

As fitness professionals, we know there are countless, ever evolving ways to train the human body. Some are creative and exciting, some are predictable and time tested, and some are progressive and cutting edge. Depending on the goals and personalities of our group exercise students and personal training clients, some methods work better than others. The possibilities are limitless, yet often our students and clients share very common goals. Ideally they want to burn fat, develop strength and increase their cardiovascular endurance. They want to do this as efficiently as possible so they can lose weight and get visible results. With these goals in mind, is there one perfect approach that will offer guaranteed results and unwavering commitment? Probably not, but one method that has stood the test of time is functional training.

### A Case for Functional Training

What exactly is functional training? We know it's a term that has been at the forefront of our industry for over a decade. It's prompted endless research and discussion, been the subject of controversy due to the loose interpretation of what it can and cannot do, and thanks to its popularity, has resulted in a deluge of products and programs. But what do you imagine when you think of functional training? Does the BOSU® come to mind? Kettlebell training or balance work? Without a doubt, functional training sparks very passionate thoughts and opinions, and though it's not the only way to train, it has proven to be effective, motivating and results driven. Quite simply put, functional training involves training for everyday movement and activity, and applying exercises that transfer to real life. Functional training involves multi-planar, multi-joint, multi-muscle movements, and daily life is just that. We bend, sit, reach, twist and do multiple activities at once, so why not train our bodies in ways that make this movement possible? Is holding a grocery bag in one arm, a child's hand in the other, and shutting the car door with your foot functional? How about mowing the lawn and pulling weeds, cleaning house or shoveling snow? They are all Activities of Daily Living, ADLs, and movements that require a sharp neuromuscular system and a body that is responsive, agile, and ready for unpredictable circumstances. There are no warnings when we're going to slip on the ice, but having good balance and a strong center helps our bodies respond quickly and effectively. Functional training encourages you to use your mind and your muscles as an integrated whole to produce movements efficiently, thereby training your brain and your body.

### Reasons for Functional Training

BOSU, stability balls and kettlebells, just to name a few, are based on principles of functional training. According to the *BOSU Balance Trainer Complete Workout System (A Programming Manual for Fitness Professionals)*, "Functional training is purpose driven or intentional training...used to expose an individual to integrated movement patterns....Functional training

encompasses an evolved performance approach that involves the whole body...moves away from isolation or single-joint training, to whole body, integrated, multi-joint movement that requires muscle groups to work together."

According to the National Academy of Sports Medicine, *Elements of Personal Fitness Training* textbook, "Today, more people work in offices, have longer work hours, use better technology...and are required to move less...this produces more inactive and nonfunctional people and leads to dysfunction and increased incidents of injury...An integrated approach should be used to create safe programs that consider functional ability for each individual person."

Even with progressive training tools at our disposal, one of the benefits of functional training is that it can be done with no equipment at all—using our body weight against gravity—or with equipment such as free weights or exercise tubing. The following are a sampling of functional exercises adapted from the exercise DVD, *Angie Miller's Crave Results*. The program, led by Angie Miller, is available at: [angiemillerfitness.com](http://angiemillerfitness.com), [collagevideo.com](http://collagevideo.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and other select retailers. The workout is designed to be time efficient and challenging with exercises that build in intensity and work multiple muscle groups. Short cardio bursts are added to increase the heart rate while a modifier offers options. Balance is an integral part of the movements and a core segment and final stretch are included. Page 50 shows segments from two exercise blocks used in the DVD.

Vince Metz, MA, LMT, CSCS, Chairman of the Western Sciences Department and Personal Training Program at the Swedish Institute College, sums up functional training like this: "The Gym is not like Vegas. What happens in the gym shouldn't stay in the gym. Whether you are balancing on a BOSU, swinging a kettlebell, or doing a dead lift...time spent in the gym should transfer to the tasks you do in life..." AF

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**ANGIE MILLER, MS**, is a multifaceted fitness professional with over 18 years' experience. A national presenter, freelance writer, instructor and trainer, Miller provides continuing education courses to fitness professionals throughout the country. A former school teacher and counselor, she creatively blends principles from psychology, education and fitness to empower and motivate clients. Her fitness videos include *Core and Strength Fusion* and *Kettlebell Bootcamp*. Miller shares her passion with fitness enthusiasts worldwide. She is certified through AFAA, ACE and NASM, and holds a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in counseling. Visit her website at [angiemillerfitness.com](http://angiemillerfitness.com).

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