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## Straight Talk! The Truth About Swiss Balls!

The Swiss ball has been around since 1960, but only recently has the tool become an infamous favorite amongst the general public of the health & fitness world. Although originating in Italy once manufactured as toys, European physical therapists soon discovered its versatile use for rehabilitation.

By the 1990's the health & fitness world caught on to the incredible "new" fitness tool, repackaged it with a multipurpose use; how to: exercise booklets, made groundbreaking claims on increased strength & core stimulus, and resold it at 3 times the price in every color of the rainbow with a heart warming satisfaction guarantee.

The big question buzzing around the fitness industry though is this; is the Swiss ball really an effective way of improving muscular strength and core as opposed to participating in free weight exercises? The simple answer is NO!, but don't just take my word. Here's the science.

Most exercises conducted on a Swiss ball are a form of neurological adaptation, which means although at first the body experiences an unstable environment (which is where the fitness industry concludes their core strengthening argument); with practice the task becomes effortless, requiring no stimulus from the muscles whatsoever. So when the trainer says, "Look at how Jimmy over there struggles relentlessly with the Swiss ball squat, the foundation of his core is weak!" He is really saying, most likely without knowing, "Your son's body has been introduced to an environment which is unfamiliar to the body, but will soon be obtainable and controllable with repetition and consistency, if anything, Jimmy has brutal proprioception in his legs (muscles which act as stabilizers). There is a far greater core stimulus in dead lifts, squats, standing overhead presses or single arm chest presses etc. than any Swiss ball can provide because the loads will exceed more than just the individual's bodyweight.

As far as increasing strength is concerned, why would you ever bench or squat on an unstable surface when you will always obtain a higher strength output on a stable surface? Typically, you produce around 50% less force output on an unstable surface as opposed to a more stable one.

Don't be fooled. The method in which Swiss balls are supposedly strengthening the core is by strengthening a deep muscle tissue unable to be seen by the external eye, a muscle far more stimulated by squats, dead lifts etc. anyways. Muscles need heavier loads than their ability to grow, so give them that environment to produce maximal effort they crave! Now Swiss balls *do* have their place in the fitness world when used properly. They provide the individual with variety, a challenge, and a few fun party tricks, but to base your philosophy of training on the magic works of the Swiss ball is both uneducated and



ill informed, and like all money making fads in the fitness world, they never do seem to stand the test of time. Now slap on some plates and get under that barbell, save the party tricks for your Aunty Alice's retirement party!

## FLEX-ability

We take part in aerobic activity to improve our cardiovascular endurance and burn fat; we weight-train **to** maintain lean muscle tissue and to build strength. Those are the two most important elements of a fitness program, right? Not quite. There have been numerous studies showing that incorporating flexibility training into workouts have greatly benefited not just the workouts but everyday life. Here are 6 simple reasons why flexibility training can enhance all aspects of life:

- 1) Improved physical performance and decreased risk of injury
  - A flexible joint has the ability to move through a greater range of motion and requires less energy to do so, while greatly decreasing your risk of injury.
- 2) Reduced muscle soreness and improved posture
  - Static stretching involves a slow, gradual and controlled elongation of the muscle through the full range of motion and held for 15-30 seconds in the furthest comfortable position (without pain).
  - Stretching can help realign soft tissue structures, thus reducing the effort it takes to achieve and maintain good posture in the activities of daily living.
- 3) Reduced risk of lower back pain
  - Flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors, quadriceps, and other muscles attaching to the pelvis reduces stress to the low back.
- 4) Increased blood and nutrients to tissues
  - Stretching also increases joint synovial fluid, which is a lubricating fluid that promotes the transport of more nutrients to the joints' Articular cartilage. This allows a greater range of motion and reduces joint degeneration.
- 5) Improved muscle coordination
  - Studies show that nerve-impulse velocity (the time it takes an impulse to travel to the brain and back) is improved with stretching. This helps opposing muscle groups work in a more synergistic, coordinated fashion.
- 6) Enhanced enjoyment of physical activities
  - helps relax both mind and body and brings a heightened sense of well-being and personal gratification during exercise