

The Eight Principles of Movement

At Functional Synergy we follow eight principles of movement to help maintain focus and ease. Based on the natural concepts of anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology, they will help deepen your practice, enhance your exploration, and leverage your body toward greater strength and ease, all while preventing rigidity and injury. As you practice, allow for these principles to be in the back of your mind.



Principle 1: Nourish Relaxation

Relaxation is the state of mind that brings clarity and focus; it is the state of the body that generates muscle and fascia release, reduces pain, and generates strength. As it relates to creating core stability, relaxation is the key to preventing rigidity, enabling you to let go of unnecessary tension and strain while building supple and resilient stability.

Nourishing relaxation is as simple as becoming aware of your breath. Do this each time you begin your core stability practice. Notice if you are holding your breath, if your breath is shallow, or if it is full and even. However your breath is, practice within its boundaries, knowing that on any given day, it may be different (depending on the day's stresses and activities).

Once you are aware of your breath, the next step is to connect it with your movement. One of the simplest ways to do this is to begin with the spine in mind.



Principle 2: Initiate Movement: Begin with the Spine in Mind

The spine is the fundamental place to begin movement because of its central connection to every piece of the body. At its essence, it is your core.

Each of the spinal vertebrae connects with fascia, blood vessels, muscles, and nerves, which in turn fan in various directions to nourish, stimulate, and balance each part of the body. In a sense, the spine is really a system of skeletal, neurological, electrical, vascular, and chemical input that when balanced and connected creates magically fluid movement, much the same way a well-balanced and connected orchestra creates awe-inspiring music.

As you move, keep this in mind. Think of your spine as your central axis, the hub of your wheel. Allow for your stability to radiate from the spine outward, keeping the image of the orchestra as a backdrop.

This leads us to the next principle, connecting spinal movement with the movement at the largest joints first.



Principle 3: Connect Spinal Movement with the Movement at the Largest Joints First

As you find ease with your breath and awareness, as you feel the spine as the place where your movement will originate from, the next intention is to connect that spinal movement to the shoulder and hip joints. Core stability is often only as good as the mobility we have in our joints, so cultivate pure movement at the shoulders and hips and minimize compensatory actions elsewhere in the body. To help you with this, read on to the next principle.





Principle 4: Move Joints in Their Optimum Range of Motion

All joints have an optimum range of motion. Some move more than others – the shoulder and hip joints move more than the knee or elbow joints; arthritis tends to impede movement. Sometimes one joint will be tight, so others will kick in to compensate. For example, the hip joint may be tight, so to compensate, the lower vertebrae of your spine or the sacroiliac joint may jam or become too mobile.

Honour your body for what it is telling you, and move the joint only in the direction it is intended to move, to the degree it can move today, in this moment. Don't force, remember to breathe easily, and be sure you don't feel pain (see principle 7).



Principle 5: As You Boost Your Core Stability, Remember to Breathe

Yes, another reminder for you to breathe. If you push too hard in any stage of the exercise the tendency is to hold the breath. If you do, it will have a negative impact on the functioning of the very muscles you are trying to strengthen. In turn, you will become more rigid rather than stable, and you'll cultivate hardness rather than suppleness. As well, your risk for injury will increase. To help prevent this, read on to principle 6.





Principle 6: Adopt Relaxed Resilience

Relaxed resilience is akin to effortless effort. It is the opposite of forcing. It requires you to be aware of what is going on in your body while you are moving so that you can make minute changes as you feel you need to. It takes the basic level of relaxation that was cultivated in principle 1, connects it with the spine in principle 2, and facilitates movement at the largest joints first in principle 3, making sure that the movement is optimal as described in principle 4 to help you develop that first level of core stability. As your strength and stability improve, then you'll naturally ramp up to the next level of core stability – with ease and without unnecessary tension.

Relaxed resilience can sometimes be tough to cultivate, particularly if you are a driven individual. If that describes you, the next principle will help you harness your “will” for the good of your body.





Principle 7: Be Generous with Yourself: Move in Your Pain-Free Range of Motion

Pain is a loaded word with many meanings and interpretations. For the purposes of this book, the aim is for you to distinguish between muscle fatigue (good pain) and searing, tearing, straining, ripping pain (bad pain). This bad pain is the kind of pain that remains for six or seven days following your class or workout and makes you wonder why you signed up. When experiencing pain in this way, mobility and strength will decrease.

To help you settle into your pain-free range of motion, notice the following:

- When you are moving, are you tightening your jaw or neck?
- Is your forehead wrinkling? Or are you trying really hard to keep the forehead from wrinkling (as opposed to gently focusing on the muscles of the core)?
- Is your breath laboured?
- Is there an increase in tension in areas of your body other than the one(s) you are focusing on?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, ease out slightly. Although it will initially feel as if you are doing "nothing," you will find greater gains in strength and mobility if you do. Now, we're ready for the final principle. . . .





Principle 8: Less Is More

Less is more is not a new concept. Start small, take baby steps, and as you experience success, that success will lead to more success. You will have the momentum to motivate yourself to continue the program. Our experience at Functional Synergy is that this philosophy leads to quicker results.

The preceding was a summary of the eight principles. If you would like to read more detail, please refer to *Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries*, by Susi Hately Aldous.

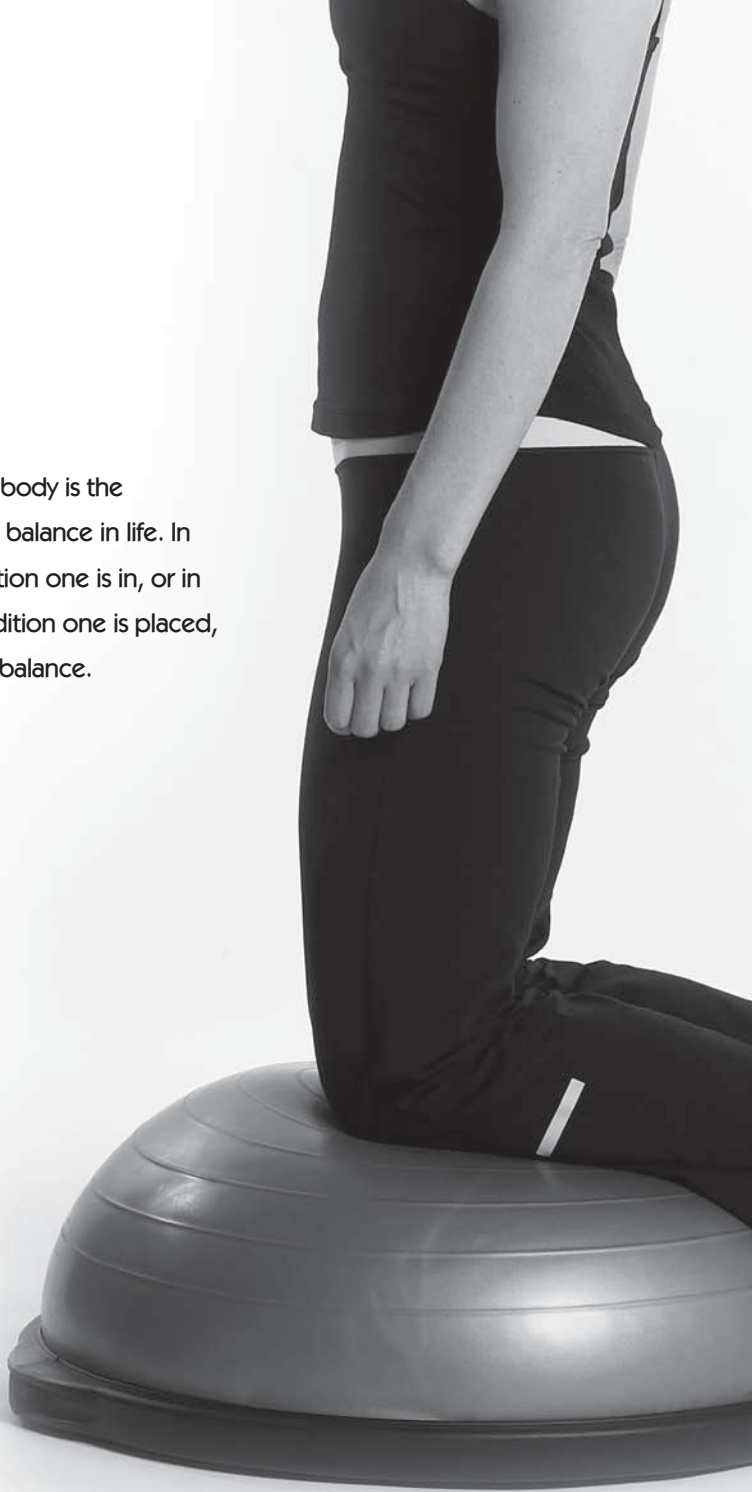
Having read through the principles, let's now move into the meat of the theory and practice of stabilizing your core.





Balance in the body is the foundation for balance in life. In whatever position one is in, or in whatever condition one is placed, one must find balance.

– B.K.S. Iyengar



Tree Pose (Vrksasana) *Activating*

This balance pose incorporates a rotational component at the hip, thereby making it a little more challenging.

From Mountain Pose, transfer the weight to the right leg. Be sure not to lose the height in the hip and waist, and keep your core active. Lift your left leg so only your toes are touching the ground, thinking tall through the right side of the body. Without moving your pelvis or spine, rotate the left knee out and place your hands in front of your heart in namaskar (prayer position). Slide the foot up the inner thigh while you lift your left knee as high as possible without losing the pelvic or spinal alignment.

Incorrect



Correct



Now extend both arms above your head to the sky in a wide alignment, or stay in namaskar.

Focus your mind on lifting out of the right hip, constantly drawing up the inner core on the exhale and softening the shoulders out of the ears. Stay here for 4 to 12 breaths, then repeat on the opposite side.



Warrior III Pose (Virabhadrasana III) *Activating*

Warrior III is another balance pose that incorporates an increased challenge for the core and low back as you try to maintain pelvic stability in a forward folding position.

From Mountain Pose, transfer your weight to the right leg without losing the height in the hip and waist, keeping your core active. Place the toes of your left leg on the ground, lifting your left heel up, thinking tall through the right side of the body. Flex the left hip slightly so the leg is lifted in front of you just off the floor. Reach both arms above your head to the sky, feeling the length in the body but also the space between the ears and the shoulders (keep the shoulders down and open).

Fold forward from your right hip (not the low back). Your left leg will swing back and lift up off the ground behind you, and your arms will stay in the same alignment with your head as in the beginning position. Make sure you do not rotate (open) the hips upward. Focus on your inner core and pelvic alignment to keep the hips level. Keep tall through the right hip; you should feel as if you are bringing the left hip down. Hold this position for 4 to 12 breaths, then repeat on the other side.



Half Moon Pose (Ardha Chandrasana) *Activating*

Half Moon is similar to Warrior III in that it is a fold from the hip, but in this pose you are challenging the core on the side of the body by opening up to the sky.

Begin this pose in Extended Side Angle Pose (Utthita Parsvakonasana). Start with the legs 3 to 4 feet apart. Turn the right foot out 90 degrees and the back foot in 45 degrees. Bend the right knee in line with the second toe, keeping the heel on the ground. Place the right forearm on the right knee and the back of the left hand on the low back.

To move into Half Moon, transfer your weight to the right foot so just the toe(s) of the back foot is on the ground. Place the right fingertips on the floor approximately 12 inches to the outside of the right foot. When you feel balanced, lift the left leg up off the floor and extend the right knee. Keep the body open and the head looking down toward the ground. To increase this challenge, extend the left arm to the sky and start to look forward or even up to the sky. Ensure the core is drawing up, there is energy flowing to the end of the left leg, and the chest is opening to the front. Allow the neck to rotate, but maintain its alignment with the thoracic spine. Hold this pose for 4 to 12 breaths, then repeat on the other side.

