FUNCTIONAL FITNESS FOR HEALTHY AGING

**consult a physical before starting an exercise program*

We are all aging, it's inevitable. Thankfully though, incorporating functional fitness can combat the natural decline of physical fitness as we get older and improve the quality of life and ability to perform daily required activities.

Functional training is based on tailoring your exercise routine to the demands of your daily life. This means performing movement patterns, exercises, and using equipment that will help enhance your efficiency and ability to carry out activities in your day as well as prevent injury. For example, a person who sits at a desk all day should train functionally to improve their glute strength, improve strength and flexibility of postural muscles to maintain good form throughout the day, and stretch and strengthen the hip flexors to prevent the gradual immobility that creeps up when sitting for too long. A post office worker, home stager, or childcare worker will need to focus on proper lifting technique including back and lower body strength as well as muscular endurance. Functional training exercises differ from machine- based exercises in that they are often compound movements that work the body as a whole rather than isolating and strengthening a few muscles. For example, rather than using the leg press machine (an isolated exercise) a trainer may teach proper squat technique to better utilize the core, glutes, and upper body, rather than isolating just the quadriceps. A squat also requires much more stability and joint mobility to perform the movement properly, and stability is a key factor to preventing injury throughout daily life.

What Can You Do Now?

As you move in to your 40s, 50s and 60s keep exercising and consider the following:

Strength – Don't afraid to train at a high intensity, testing your 85% 1 rep max. As long as your technique is solid and you are injury free, incorporate compound exercises with a focus on glutes, core, and shoulders. Example. Stationary lunge with one arm lateral dumbbell raises.

Agility – If you're not playing a sport, incorporate some quick step work such as fast straddles, ladder workouts, obstacle courses, throwing a ball against a wall etc. to keep up or improve your reaction time.

Balance

You can incorporate balance into your strength workout by standing on one leg while doing other exercises such as alternating bicep curls or triceps press downs. Try standing Superman with one arm forward and the opposite leg back. Stand on uneven surfaces such as a log or a rock when you are outside walking or hiking.

Research and Information

Were you aware that the number one cause of injury for people over 65 is from falling or car accidents due to mobility issues? Here is some great information on fall prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/injury/features/older-adult-falls/index.html#:~:text=Falls%20and%20motor%20vehicle%20crashes,injury%20death%20in%20older%20adults.

For a highly informative article on research at UBC on seniors and the different results from high intensity resistance training, versus stretching and agility training go to: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3344816/