

FITNESS FENG SHUI AS MUCH AN ART AS IT IS A SCIENCE

BY RANDY ZARECKI

A few years ago, I remember reading about the winner of a mountain bike race as having a higher level of fitness than his competitors. I've also often wondered why health and fitness are sometimes combined, as in Health Fitness, or why at other times they are separated, as in health and fitness. Then there's Functional Fitness, Personal Fitness Training, Fitness Programs, Fitness Tips, and so on.

Quite clearly fitness is a highly overloaded term meaning many different things to different people. So, it seemed appropriate to coin the phrase Fitness Feng Shui to define just what fitness should mean — within the context of a holistic approach to life and well-being.

Fitness Feng Shui is as much an art as it is a science. While intimately rooted in physical elements such as how you look, how you feel or how strong you are, it is as much a state of mind as anything else. While you can measure muscular strength, muscular endurance, body composition, cardiovascular condition and flexibility, Fitness Feng Shui is an attitude...a lifestyle...and a way of living an enriched and enhanced life through regular exercise.

Fitness Feng Shui is a very powerful tool to keep in your life-enhancing bag of tricks! Improving how you look can improve your self-esteem, increase your confidence, and, in many cases, open doors that might not otherwise exist. Maintaining a healthy weight with reduced levels of body fat dramatically reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke and many forms of cancer. You can reduce your blood pressure, reduce stress, sleep better and have better sex with Fitness Feng Shui.

Indeed Fitness Feng Shui is a fundamental element of health and happiness.

LIFESTYLE ELEMENTS

Fitness Feng Shui is more of a journey than it is a destination. It's about how you think about exercise and fitness: how you plan your week; activity choices you make at home; the lifestyle priorities you establish; and how you spend your vacations.

To have Fitness Feng Shui requires that exercise is habitually

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scheduled into your busy life, and that exercise appointment with yourself is the most permanent, immovable appointment of your day!

The exercise element of Fitness Feng Shui can be elusive to adopt, but is straightforward enough. It includes a healthy balance of strength training, cardiovascular exercise, stretching, proper nutrition and sufficient recovery. Proper nutrition is a huge area to discuss, but it is beyond the limited scope of this article and reserved for another day.

Observation of the exercise community reveals that most of us tend to lean more heavily on one exercise element or another. Runners run run run, and they have enhanced cardiovascular systems, but very little muscular strength. They also frequently run themselves right into arthritic knees and back pain. Cyclists do a slightly bit better job with enhanced lower body muscular strength development, but they tend to have disproportionately smaller and weaker upper bodies.

On the flip side, bodybuilders and other “gym rats” often neglect cardiovascular training, and frequently they have very low cardiovascular fitness levels. Yoga students develop terrific flexibility, but can lack muscular strength and cardiovascular fitness levels.

Fitness Feng Shui is the proper combination, integration and balance of cardiovascular exercise, strength training and stretching. Just how much of each is a study in individual exercise programming and the exact reason why personal fitness training is as popular as it is today. Herein, however, are some general guidelines.

- Stretching is something that should be a daily activity. It assists in keeping good skeletal alignment, improved posture and reduces exercise-induced muscular recovery time. It could include a yoga or t'ai chi session, but doesn't need to. A highly focused 15 minutes of stretching each morning or evening can be sufficient for most individuals.

- Strength training is something that should be performed two to four times per week. Strength training increases bone density, stabilizes the joints, improves posture with stronger tendons and ligaments, and enables a more active lifestyle. Focus on large muscle group and compound exercises that incorporate multiple muscle groups for a highly efficient strength training workout. Always spend a minimum of 10 minutes warming up with some low-to-moderate intensity cardiovascular exercise, as well as a minimum of 10 minutes warming down after your workout to help flush lactic acid (a byproduct of exercise) from the muscle tissues. A proper warm down also helps begin the recovery phase so that you're refreshed for your next exercise day.

If you are new to strength training, do seek the advice of a professional. Proper body position, breathing, resistances and appropriate repetitions can vary significantly from individual to individual. Don't get injured or struggle with making progress.

- You should complete some form of cardiovascular exercise three to five days per week. Total cardiovascular exercise volume and intensity will be varied on a daily, weekly and monthly basis to safely, effectively and permanently reach Fitness Feng Shui.

HEART RATE

Heart Rate is used almost exclusively for cardiovascular training management. Heart Rate is quite simply the frequency with which your heart beats, usually expressed in beats per minute (BPM). The fastest it will ever beat, your Maximum Heart Rate (MaxHR), is completely dependent on age and hereditary factors. You simply cannot change it with training.

Heart rate zones are ranges of heart rates where your body metabolizes energy sources into energy uniquely within each range. Between your Maximum Heart Rate (MaxHR) and Ambient Heart Rate are several heart rate zones. We use five zones in a Prescribed Cardiovascular Programming™ model.

The challenge with prescribed cardiovascular programming is threefold:

- Volume (time) needs to be defined and managed to make progress, and burn calories without overtraining.
- Intensity needs to be sufficiently high to train elevated Heart Rate zones, yet brief and/or low enough to prevent catabolism (the unfortunate use of lean body mass as an energy source).
- Both Volume and Intensity need to be adjusted for fitness level, gender and age.

You can get more information about this balance in my Heart Rate Zone Training to Look and Feel Fantastic report. But here are some brief guidelines:

Use a Relative Perceived Exertion (RPE) to define Intensity as follows:

10 = The Hardest Thing you've ever done and you must stop exercising immediately.

9 = A very, very difficult level, but something you can continue to do for a few seconds.

8 = A very difficult exercise level, but something you can continue to do for a few minutes.

7 = A Somewhat Difficult exercise level, but something you could continue to do for an hour.

Each Week, your total Cardiovascular Program should Include:

- One or two easy, but longer duration cardiovascular events: spend 45 to 60 minutes at Level 7.

- Two moderately difficult and moderately lengthy cardio events: Maintain, alternatively Level 7 and Level 8 intensities between 35 and 45 minutes. Total effort in the Level 8 range should be no more than 10 percent of the total exercise time. These are rolling hills kinds of things — gradual, slow increases in intensity with longer periods of time in Level 7 in between for “rest and recovery.”

- One day per week you should complete a shorter duration, high intensity effort of about 30 minutes. Sixty percent of the exercise should be Level 7, 35 percent of the time should be spent at Level 8 Intensity, and 1-5 percent of the effort at Level 9. These are very high intensity exercise bouts, such as 30- or 60-second all-out sprints or steep hill short hill climbs, followed by a rest interval. They should be briefly painful, but not agonizing. Pain good. Suffering bad.

RECOVERY

No discussion of Fitness Feng Shui would be complete without a bit of guidance on recovery. Indeed, what separates weekend warrior athletes from world class athletes is the body's genetic ability to recover from exercise. World class athletes simply recover more quickly than the rest of us, enabling them to exercise more frequently and more intensely to achieve even higher levels of fitness.

For the rest of us, use performance and pain as your guide. If you're having an off day on the bike, or a weak day with the weights, it's either because you're training too hard or not training hard enough. For highly motivated individuals, it is frequently the latter. Continue to stretch daily, but reduce your strength training from 4 to 3, or 3 to 2, days per week if you're feeling week. Or, reduce your cardio efforts from 5 to 4 or 3 days per week if steady improvements aren't made. Again, if in doubt, check with a Fitness Professional for true Fitness Feng Shui!

And remember, “...When the body is fit, the heart will sing!” ✨

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