



FUNCTIONAL STRENGTH TRAINING FOR TENNIS

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Functional training is a big buzzword in the fitness industry, but a lot of people are unclear what it means. For the average person, it means training so you do better in your everyday activities such as lifting your kids or getting out of the car. For the athlete, it means training in a way that improves your game. For the tennis player, this can dramatically improve your game and reduce the chance of injury.

According to a 2002 study done by the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), the average tennis match requires that 47% of movements are forward, 48% are sideways and 5% are backwards. This seems obvious to most players when you are on the run during a match. Why then, is there very little off-court training using side-to-side movements?

Most exercise equipment is built for concentrated movements on one plane of motion and for most tennis players; there are better moves that are easier on the joints.

Tennis players need to pay close attention to certain body parts that are hard or impossible to work on most machines. The core muscles of the body are critical to tennis because they help with almost every stroke. The core is the 29 muscles that support the spine. You are probably familiar with many of them as they are the muscles that hurt when you have low back pain. They are also the muscles that surround your body and give you that lean mid-section that we all want. As appealing as a flat belly is, a strong core is critical to your well-being. And, it will help your tennis game.

Here is how it works. When you hit the ball, power is transferred from your lower body to your upper body to the racquet. If your core is not in shape, you have a sort of short circuit where energy is lost. The force transfer does not occur effectively and you do one of two things. You either try to make up for the lack of power with arm strength which can put undue stress on your shoulder or elbow. Or, you find yourself lacking on most of your strokes or missing a lot of balls that you should be getting.

Core strength can help to increase hip drive and hip drive is what gets some players to those balls that others miss. So, how do you increase core strength? There are some systems, such as the Gold's Gym Spinal Fitness System, that can help you work your core on machines. Since this equipment is specialized, it exists at only a few gyms in the country, so it is also a good idea to be familiar with some other training options. People who are serious about improving their game should add a few basic things to their routine. If you are not familiar with the gym or aren't sure what moves would be appropriate for your game, you should seek the advice of a Certified Personal Trainer or Sports Specialist. A few sessions may be all you need. You will learn the correct movements to avoid injury and you will avoid wasting your time on moves that do little or nothing for you or your game.

Tennis players tend to have an asymmetrical build. That is, they have more developed muscle on their dominant side. Training for tennis should take this into account. You should be doing movements that emulate your tennis movement, but also movements that are the opposite of your tennis movement. You should do these movements on both sides of your body to keep your body in balance. I think you will find if you train consistently on both these sports specific moves and core strengthening moves, that your game will show dramatic improvement. I wish you great tennis and great health!