



The Ultimate Exercise Ball Training And Fitness Solution



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Introduction

Working out with a fitness ball is a fantastic way to tone your entire body. Physical therapists the world over are using them every day to cure a whole host of injuries as well as improving core strength, stability and posture. It even has beneficial effects on the cardiovascular system and flexibility.

Yet, the humble fitness ball has been relegated to the corner of the gym with the huge popularity of other, sexier, forms of exercise. That's a pity because the fitness ball not only allows you to do dozens of unique movements that will hit your body – especially the core – like nothing else, it will make many movements that you would normally do on a bench that much more effective.

In this book, we will put the fitness ball back in the spotlight – where it belongs. You will discover precisely how you can utilize this great piece of exercise equipment to create the body of your dreams. So, let's get on the ball . . .



BALL BASICS

The fitness ball, also known as the Swiss ball, the flex ball and the Stability Ball was developed in the 1960's. It soon became popular among exercise enthusiasts throughout Europe. Fitness professionals as well physical therapists began using the balls in order to enhance strength, flexibility, coordination and balance. In addition, the ball proved invaluable in treating neurological disorders such as spinal cord and stroke injuries.

So, what is so good about using an exercise ball? The effectiveness is in the instability of the ball. Due to this instability, the muscles of the body are required to do extra work to keep the muscles of the body stable during exercise movements. The delicate, small stabilizing muscles of the body are forced to make instant reflex adjustments mid exercise in order to maintain balance.

The instability of the ball makes it a challenging piece of equipment to exercise on. People who have been exercising for years on a solid platform, such as an exercise bench, are often surprised at just how much more challenging it is to do the same movement on an exercise ball.

A huge benefit that is inherent to any exercise ball is that it is versatile enough to accommodate any type of exercise option. Exercise balls can be used for . . .

- Functional Fitness
- Strength Training
- Recovery from Injury
- Flexibility
- Recovery from Training
- Post injury rehabilitation
- Physical Therapy

The same ball can be used to suit all of these purposes!

Core Benefits

One of the greatest benefits to be derived from working out with a fitness ball is the benefits it brings to the muscles of the core. As we age we start to slow down. We also get weaker. And we begin to have problems with our balance. Lower back problems start to kick in and we tend to find it more difficult to perform basic lifting and bending jobs.

But we don't have to be old to have problems. Many people have a weak core. Even gym goers spend a lot of time getting strong arm and chest muscles while completely ignoring their centre. Yet your core is the essence of everything that you do.

All of your power, your driving force and your energy, originates with the core. That's why it's vital that you incorporate core strengthening exercises into your routine.

A solid core also helps to provide a sense of balance. The muscles surrounding the core and the joints need to be able to adequately stabilise the body. This will help the individual to remain active and functional.

Core Training Benefits

While it's great to be able to fit into your jeans again, the biggest benefit of performing core strengthening exercises is safety, not aesthetics. Virtually every movement we make, from getting out of bed in the morning to reaching up for a jar in the pantry, requires use of the core muscles. Strong core muscles can prevent a litany of problems in your life now and in the future. These include:

- lower back pain
- sprains, strains and tears
- muscular imbalance

Safety

Fitness balls are generally safe, although it does take some time to get used to the imbalance that is at their core. A main cause of injury is to operate with either an over or an under inflated ball. Of course, being a ball, it is possible that you will fall off. You should not jump straight into the heavy weight training that you have been doing on a flat bench if transferring exercises such as the Dumbbell Bench Press and Bulgarian Split Squat to an exercise ball.

You will notice that some fitness balls are promoted as being ‘anti burst’. This doesn’t mean that they are indestructible. Anti burst means that if it does fail, it will deflate gradually rather than popping like a balloon. Gym balls always come with very specific warranty restrictions because, while they can withstand massive forces, they can sustain invisible damage if kicked or used inappropriately.

Only use a fitness ball outside if you have it on a mat and the area is free of any sharp or rough surfaces.

An under or over inflated ball will not perform correctly. If a ball is too soft you will just sink into the surface and if a ball is over inflated it will cause the user to balance on top of it, rather than allowing the ball to mold to the user’s body shape.

The ball should be inflated to about 80 percent of its total inflation. Then leave it for 24 hours to allow the material to settle, before finishing the inflation process. Rather than trying to measure air pressure inside the ball, measure the diameter; place the ball right up against a wall, hold a straight edge against the point on the ball that is furthest from the wall, then measure the distance along the floor from the wall to this point.



#2

FITNESS BALL FAQ

Will using a fitness ball give me better results on exercises?

Yes it will, provided that you use it to enhance the exercise, as opposed to using it just for the sake of it. Simply sitting on the ball won't magically transform an exercise. The purpose of the ball is to add to the physical challenge of performing the exercise. For that reason, you should only do an exercise on a gym ball if doing so will make the exercise most intense.

As an example, doing dumbbell curls on a fitness ball will not do any more for your biceps than doing it on a bench. Whereas, doing sit ups with a fitness ball will recruit the same muscles as the floor version, as well as those muscles that stop you rolling off the ball.

The ball creates an environment or reaction in the body that adds to the exercise by increasing muscle action.

How does the fitness ball add to an exercise?

A fitness ball can do two main things to enhance your workout:

1. The flexible, tactile surface allows you to get into advantageous positions that you can't achieve without it. These positions trick the body into working productively against its own weight or an external resistance. When you do the dumbbell chest press on the fitness ball, for example, you are not only working your chest, deltoids and triceps, but you are using every major muscle to hold your body in position on the ball.
2. Due to the unstable nature of the ball, the body generates involuntary muscle actions / activity which allows you to target muscles that would ordinarily be less involved if the same movement was performed on a solid platform.

Why is a fitness ball a great way to work the muscles of the core?

Core training is exercise that develops strength and endurance for all muscles that protect the spine from damage and that function to produce dynamic movements. The lumbopelvic region consists of the deep torso muscles, transversus abdominus, multifidus, internal obliques and the layers of muscle and fascia that make up the pelvic floor. They are key to the active support of the lumbar spine, but, unfortunately they are also the most vulnerable to injury if neglected. Using a fitness ball as a semi-stable platform to support the body when doing strength and conditioning exercises recruits these muscles and is particularly productive because the muscle activity is involuntary so, rather than having to tell the body to do something, it simply gets on with the work that is required. In fact, these muscles are recruited a split second before any movements of the limbs, which suggests that the muscle actually anticipates the force that will soon be going through the lumbar spine.

Should I do all of my exercises on a fitness ball?

Theoretically you could do all of your exercises on a fitness ball. Yet, there are many exercises that are more productive when done standing on two legs. These are because human beings have been standing on two feet for thousands of years. Exercises like lateral raises and shoulder presses are examples of movements that are better off done on two feet.

Can I get a workout from simply sitting on a fitness ball while working at my desk?

Merely sitting on a ball isn't going to prompt the deep core muscles to do anything dramatic. But sitting on a fitness ball as opposed to a chair will at least make you more aware of your posture during the desk-bound parts of your day. After all, it's pretty hard to slouch on a fitness ball!

Is it safe to use free weights on a fitness ball?

It is, provided that the combined weight of the dumbbells or barbell you are using is within the dynamic and static capabilities of the gym ball (you can find these printed on either the ball or its packaging).



GETTING STARTED

Learning to sit properly on a fitness ball will provide you with the positional awareness to execute all of the exercises that will follow. The goal is to sit directly in the middle of the ball. This will maintain your center of gravity. Before sitting on the ball, make sure that it is stationary. Stand with your back to the ball, feet shoulder width apart and rear legs touching the ball.

Keep one hand on the ball at all times to maintain proprioceptive awareness and positioning of the ball. When sitting, bend the knees and slowly lower, sitting directly in the center of the ball. This may require multiple foot, hip and body adjustments.

When you are firmly positioned on the ball, lengthen the torso without leaning backwards or forwards. Rather, maintain an upright position. From this position, make slow, small movements from side to side from the hip in either direction to develop confidence and awareness for the use of the ball.

Focus on how the muscles are reacting to bring awareness to your mind and body.

Most exercises require you to work slowly and under tension while maintaining good body posture. This will help to ensure that the correct muscle firing patterns are achieved. The key to success in using the fitness ball is to be able to hold good posture while performing a number of exercise reps and sets.

The following exercises will assist with developing good body posture, balance and coordination when sitting on the ball. This will help to build the confidence and motivation to perform other exercises and to develop core strength, body awareness and muscle tone.

Single Knee Lift

Description:

- Find your position on the center of the ball
- Place both hands on either side of the ball for support
- Sit tall and brace your abdominal muscles
- Keep your feet shoulder width apart
- Keeping your abdominal muscles braced, slowly lift one knee up and foot off the ground
- Maintain square hips at all times without leaning to the side, forwards or backwards
- Raise the knee and foot slowly until they are 12 inches off the ground, hold, then slowly lower and repeat with the opposite leg
- Keep the movements slow and controlled with a deep breathing pattern
- Start and finish with the foot in the same position – avoid any lateral movement or positional change

Single Knee Lift with Leg Extension

Description:

- Go into the same sitting position as with the Single Knee Lift
- Raise the arms to the side until they are parallel to the floor
- Slowly lift the knee and extend the leg forward until the leg is straight. Reverse the movement and lower the leg. Repeat with the opposite leg
- Avoid leaning forward, sideways or backward. Remain tall throughout, keeping the hips square and the abs tight
- Start and finish with the foot in the same position – avoid any lateral movement or positional change

Single Knee Lift with Leg and Arm Extension

Description:

- Sit tall on the ball with feet parallel and arms back by your side
- Simultaneously, lift one knee and extend the leg while extending your arms forward
- Maintain an upright position. Avoid leaning forward, sideways or backward – remain tall throughout, keeping the hips square and the abs tight
- Return the leg and arms back to the starting position and repeat with the opposite leg
- Start and finish with the foot in the same position – avoid any movement or change
- Start with slow and controlled movements in order to maintain good body posture
- Maintain a deep breathing pattern throughout



#4

PORTFOLIO OF EXERCISES

UPPER BODY
(CHEST, BACK, SHOULDERS, ARMS)

Wheelbarrow

- Kneel down with the ball in front of your thighs. Keep your spine in a neutral position and pull your navel in towards your spine. Relax your shoulders and place your hands on the ball.
- Lean forward over the ball until your hands touch the floor and the ball supports your body weight. Feel how pushing onto your hands supports your weight.

- Push out over the ball, walking your hands out so that the ball is underneath your thighs. Keep your navel pulled in towards your spine to help keep your hips and lower back straight. Walk your hands back in towards the ball.

Chest Flyes

- Select a suitable weight then lie with your upper torso resting on the ball and your legs at a 90-degree bend, feet firmly planted on the ground.
- Holding a dumbbell in each hand, extend your arms straight above your head. Keeping your elbows slightly bent with your palms facing each other. Look straight up. Keep your knees over your feet and use your buttocks to steady you.
- Breathe in as you carry your arms outwards until they are almost parallel with the floor. Breathe out as you bring your arms towards each other, feeling your chest muscles contracting as they do so.
- Make sure to pull your navel in towards your spine to stabilize your back. Keep a slight bend on your elbows to prevent them locking.

Off-Toes Push Up

- Start with your body straight and your toes on the floor. Hold the ball on either side, with your hands placed under your shoulders. Squeeze the ball to hold it steady.
- Breathe in as you bend your elbows to lower down to the ball, holding your body in a straight line. Keep the movement slow and controlled. Breathe out as you push back.

Reach For The Sky

- Select suitable weights. With a dumbbell in each hand, sit upright on the ball with your spine in a neutral position. Position your knees over your feet. Maintain this upright posture.
- Bend your arms at 90 degrees and bring your elbows level with your shoulders. Your palms should face forwards. This is the start position.
- Breathing out, push the dumbbells upwards, raising your arms above your head. Keep a slight bend in your elbows to avoid them locking. Look straight ahead. Then, breathing in, lower your arms back to the start position; avoid dropping your arms as you do so.
- If you feel unstable, widen your knees so that they point slightly outwards and are positioned over your toes.

Drop Dips

- Place the ball against a wall, on the floor. Sit on the ball with your hands to the sides, elbows bent and fingers pointing forwards. Pull your navel in towards your spine. Walk your feet out slightly from the ball, pushing into it via your arms to keep your balance.
- Breathe in and bend your elbows to a comfortable angle without losing control. Breathe out as you straighten the elbows and avoid locking them.
- To increase intensity, perform Drop Dips without bracing the ball against a wall.
- Keep the distance you move forward to a minimum, only just clearing the ball with your back. This will avoid stressing your shoulders.
- Maintain a strong shoulder position to help you complete more reps. Push down into the ball to improve stability.

Biceps Curl

- Select a suitable weight. Place the ball against the wall, nestling it comfortably in the small of your back. Hold the dumbbells with palms facing forward and arms by your sides. Keep your knees slightly bent.
- Breathe out and keep your elbows close to your body as you lift the dumbbells up to your shoulders. Squeeze your biceps at the end of the curl, then slowly lower back to the start position, breathing in as you do.

ABDOMINALS AND BACK

Aeroplane

- Lie with the ball under your stomach, with your feet on the floor. Squeeze your buttocks to straighten your hips. Hold your arms out at shoulder level, like an aeroplane's wings.
- Keep stabilized on the ball as you turn your upper body so that your right hand touches the floor. Use your stomach muscles to turn yourself back to the start position. This is one rep. Now repeat on the other side.
- For a more intense challenge, perform the Aeroplane with your feet against a wall, positioned slightly lower than hip level.
- Focus on your buttocks to avoid over using your back muscles. Do not turn your head too far to each side as you rotate your body.

Body Bow

- Lie over the ball on your stomach with your knees bent on the floor. Touch your hands to the sides of your head. Keep your eye-line towards the floor. Breathe in to prepare.
- Breathe out as you lift your chest off the ball. Keep your shoulders and neck in line with your back as you extend your body. Lower to the start position.

Kick-Start

- Place the ball against a wall. Lean forwards on to a ball with your elbows bent and hands clasped together. Straighten your body, pull your navel in towards your spine and balance on the balls of your feet.
- Maintaining a neutral spine position, slowly bring your right knee up toward the ball, breathing out. Then extend your leg back to the start position, breathing in. Do this 4 times with the right leg, then repeat with the left leg. This completes set.

Prone Ball Row

- Lie on the ball with your body weight supported. Bend your knees and extend your arms forwards slightly to the floor. Your hands should be underneath your shoulders. Hold a pair of dumbbells in an overhand grip. Breathe in to prepare.
- Breathe out as you lift the dumbbells upwards, leading with your elbows in a rowing movement, then lower to the start position.
- Keep your neck lengthened and look downwards towards the floor to maintain the correct neck alignment.

Lying Overhead Extensions

- Lie on the ball with your head, neck, shoulders and back supported. Hold one large dumbbell in hand in both hands, starting with the weight above your head at eye level. Keep your elbows slightly bent.
- Slowly extend your arm and lower the dumbbell behind your head until you feel a stretch through your outer mid-back area, and then return the dumbbell to the start position.
- Try not to over-extend your arms. Use slow, controlled movements. Breathe in as you extend your arms backwards, and breathe out as you bring them back to eye level.

LEGS AND BUTTOCKS

Ball Drag

- Lie on the floor with your legs straight and your heels and calves resting on the ball. Place your arms at your sides, palms facing down, and relax your arms and shoulders.
- Tighten your buttocks, pull your navel in towards your spine and lift your hips upwards until your legs and shoulders form a diagonal line.
- Push down into the ball through your feet and pull the ball in towards your buttocks as far as you can. Keep your buttocks lifted. You will feel the muscles working from your calves through to your buttocks.
- Push into the ball and slowly straighten out your legs again, keeping the ball steady. Lower your hips back to the start position.
- Keep the ball movements in a straight line, as if it were on a railway track. Keep your neck and shoulders as relaxed as you can to avoid unnecessary tension.

Ball Frog

- Lie on your back with your heels and calves resting on the ball. Place your arms at your side, palms facing down.
- Tighten your buttocks and slowly lift your hips off the floor as you push down through your feet.
- As you do so, pull the ball in towards your buttocks as far as you can and hold for a second.
- Now, gently squeeze the outsides of your buttocks and turn your knees out.
- Tighten your outer buttocks and squeeze your inner thighs as you bring your knees back together. Now push down into the ball through your feet and straighten your legs.
- Keep your buttocks contracted and your hips lifted. Your legs will now be parallel and straight. Turn your toes out while keeping your heels together, and your pelvis square. Bring the toes back to a straight position, then lower your hips to the floor.
- Raise your navel in towards your spine throughout to stabilize your back. Avoid pushing up from your hips, as this will force your lower back to arch.

Wall Crawl

- Place the ball against the wall between your mid and lower back. Keep your back straight, with your hands on your hips for balance. Pull your navel in towards your spine. Your feet should be shoulder width apart with your hips level, and your knees slightly bent and in line with your ankles.
- Slowly roll your body down until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Then slowly roll back up to the start position. Focus your thoughts on your thigh muscles, which will help to maximize the effect of the exercise.

- To add extra intensity, hold dumbbells while performing this movement.

Bellows

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Place the ball between your knees. Pull your navel in towards your spine. Rest your arms by your sides, palms facing up.
- Gently and firmly squeeze the ball between your knees and inner thighs. Hold for a second, then release.
- As you squeeze the ball, keep your navel pulled in towards your spine to avoid arching your back.
- Speed up or slow down the tempo of the squeezes to vary the intensity of the exercise, and hold the squeeze for longer to maximize the effect.

Wall Slide

- Lie on your back with both knees bent. Place the ball against the wall and put your right foot against it. Your left foot should be flat on the floor and your arms relaxed at your sides, palms facing up.
- Slowly extend your right leg and roll the ball up the wall slightly. Lower your right leg and the ball back to the start position. Perform the required number of reps, then change to the other leg.
- For extra intensity, perform the wall slide with both feet on the ball at the same time.
- Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed. Pull your navel in towards your spine throughout to avoid your back arching.
- Use slow, controlled movements throughout.

Thigh Trimmer

- Lie on your left side, extending your arm out to cushion your head. Position the ball between your feet and ankles. Lift your waist up from the floor, using your stomach and back to hold you steady on your side.
- Squeeze the ball between your legs – push down with your right leg and up with your left leg. Hold for a second, then release.
- If your neck is uncomfortable, place a small cushion between your arm and your head.
- Keep your upper shoulder relaxed. Do not let your waist drop back towards the floor.

COOL DOWN STRETCHES

Archway

- Sit upright on the ball with your hands on your hips and your navel pulled in towards your spine. With your feet out, allowing your back to mould into the ball.
- Resting your back, shoulders and head on the ball, reach your arms over your head, palms facing up. Feel the wonderful soothing stretch in your chest muscles.

Archway

- Sit up tall on the ball and gently pull your navel towards your spine. Rest your left hand lightly on your left thigh and hold your right arm above your head.

- Reach up and over sideways with your right arm until you feel a comfortable stretch along the right side of your torso. As you curve over, move your left arm across the opposite hip. Hold, then repeat on the other side.

Torso Stretch

- Sit on the ball with your knees together over your feet. Place your left hand on the outside of your right thigh, palm facing out. Put your right hand on the ball behind you with the palm facing down.
- Lift up out of your hips. Pressing your left hand against your right thigh, rotate to the right. Turn your head and upper body as far around as is comfortable without twisting your hips. Hold, then return to the start position. Repeat on the other side.

Lower Spine Soother

- Start by kneeling in front of the ball, pulling it close to your thighs. Lean into the ball on your stomach and bend your knees to the sides of the ball.
- Now relax forwards over the ball and hug it close to your body, so that your spine rounds over the shape of the ball. Hold.

Butterfly

- Sit on the ball with your hands placed lightly at the sides of your head. Walk your feet out until you are lying back on the ball with your neck and shoulders resting on it.
- Gently arch your back over the ball, raising your arms out and over your head. Stretch your arms out and over your head. Stretch your legs outward and hold. Slowly return to the start position by walking your feet back in.



CONSTRUCTING YOUR WORKOUT

STARTING OUT

Use this total body workout program twice per week. Perform two sets of 12-15 repetitions of each toning exercise and leave a minimum of 48 hours rest period between workouts.

Warm Up

- Skipping x 2 minutes
- Single Knee Lifts
- Single Knee Lifts with Leg and Arm Extension

Workout

- Wheelbarrow
- Reach for the Sky
- Aeroplane
- Ball Drag
- Body Bow
- Ball Drag

Cool Down Stretches

MOVING ON

As you become fitter, stronger and more confident, your body will need to be challenged to progress. Use this program 3 times a week. Perform 2 to 3 sets of each toning exercise and leave a minimum of 48 hours between workouts.

Warm Up

- Skipping x 2 minutes

Workout

- Chest Flyes
- Off Toe Push ups
- Drop Dips
- Biceps Curls
- Body Bow
- Kickstart
- Lying Overhead Extensions

- Ball Frog
- Wall Crawl
- Wall Slide
- Thigh Trimmer

Cool Down Stretches



#6

FINAL WORD

Your body is an amazing thing. It will respond to your fitness ball routines by adapting and improving the way that it functions. The information in this book has fully equipped you to get the most out of the time you spend exercising with your fitness ball. You will soon discover just what a valuable and versatile piece of equipment your ball really is.

Of course, there are many hundred of other exercises that you can do on your fitness ball. Once you have trained for a minimum of six months following the routines in Chapter Five, feel free to go online to find more challenging workouts. Just remember to adhere to the safety precautions outlined in Chapter One. You can also introduce new challenges with different pieces of equipment, such as dumbbells, barbells, medicine balls, and kettle-bells.

Congratulations on the progress you have made so far. Every minute that you invest in exercise pays off with interest, even if it doesn't seem that way when you're doing it. So, keep moving, keep progressing and keep advancing.

So long as you're moving, you will be improving.