



The story you are about to read came from a brainstorm among a group of *WH* editors. But this idea was, to be frank, a happy accident when we got sidetracked discussing all of the little areas of our fitness routines holding us back. Someone said, "I know I can do lunges with heavier dumbbells, but my grip goes before my legs do..." Another person chimed in, "I'm trying to get stronger in my squat, but my ankles are so tight..." We realised: this is the big idea. All these seemingly mini hurdles – grip strength, tight ankles, the list goes on – are training points that actually make a massive difference in how we move and whether we achieve our goals. "Everyone gets excited about working the big muscle groups or how heavy they can lift," says physical therapist Kristi Barker. "But if we can understand that it's about movement quality and making sure all muscles and joints are working well, there will be fewer injuries, better functioning and less pain." These five areas add up to big gains, so we're focusing on them. Join us, will you?

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PROPRIOCEPTION

"You hear it all the time: 'be present in your body,'" says trainer Lazoff. "It's actually a huge challenge to focus on where your body is in space." That's the meaning of proprioception. It's knowing which foot should go where when you're running on a root-strewn trail or being able to touch your nose with your finger without looking in a mirror. So, training this element will boost your performance, whether you're a runner, tennis player, dancer or otherwise. "Without solid proprioception, our body doesn't know what a safe movement is, and technically, our nervous system will prevent us from being able to get into those end ranges of motion" and complete full repetitions every time, Barker says. Translation: you won't be able to go as low in a push-up or get your chin to the bar in a pull-up, for example.



Try bear crawls, zeroing in on keeping your weight distributed equally and hips steady. Or hold an isometric squat or wall sit, placing your hands on your ribs, then "close your eyes and focus on sending your breath laterally into your rib cage," Lazoff tips. Another important piece is moving through different planes of motion and ensuring you're incorporating movements that make you go forwards, backwards, side to side and rotationally. Try cone drills for a fun and effective way to do this.

BALANCE

Having great balance is a prerequisite for any kind of weight-bearing strength training. Barker points out: "Without coordination, we won't be able to move optimally." She adds, "And if we're not able to get quality movement, we really shouldn't be loading our joints."



Mix in single-leg variations on moves like deadlifts, planks and dead bugs to help build balance skills. For an added challenge, close your eyes and see if you can still maintain your position. Or, while you are in a deadlift with the left leg behind you off the floor, take a kettlebell or dumbbell in your left hand, then pass it to the right hand and back to the left without breaking your lower-body position. Then switch legs. You could also try around-the-world lunges (one in each direction) and speed skaters.

FITNESS

Balancing act



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ANTHONY CUNANAN

WWW.ANTHONYCUNANAN.COM
ANTHONY@ANTHONYCUNANAN.COM