Exercises You Never Knew You Were Doing Wrong…Part 2

Travis Manners, PT, SCS, CSCS

Today I will be sharing the 2nd insert of my three part series covering "Exercises You Never Knew You Were Doing Wrong." Since I last wrote, I have been to the gym multiple times and once again have been given plenty of things to talk about as I expand on this topic.

In reviewing the first group of exercises, I shared the common faults as well as the proper technique of the Romanian or stiff-leg deadlift as well as front shoulder raises. Unfortunately, my quest of changing the world of fitness is still needed as I saw multiple people doing these exercises incorrectly in the last couple weeks. Nonetheless, we push forward to the next two exercises.

Box Squats

The Problem:
This exercise was originally developed to establish a specific depth to a squat. The intent of the box squat is to lower the hips down, lightly touch the box with the rear end, then raise up. However, I consistently see people using the box as a resting point as they are fully sitting down on the box. One problem is that sitting down on the box creates a double compression on the spine. One from the weighted bar resting on the shoulders at the top of the spine and the other coming from the box pushing up into the lower spine. The other problem is that when the person sits fully down on the box the pelvis typically rotates backward taking the lumbar or lower spine out of its normal and safe position. This new loaded position can put increased posterior pressure on the discs of the lumbar. With enough load and/or enough repetitions, this posteriorly directed force will potentially weaken and eventually herniate the discs in the lower spine.

The Solution:
Obey the correct technique of the original design of the exercise. Lightly tap the box with the rear end on the descent and have no worries.

INCORRECT

CORRECT

Front Planks

The Problem:
This exercise has become a very trendy core exercise and rightfully so. The front plank is a great anti-extension exercise. However, there is a misconception on how long a plank should be held. I have seen and heard of people holding the plank for minutes on end. The thought process is the longer the plank is held the stronger the core. Well, the research from a well respected researcher, Dr. Stuart McGill, suggests differently. Dr. McGill has shown that after approximately 10 seconds the muscle that is being contracted starts to lose blood flow. What that means is that with a reduced blood flow, the muscle tissue loses oxygen. Without oxygen, the muscle cannot function properly and will eventually fail. In addition, if held long enough the muscle tissue will start to become necrotic which means the tissue is starting to die. Now that's a problem.

The Solution:
Instead of holding long periods of time, hold shorter periods of time and do more reps. A suggestion would be 5-6 reps of 10 seconds. Once that becomes easy, the next step is not to hold longer, but instead progress the intensity of the exercise through position changes. An example would be to lift a leg 3-6 inches off the ground and hold. Another progression would be to reach straight ahead with an arm and hold. Both are examples of taking a 4-point position into a 3-point position which make the exercise entirely more difficult. Again, with each progression stay within the same set reps and time frames for maximum results.

5-6 REPS
OF 10 SEC.

PROGRESSIONS

I hope this provides some insight into these two exercises. Please pass this article on to a friend or relative because substantial injuries can result from both of these exercises when done incorrectly.