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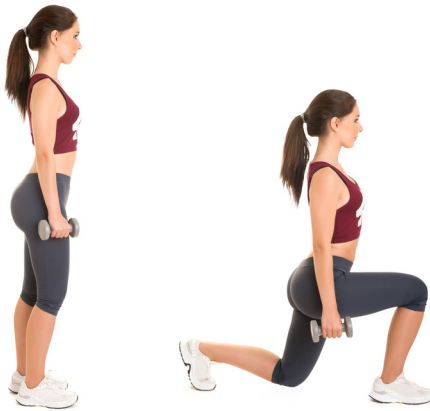
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Ten Reasons to Love the Lunge



Any fitness activity you perform should carry over to better performance during daily living. We all need to be able to get up and down off the floor, stride over an obstacle, and

maintain some degree of balance on one leg. A simple, no frills exercise progression that checks all those boxes is the lunge. Following are the reasons for and instructions on the lunge series of exercises:

One: Neural response. Lunges reinforce the neural connections that produce a movement pattern you need to stay independent and active for a lifetime. Improving the performance of the neural software that controls movement is the most important aspect of any training program.

Two: Single leg strength. Human movement happens one leg a time. Lower extremity mobility and strength asymmetries lead to injuries. It is very common to find athletes and fitness clients with one leg that works well and the other leg that lags behind. We all need more training that makes us more durable and harder to break.

Three: Better mobility. Reciprocal hip mobility (one hip moves forward as the other moves back) tends to shrink with age, injury, and more time in the recliner. The loss of reciprocal hip mobility affects your ability to walk, run, and sprint. It places greater stress on your knees and lumbar spine and, I believe, is the reason for much of the early breakdown in those joints.

Four: Reduced spinal loading. Prolonged sitting, extra body fat, and poor core muscle control increase compression of the spine. If you have a prior history of lower back or neck pain, then managing the amount of spinal loading in your fitness program is a good idea. Lunges strengthen the legs and produce much less compressive force on the lumbar spine than a leg press, squat, or deadlift.

Five: Fat loss. If your primary goal is to improve your body composition, then increasing training intensity will always work better than longer training sessions. There are few training activities that are as metabolically demanding as lunges. A consistent diet of lunges will produce the magical metabolic process that removes fat and adds muscle.

Six: True core training. Most core training happens in supine or prone, but we use our core stabilizers in an anti-gravity posture. Lunges train the team of muscles that holds the pelvis and spine in a functional upright position. You develop the isometric strength / endurance necessary to haul in the groceries, push the lawn mower, or carry a child.

Seven: No equipment necessary—just some open space. Start with just your bodyweight. As you become stronger and able to add load, use a medicine ball held at chest level. If you lose balance and need to drop the ball, it will not produce a fractured foot. As you get stronger and more confident, you can add resistance with dumbbells, sandbags, or kettlebells.

Eight: Bone building. Lunges create a bone-enhancing stimulus to the lumbar spine, pelvis, and femurs. These skeletal segments are commonly affected by osteoporosis.

(continued on next page)

Nine: Better balance. Nothing impacts your health like an injury caused by a fall. If you are an older female, your health is more likely to be impacted by a fall than heart disease or cancer. Unfortunately, our balance deteriorates with age. The single leg biased training of a lunge has a profound effect on balance skills.

Ten: Anti-injury. You sprain your knee, twist your ankle, or damage your hip when you land, not when you take off. Most athletes need a better set of brakes. Lunges will improve control of deceleration at the foot, ankle, knee, hip, and pelvis.

Bonus: Injury predictor. An athlete's performance of the lunge serves as an ongoing evaluation of his or her potential for injury. The female soccer player whose knee collapses inward during the lunge is auditioning for an anterior cruciate injury. The football player who is unable to maintain a tall torso is a future lower back pain patient. Identifying and fixing these performance deficits, before they produce injury, is proper training.

Whatever your fitness level, there is a version of the lunge you can perform. This is the progression I have been using with athletes and fitness clients for many years:

Lunge Prescription

Split Stance Squats -> Posterior Slides -> Walking Lunges

Beginner: Split Stance Squats



Set up at the bottom of the movement pattern in a half-kneeling (genuflexion) position.

Place a cushion under the knee on the floor. The front knee is flexed at 90 degrees and the front foot

stays flat on the floor during the movement. The toes of the rear leg are dug into the floor. Push up with both legs at the same time and straighten the front knee. Hold for two counts, lower back down in a controlled manner, and repeat. The down knee should just touch the cushion and then come back up. As necessary, you can use the assist of a chair, counter, or table. The torso leans forward similar to a squat and keep a proud chest. Very often, this exercise is easier on one side than the other. Start with the weaker side first and try to train away the asymmetry.

Intermediate: Posterior Slides

Stand with a furniture slider under the left foot. You can purchase a pack of four sliders at Bed, Bath and Beyond for \$15.00. You may initially need an upper extremity support to assist if your balance is limited. Use a chair, broomstick, or pvc pipe on the

left side. Place 90% of your weight over right foot and 10% on the left. Slide the left leg back into a genuflexion position. The right hip flexes and the knee bends while the shin angle stays upright. Push back up with the right leg keeping the right heel firmly on the ground. Keep the chest up and a tight upper back. Push back up with the gluteals and hamstrings of the right leg. Complete your repetitions and switch to the left leg. It is not uncommon to have one side more proficient than the other. Work on training away that asymmetry by performing an extra set of this drill on your weaker side. As your performance improves, drop the balance assist and work on adding resistance.

Advanced: Walking Lunges

Stand tall with the feet hip width apart. Step forward with the right leg and lower your body down so the left knee nearly touches the ground. Keep a fairly upright front shin alignment and load the gluteal and hamstrings with flexion of the right hip. Push up to standing with the right leg and then step forward with the left leg. Make sure you stand all the way back up to a tall and upright posture. The front knee should not collapse inward and try to keep your path straight. Beginners can start with two sets of five lunges on each leg and build up to two sets of ten on each leg.

-Michael S. O'Hara, P.T., OCS, CSCS

View video of these exercises on our youtube channel:
<https://youtu.be/SOgWGUo7Hkw>

“The Greatest Wealth Is Health” -Virgil

Carol Cornillie's Story of Strength



I met Carol Cornillie in July of 2014 when she was just finishing a successful round of physical therapy. Carol had always been active but

her fitness level declined during the years she was raising her two children. When they were older, she started running to get back in shape, but her good intentions eventually ended in pain. She was referred to our clinic after a bout of sciatica became so bad it started interfering with her daily activities. Her therapist convinced her to take at least a few weeks off from running and encouraged her to try Fenton Fitness to explore other ways of working out. She was hesitant to join the gym at first because she didn't think she'd be challenged in the gym like she was on a run.

“As a runner, I felt strong. It wasn't until I started taking classes and working on the program Jeff created for me that I realized I had a lot of work to do. The workouts were tough. I started using muscles I never had before and quickly learned there is a lot more to working out.”

Carol began a Team Training membership and loved the classes. Her sciatica disappeared. She was getting stronger and the encouragement from the trainers and members was motivating.

In September 2015, after over a year in the gym establishing a consistent exercise habit, Carol was hit with some bad news. Her cancer was back. Three years before, she had been diagnosed with breast cancer, and at that time, underwent a bilateral mastectomy, reconstruction, and chemotherapy. Devastated but determined, she took time off from the gym through chemo and radiation. Seven months later,

she returned, cancer-free yet hesitant, to start again. She had acquired many friends in Team Training and she remembers being overwhelmed by the support from her fellow classmates.

“You'll never know how hard it is to come back,” she said to me one morning after class. “When you lose your hair and your mood is down and you feel weak... I was so sensitive. I felt insecure and self-conscious. It was really difficult to overcome those feelings. Gratefully, I was welcomed with open arms by this close knit group. I had lost so much confidence while I was away, but when the members rallied around me, I instantly felt supported and encouraged.”

Just after her return to the gym last spring, we had a Free Training Week and invited all of our members to try something new. Carol was interested in Semi-Private Training but said she didn't want to waste our time. She enjoyed the classes and wasn't sure she was ready for the close attention or increased cost of small group training. We convinced her to give it a try, and seven months later, she has no regrets.

“I would like to say my newest love is Semi-Private Training because I am pushed harder and see better results in a shorter period of time than ever before. I also like that it is designed just for me, and I can go at my own pace without missing reps. With a trainer by my side, I also can't slack off or get out of anything!”

“I believe I am stronger now than before my most recent health issue and am motivated by the results of my training. The terrific people here have created a positive, encouraging, friendly, and fun place to work out.”

Carol's increased strength and confidence has played a big role in maintaining her positive, determined mindset. “I could not have gone through this alone. I have put my life in God's hands. I had to give up that control to keep going. By scheduling my workouts and coming to the gym consistently, I am doing all I can to stay strong and healthy. I have to.”

~Amy Warner, Director of Sales and Marketing

Going Grizzly

Crawl and Bear Hug Sandbag Carry

When designing exercise programs for rehabilitation patients and fitness clients, I put activities together in pairs. This practice is commonly called super-setting exercises. Pairing up exercises in a training program has multiple benefits:

Train efficiently—You get much more work done during your training time.

Abolish performance deficits—Most physical therapy and fitness clients need to work on glaring right vs. left movement asymmetries, postural restrictions, and stability limitations.

Lose weight—Fat loss is the primary goal of most fitness clients. Pairing exercises ramps up exercise intensity and creates the hormonal response that improves body composition.

Move better—Training neurologically related movement patterns improves motor control.

CRAWL AND BEAR HUG SANDBAG CARRY

A finisher is a short, but intense, high metabolic cost, training event performed at the end of an exercise session. The best finishers create carry over to real life activities and can be made more challenging as you become more fit. When linked to proper diet, finishers produce the “metabolic hit” that stimulates fat loss. As the name implies, you always perform finishers at the end of your workout because, afterwards, you will not want to do anything else.

Crawl

Crawling is all about the spiral, diagonal force connection that happens through the middle of the body. Crawling is the primal exercise that enabled us to stand and walk. The “core muscles” neurologically connect the left hip with the right shoulder and the right hip with the left shoulder. They stabilize the pelvis and spine so you can transfer force from the hips to the shoulders.

Crawling keeps that connection healthy and strong.

Bear Hug Sandbag Carry

The bear hug sandbag carry is the cure for the epidemic of device disability syndrome (DDS). This exercise reverses all of the weakness that is created by endless hours planted in a chair, staring into a screen. Sandbag carries are functional core stability work. The abdominal muscles interact with the muscles in the legs and shoulder girdle to hold a stable upright position. Walking with a sandbag kicks starts your postural reflexes—the neural feedback mechanism that holds us up against gravity. Do not go too heavy on the sandbag. You should be able to stay tall and not stagger or lean forward.



The Routine

The routine is simple: Crawl for twenty yards—ten yards down and ten yards back. Try to keep the knees close to the floor and the back flat. Immediately after finishing the crawl, pick up the sandbag with a bear hug hold (no hands linked) and carry it for twenty yards. Rest as needed and repeat. Start out with three circuits and increase to five. Try to keep the rest periods under thirty seconds. Once you get up to five circuits, add a weight vest and then a heavier sandbag. Modify the distance, load, and cycles to suit your needs. Give the crawl/bear hug carry combo finisher a try and let me know how it goes.

-Michael S. O'Hara, P.T., OCS, CSCS

View video of this exercise combination on our youtube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygg2vbf-Uoo&t=1s>

Additional Resources

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