proprioceptive training - to increase proprioception, then integrate that into your sport.

Like any kind of training, proprioceptive training should be challenging. This forces an adaptive response on your body's central nervous system. This is much like lifting weights where most of the strength gains come from the nervous system - and not from increasing muscle size. If all you ever do is lift light weights that aren't challenging for you - you aren't going to get much stronger.

So, I can hear you asking, "what exercises can I do for proprioceptive training?"

That's a great question. Let me tell you that there is an astounding array of exercises designed to increase proprioception. You know those big rubber stability balls that every gym has these days? Those are great for proprioception. There are also wobble boards, Styrofoam doo-hickies, and all sorts of crazy wobbly things designed to challenge your balance and core strength.

Certain yoga exercises are also designed to challenge balance, as are some forms of kettlebell lifting. To get some sport-specific proprioceptive training I suggest you check with a qualified fitness instructor.

John D Moore is a personal protection, self defense, and fitness instructor. he is the co-founder of Martial Training Systems – see

and author of the book

Quotations for Martial Artists

## **Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation | Pnf**

**By Sharon Hopkins**

What is PNF

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation or PNF is a type of flexibility therapy. It is based on the principles of functional human anatomy and neurophysiology, Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation uses proprioceptive input to improve muscle flexibility and strength. Proprioceptors are sensory nerve-ending in muscles, tendons, and joints. They provide a sense of the body's position by responding to stimuli from within the body. Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation is built on a

series of exercises that stretch stiff or painful muscles in the body.

### How does PNF work

Over the years, bad postural and movement patterns can put chronic strain on the muscles, leading to soreness, stress and injury. Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation makes the patient aware of these hazardous patterns and teaches them how to correct these patterns. This newfound awareness also helps the patient avoid exerting unnecessary strain on the muscles and limbs when carrying out any physical activity. Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation achieves this by teaching a series of stretching exercises that the patient can adapt into their everyday movements. These exercises combine muscle contraction and relaxation with passive and partner-assisted stretching.

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation is also used as a rehabilitative therapy to improve the flexibility, strength, and range of motion, of a damaged or stiff muscle. It is also used to treat lower back, neck and shoulder pain associated with poor posture. During these therapy sessions the patient is asked to contract the affected muscles against a static resistance that is applied by the therapist. A typical session of Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation therapy consists of a series of muscle contractions followed by periods of muscle relaxation.

### Benefits of PNF

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation helps to improve muscle strength, increase endurance and improve coordination. It also results in the correction of muscular imbalances which results in increased holding power and promotes relaxation. The correction of incorrect postural and movement patterns also leads to improved health and wellbeing.

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation when used as a rehabilitative therapy can be used to soothe chronic muscle pains and correct other ailments related to incorrect posture such as back and shoulder pain and restricted movement in the joints.

### Precautions for PNF

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation involves a series of stretching exercises, hence, all the precautions that are commonly taken while carrying out any form of exercise should be followed. Before starting the PNF exercises ensure that your body is sufficiently warmed up to avoid cramps and injury to the muscles. While carrying out the exercises, step up the pace and intensity gradually, to allow your body to get conditioned to the demands being placed on it. While stretching, do place an

emphasis on proper form and posture, otherwise you could risk negating the benefits of PNF and injuring yourself.

Sharon Hopkins authors content for

and introduces you to

Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation, a type of flexibility therapy in this article. She also writes for other health sites on Yoga, Hair–n–Skin–Care and Aromatherapy among others.

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