



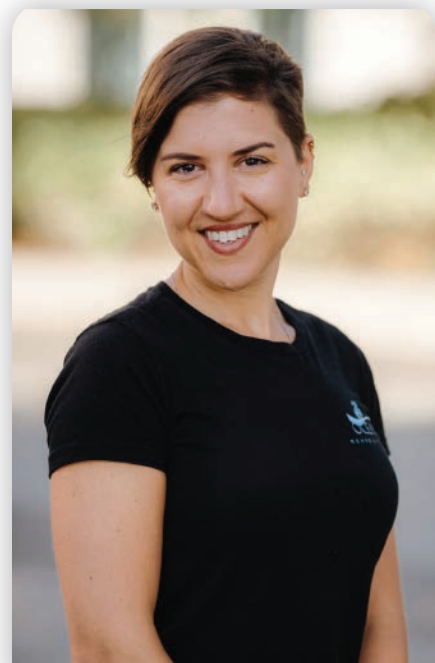
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FITNESS JOURNEY MISTAKES

By Megan Williamson

Being a specialist who works with people living with disabilities, my ideal client is someone who wants to improve their quality of daily living. I absolutely love being able to coach clients along their journeys to achieving better mobility, more strength, and improved body awareness.

These tips are for anyone to consider along their own health and wellness journey, whether you have a coach or not. Having knowledge of what helps us succeed, and what doesn't, can save so much time and effort. It's my pleasure to share five of these from a coaching standpoint.



1

NOT WARMING UP BEFORE STRENGTH EXERCISES

This one is so important. Many people skip a warm-up for one of the following reasons: it's boring, don't have enough time, think it takes away from their actual workout, or don't think they need it.

I'm here to tell you that not only does everyone benefit from a proper warm-up, but it also improves your strength gains! A warm-up is just that – preparing your body for the movement to come, whether it be strength training or endurance.

By bringing blood flow to our muscles and focusing on working through a full range of motion for the joint before adding load or intensity, we can immediately decrease our risk of musculoskeletal injury as well as make every set count toward improving our strength.



2

NOT PERFORMING UNILATERAL MOVEMENTS

A unilateral movement is an exercise using a single arm or single leg. It is an absolute must to include in your strength and mobility programs. I doubt that there is even one human walking this earth that doesn't have an imbalance of some sort in their body.

To give an example, my right hip muscles and quadriceps are much stronger than my left side because it's my power leg when I snowboard. I frequently stretch out my tight and "overused" quad and really focus on strengthening my left side.

A client with an amputation, of course has a more "affected" side. Working this side on its own is crucial for making strength or movement pattern gains. Take lower limb amputees who wear a prosthesis for example. They need to fully bear weight on their prosthetic leg for proper gait patterns with walking or running.



What happens when we stick with only bilateral movements? The stronger side tends to take over and doesn't let the non-dominant side be challenged enough to make as many strength gains. It is important to recognize that this unilateral training starts in the brain, where new neural pathways are created to complete these unilateral movements. The more we practice, the stronger these neural connections become. And because we are only as strong as our weakest link, being able to strengthen our non-dominant or more affected side helps us improve our performance in daily tasks and decreases the risk of injury.

3

NOT FOLLOWING A DAILY STRETCH ROUTINE

Ever noticed how crawling babies move with such ease? They can pull themselves up from a deep squat with no issue, roll over in one motion and slide through the splits into an army-like crawl. Baby bones haven't yet hardened like adult bones but there is another reason. Babies' bodies haven't yet seen the effects of habits, posture, sport, disability (for some), inactivity or activity, that takes a toll on muscles and joints.



As we go through life and grow into adults, our bodies tell the story of how we spend our time. Wheelchair users tend to have chronically tight hip flexors and pectoralis muscles. Single leg amputees tend to have tight and overworked soft tissues in their sound leg because of carrying most of the load.

We can help balance our bodies by stretching areas that are tight or overactive. This in turn helps retain a healthy muscle length-tension relationship which decreases our risk of musculoskeletal injuries. It also helps to improve posture and performance in daily activities like gardening or playing with the kids.

4

BEING A WEEKEND WARRIOR

There are many different ways we can exercise depending on our goals. We can change things like frequency (how many times a week we work out) and duration (how many exercises we perform) of our workouts.

When I was in my twenties I used to work in conventional gyms and regularly see people who would only workout on weekends. Some would stay for hours on end, Saturday and Sunday. Then, for the rest of the week, they wouldn't come to the gym at all.

Studies show that when it comes to neural strength gains, practicing more frequently is key. So, these "weekend warriors" were not setting themselves up for much progress.

Taub, the behavioural neuroscientist who studies neuroplasticity, states that "training should be done in increments; and work should be concentrated into a short time, a training technique called massed practice," which he has found far more effective than long-term but less frequent training.

Aiming for more frequent, consistent training sessions clustered together in a shorter amount of time will bring the most benefit when it comes to rewiring the brain and body for better movement patterns, increased strength and increased mobility.



5 NOT TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS

We can get frustrated when we don't see results from our hard work. Without having data and ways of measuring our progress, we can be terrible judges of how far we have come.

I see this a lot with my clients. They come to me and express feelings of frustration because they aren't where they thought they would be with their rehab or fitness goals.

I show them my notes from our session progress and review what they were accomplishing three months ago, six months ago, and maybe even a year or two ago. Often, the client is surprised at how far they have actually come.

These reminders are very helpful for a couple of reasons. For one, they help us to stay focused on our goals. When we see that we have in fact made progress over time, it can bring encouragement to continue the work.

It can also help us with self-compassion. Without recording our progress, it's very easy to think that we haven't done enough, or to "not remember" the other milestones we've made along the way.

I recommend a training journal for keeping weekly records of your journey. It can also be a great way to see where some things may not be working for you, and things in your program that need to be adjusted.



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