

health club management

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INTERVIEW

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A FINE BALANCE

Balance training is an exciting area at the moment, with an influx of specialist equipment from the US and new programming ideas.

Kath Hudson reports

In the last few years, there has been more investment in functional training areas – but to the uninitiated, the equipment can be baffling. Without instruction, how do you know how to translate a Swiss ball, or a BOSU, into meaningful exercise?

Functional training has traditionally been used at the two ends of the spectrum: by older people and prehab/rehab patients working with physios, or by elite sports people. But recently it's started to move towards the mainstream, with more innovation, experimentation and education to get clubs and members excited.

Balance training is a part of functional training: it's about making the core strong – something we all need to be able to carry out everyday activities. Indeed, in its new guidelines, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) states that cardio and resistance workouts should ideally be backed up with balance training. If you haven't already done so, now is the time to get on board with balance.

"As the industry – and those of us working in it – mature, we're all starting to realise that resistance training can't just be about strength, or building muscle, but that it needs to include other aspects like flexibility, mobility and balance, as we are losing these functions with our sedentary lifestyles," says Jon Johnston, managing director of Johnson Health Tech.

IMPROVING RESULTS

In old age, better balance can help prevent falls; in youth, it can improve physical performance. Indeed, by working out on an unstable surface, challenging the stabilising muscles as well as the compound muscles, balance training can enhance overall training results in the gym. "The unpredictability of balance training opens up many possibilities. As the body reacts to the movement, many more muscle groups are worked," explains Anthony Carey, CEO of Coretex.

And yet, according to Jonathan Lewis, head trainer of

CrossCore Europe, those who have always worked out in gyms have less of an understanding about balance and body awareness compared to those who have participated in movement-based activities like yoga, pilates, martial arts and dance. There is, he believes, a clear need for balance training programmes in gyms.

"The key thing with balance training is understanding how to move. It's about spatial awareness, body awareness, weight transference and co-ordination," says Lewis. "Our CrossCore 180 product [see p74] helps develop this. Since it involves rotational movement, people have to constantly stabilise and control the rotation. We suggest people start with simple movements first, such as squats and lunges. Once they have established a sense of balance, they can progress to more difficult positions."

Meanwhile for operators, as balance training generally requires explanation and therefore engagement with clients, it can be a relatively easy sell for personal trainers, helping drive this secondary revenue stream. Alternatively, it offers the opportunity for a group exercise class with a difference.

The Physical Company, for example, is currently working on a BOSU group exercise class. "BOSUs have been in most clubs for a while now, but the next move is taking them into the studio. We're currently working on a new group exercise programme," says John Halls, sales and marketing director at The Physical Company. "We're also looking at ways of product integration: using different products together, such as kettlebells or free-form boards with the BOSU, or two BOSUs together, all of which makes balancing more of a challenge and helps to improve proprioception."

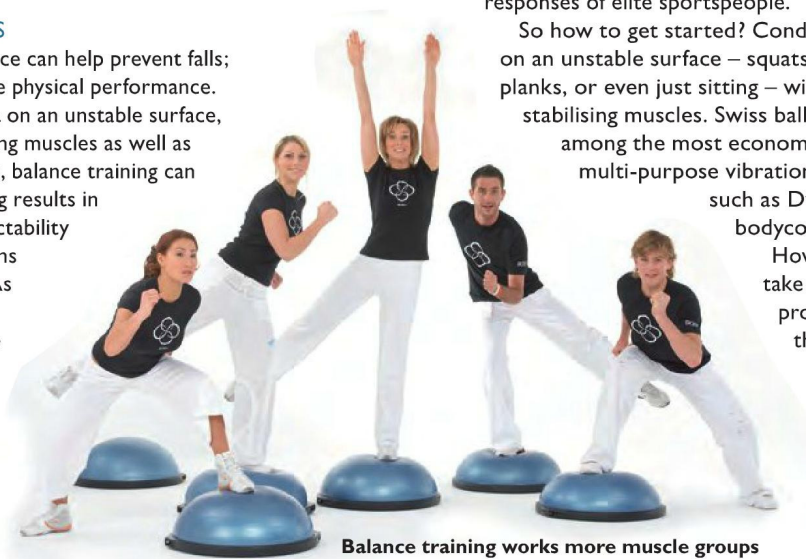
INTRODUCING BALANCE

The opportunities offered by the equipment are so varied that balance training really is appropriate for everyone, from improving the balance of the infirm to sharpening the responses of elite sportspeople.

So how to get started? Conducting basic exercises on an unstable surface – squats, lunges, push-ups, planks, or even just sitting – will all work the stabilising muscles. Swiss balls and BOSUs are among the most economical solutions, with multi-purpose vibration training platforms

such as Dynamic Activity's bodycore another option.

However, if you want to take it further, a number of products are now joining the likes of BalanceMaster in the area of balance-specific equipment.



Balance training works more muscle groups

Read on for
our balance
equipment
briefing

▶ BALANCE PRODUCTS

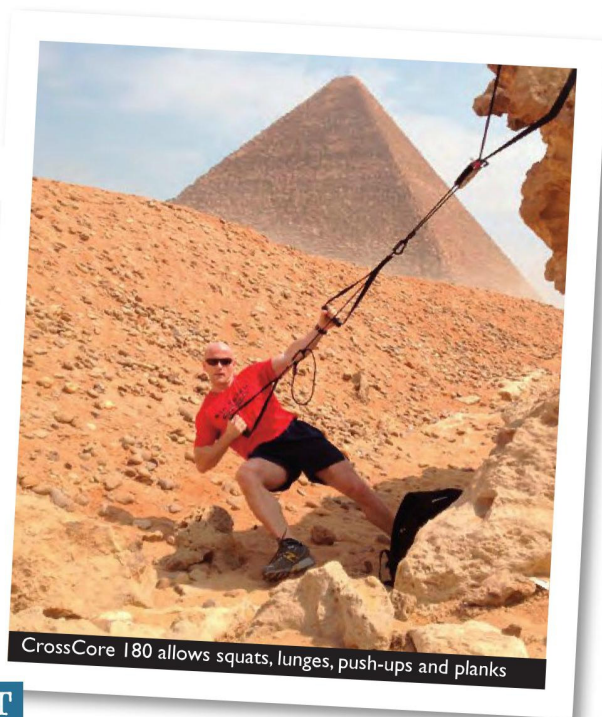
CROSSCORE 180

Based on gymnastic rings and a patent pending pulley system, the CrossCore 180 allows the range of motion to be adjusted for either a stabilised workout or free movement. Holding on to the straps, users can perform a whole host of exercises including squats, lunges, push-ups and planks. The user stands on the floor but, in some exercises, one or both legs can be hooked into the rings. This makes the user particularly unstable, with the body constantly working to balance itself during the exercises.

Only available in the UK since last year, the product was initially sold into yoga, pilates and personal training studios, but is now targeting commercial clubs. Kicks Gym in Chelsea, London, has just ordered eight units to run group exercise classes.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

crosscore



CrossCore 180 allows squats, lunges, push-ups and planks

“BALANCE TRAINING OFFERS A GREAT WAY TO ENGAGE WITH CLIENTS”

ARKE



The Arke range is colour-coded for different training functions

Technogym's Arke functional range activates the whole body in 360-degree movement, with a wide range of benefits including improved core functional movements, co-ordination, stability and balance.

The range has been designed to retrace the body's development journey, in order to increase awareness about posture and help individuals find their centre of gravity. The range is divided into four categories, each named after a natural element and colour-coded. The green equipment, Earth, is for stability and proprioception and includes items like balance domes, stability disks and balance pads on which to conduct standing exercises. The blue equipment, Water, is for agility and balance and includes water balls, which people lift and move with, challenging them to find their centre of gravity.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

technogym

CORETEX

“It's basically a skateboard in a bowl,” says Coretex inventor Anthony Carey. “I came up with the idea when I was preparing for exercise with some squats, and felt like it would be good to have some movement to mobilise the hips.”

Coretex is a 30-inch dish which moves along three balls, ensuring continued contact with the sources of motion. It can be used in a wide variety of ways: standing, kneeling, lying, feet on, hands on. If the handrail is attached, or if balance is very good, it can be used standing up. Advanced users can even work with a partner to push them off balance.

As the equipment translates (slides away), rotates and tilts at the same time, it causes the body to react and respond as it does in the real world. Carey explains: “Holding a plank on it for 10 to 15 seconds is the equivalent of doing a plank on the floor for one minute. The increased muscle



Coretex is a balance dish which moves along three balls

activation ensures an efficient workout.” Since Coretex is always moving, the user has to work to stabilise during any movement performed on it, thereby improving balance.

Virgin Active in the UK has just acquired 10 units to use in their functional training areas.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

coretex