



HEALTH

# Functional Fitness Is the New Name of the Game

If your workouts consist of doing bicep curls for an hour in the mirror, you need to read this.

By SAMUEL BLACKSTONE



"How you feeling?" asks Joe Ardito, head trainer and founder of [FitCrushNYC](#), in a deep, inviting voice as I hunch over, hands on knees, huffing for oxygen after a set of elevated, slow-motion push-ups. "You feeling dizzy?"

"I'm seeing a few stars," I hesitantly admit. Moments later, per Ardito's instructions, I'm lying on my back, legs extended, feet raised and resting on an elevated bar, waiting for the blood to return to my brain before I faint in a small, sun-filled fitness center in SoHo.

"Take a breather like that for a minute," instructs Ardito, a slight grin curling up from the corner of his mouth. I say nothing, my ego contracting as my lungs expand with oxygen. At 25 years old, with a fitness level capable of repping 20 pull-ups, 50 push-ups, or running a 6.5-minute mile without much difficulty, I thought I was ready. Without lifting a weight, it had been bluntly demonstrated I was not.

Ardito's fitness philosophy is simple, and centers around "incorporating high-calorie-burning and functional movements that focus on the areas of the body that are most important for health and vitality . . . all done in a strict super-set fashion while incorporating intense interval cross-training cardiovascular movements in between to keep the workouts fun and challenging." He's not alone in this approach either. A few months back, the American College of Sports Medicine came out with its [annual list of the top fitness trends for 2015](#).

Body-weight training came in at No. 1. Functional fitness took No. 9. In the past five years, both of those approaches have changed the fitness landscape enough that if you're in a gym these days, you're just as likely to see someone in the corner busting out burpees as you are seeing a guy bench-pressing or biceps-curling in the mirror. Isolated weightlifting is out. Functional, body-weight exercises, as well as flexibility and mobility work, is in.

"There are four principle exercises we incorporate into every workout," Ardito explains. "Squats, deadlifts, rows, and core work. Most people spend all day hunched over at a desk. Our workouts are designed to counteract this postural imbalance, making you stronger and less injury-prone. We also always incorporate a series of deep stretches each session. It may sound simple, but not everyone does it. Here at FitCrush, we believe that mobility is one of the most essential aspects to a fulfilling and healthy life."

Go to any local CrossFit gym, and you're likely to see a bunch of people repping out squats, deadlifts, pull-ups, and burpees, just like I was with Ardito. So, what's the difference? Having someone with 25 years of training experience there to make sure those deadlifts you're doing are strengthening your body, not tearing it apart.

"Good movement in the gym equals good movement outside of the gym," says Ardito. "We facilitate correct form through a variety of ways, incorporating posture-corrective drills and functional multi-joints exercises into a circuit-style workout." My butt was too low in the push-up drills. Joe fixed that. My shoulders and traps were engaged during a row exercise. Joe made sure I relaxed them and worked the correct muscles. Simple changes make the exercises more difficult and effective. And when you repeat the exercises 100 times a workout, up to three times a week, correct form and posture are paramount and can be the difference between strengthening your lower back and slipping a disk.

"Our society likes to treat symptoms rather than causes," states Ardito. "It's a quick-fix mentality that's led to pain that could have been prevented for many people. Don't be one of these people. Make your fitness a main priority today, so you will stay healthy and injury-free tomorrow." Preach, Joe, preach.

