



What's the Best Exercise for.....?

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The most common question (what I call a superlative inquiry) I receive as a personal trainer is: “what’s the best exercise for (fill in the blank)?” Men and women of all ages want to know the best exercise for: weight loss, stomach toning, bone mass, flexibility, 10K training, bulking up, speed running and more! All movement (as long as you are safe) is good! But, exercise is specific, so what is best for you depends on your goals. Here are my recommendations on how to reach your fitness goals in these top three areas: weight loss, core strength, and flexibility.

Weight Loss – Many clients I work with believe that exercise is the most effective way to lose weight. While it’s true that exercise is vital to healthy weight loss and long-term weight maintenance, you will be most successful if you make and maintain changes in both your diet and exercise. But, what type of exercise is most likely to help you lose weight? Research shows that repeated bouts of high intensity exercise may be more impactful than periods of low intensity exercise such as walking at a moderate pace for longer duration.

High intensity interval workouts consist of alternating between bursts of high-intensity exercise and low-intensity exercise, usually with a ratio of 20 to 30 seconds of intense exercise followed by 15 to 30 seconds of rest or less-intense exercise. Studies show that you burn more fat during AND after your workouts than when you do low to moderate steady state exercise. There are many ways you can integrate high intensity exercise into your days – at home, at the gym, or outside. Go to emiia.org, wellness, individual resources, videos, webinars and audio, and see Well Aware HIIT Workouts for examples.

Core Strength – Your ‘core’ is not your stomach. Think of your core as a series of muscles working synergistically from your knees to your neck, 360 degrees around your body. This includes areas such as your rotator cuff muscles in the shoulders, the gluteal muscles, the hip complex, and your lower back. Every movement you initiate – or prevent – originates from your ‘core.’

The most effective and safest workout for the core involves anti-rotation and anti-extension movements. These are exercises where your body is preventing – instead of initiating – movement. My top recommendations (please click the links for video viewing) include exercises like [Dead Bugs](#), [Anti-Rotation Presses](#), and [Plank Variations](#). The key is choosing exercises that are pain-free, challenging, and cause no pressure on the spine, knees, and hips. I always advise individuals to consult with an exercise professional who can suggest ways to progressively make the exercise more challenging over time.

Flexibility – Many people equate flexibility with stretching but I like to focus more on range of motion (ROM) as it's really more than just stretching. Range of motion exercises can be simple movements like [ankle circles](#) and [neck rotations](#). The idea is to slow the loss of flexibility with age. The classic example of loss of ROM is the difficulty some people have turning their heads while backing out of a parking space.

In addition to ROM exercises, Self Myofascial Release (SMFR) techniques really help to free up tight areas that restrict range of motion. Self massage with [foam rollers](#) or tennis balls works really great at releasing tightness. A study published in The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research (2017; 31 [4], 893-900) confirmed that foam rolling initiates an increase in blood flow to treated areas. Massaging the bottoms of your feet with a tennis ball loosens up the 'fascia' (connective tissue). If you've ever been diagnosed with 'plantar fasciitis,' you know how painful it can be. Tennis ball massage or golf or lacrosse ball (both are harder than tennis balls) massage can help combat this painful condition.

Have fun and let me know how you make out.



Certified through the National Strength and Conditioning Association as a personal trainer (NSCA-CPT), Paul Connolly possesses a degree in Exercise Science from UMASS-Boston where he graduated Magna Cum Laude.