

# **A Caveman's Guide to Exercise**

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"It's so easy a caveman can do it!" That's what Gieko says about car insurance. I wish I could say the same for strength and conditioning. The fact is in this day and age there is too much sizzle and not enough pop, too many machines not enough free weights; too many exercises not enough logical progression, and too much gimmick without the RESULTS. It's scary to walk into a gym and see where we currently are in the fitness industry. Leg curl machines are being maintained while rust and cobwebs are being collected on the free weights and barbells. Records of progress and exercise prescription are not being kept, technical proficiency is non-existent, and exercise selection is just plain scary. We now have "The Kettle bell Man", "The TRX Man", "The Resistance Band Man", one tool wonders expected to solve all the problems. As Coach Boyle said "Would you hire the chain saw man, to trim the shrubs in your front yard?" The following is a list of solutions to many exercises that are currently plaguing mainstream gyms.

## **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: Leg Extension/Leg Curls/Leg Press/Tire Flips:** Leg extension and leg curls DO NOT tax the hip flexor/extensor muscles in the intent they were functionally designed. The leg press places large amounts of flexion/compression on the lumbar spine while allowing artificial stability to the skeleton inhibiting the deep longitudinal sub system from performing its job effectively. Additionally, most clients/athletes lack sufficient hip mobility to safely perform tire flips, instead they perform lumbar flexion to offset this problem. This causes low back issues.

## **Do This!**

**Solution: Front Squat/Single Leg Squat/RFESS:** These are all multi-joint exercises that tax the glutes, hamstrings and adductor complex as hip extensors. Additionally, if you set the distance properly, these exercises tax the hip flexors as well (even the psoas and iliacus that flex the hip past 90 degrees).

## **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: Deadlift:** I have never placed the "traditional deadlift" in any of my athletic development programs. Many times reading educational content from coaches with many more years of experience than myself has not only allowed me to apply their knowledge directly, but more importantly, has taught me to avoid the same mistakes they have made in the past. Heavy deadlifting equals spinal flexion and torque.

## **Do This!**

**Solution: Trap Bar/SL Dead lift:** The trap bar dead lift places less stress on the lumbar spine as the athlete becomes "part of the bar" eliminating flexion and torque associated with the typical deadlift. In addition, the single leg deadlift places

increased neural demand on the system, is safer on the spine and attacks the Lateral Sub System, an excellent ‘Bang for your Buck’ exercise.

### **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: Lat Pull down:** This exercise seeks to isolate muscle and does not allow the scapula to naturally rotate comfortably from internal to external rotation. Another problem with Lat pull downs is that it activates the hip flexors as synergists to the movement (they aid in pulling the weight). This is not the desired affect of a well-designed program.

### **Do This!**

**Solution: Pull Ups/Chin Ups:** Vertical pulling is a tremendous shoulder saver that taxes the scapular retractors, the lats, and the thoracolumbar fascia. It allows for natural scapulo-humeral rhythm of the shoulder complex.

### **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: Pilates:** This form of exercise takes place in a static position, and can actually create compensatory relative flexibility in which a muscle group (i.e. lower back) can compensate and create “artificial” flexibility (i.e. the hamstrings) in another group of muscles. It can also promote flexibility in areas where we need stiffness.

### **Do This!**

**Solution: Foam Roll/Static Stretch/Dynamic Warm Up:** Foam Rolling prepares the muscle for static stretching by decreasing density, promoting blood flow and stretching the fascia. After foam rolling, static stretching serves to stretch the elastic properties of the muscle and prepare the body for the demands of exercise. Finally the Dynamic Warm-up excites the CNS and elevates body temperature. In this particular order, these elements greatly enhance “functional flexibility” while reducing the likelihood of injury in the gym and/or playing field.

### **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: Elliptical Machine/Stair Master:** These machines are done for one reason only; they are EASY. If you're a healthy individual, get off the elliptical

### **Do This!**

**Solution: Slide board/ Push/Pull Sled/Run Fast:** These energy system tools place excellent metabolic demands on the CNS and can be used for both athletes and personal training clients alike. The slide board taxes both the hip abductors/adductors in the frontal plane, and the push/pull sled and sprint work tax the hip flexors/extensors while driving up metabolic demand.

### **Don't Do This!**

**Exercise: ACL Prevention Programs:** Gimmick marketing at it's best. Save your money! There is no such thing as an "ACL Prevention Program".

### **Do This!**

**Solution: Get on a Good Strength and Conditioning Program:** The fact of the matter is that a well designed strength and conditioning program is the best way to prevent an ACL injury. The program needs to have several components: soft tissue work, activation/mobility, plyometrics (jumps, hops, bounds), speed work, weight training and energy system work. This is the BEST way to prevent an "ACL" injury.

The bottom line is to KISS (Keep it Simple Stupid) and avoid the gimmicks. We as coaches need to explore and educate ourselves on protocol, progression and regression and avoid the "one tool" mentality. This is not rocket science, but it's not as easy as many of us think. If it were, even a caveman could do it.

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